

# M'sit No'kmaq: Learning about Settler Relations and Responsibility in Trauma, Climate Change and Gender

by Riley Olstead and Kim Burnett

**Abstract:** This is a paper about the structural violence of settler colonialism in relation to the limits of the planet. As settler academics, we are involved in this violence. Here, we humbly seek guidance from the land ontology of the Mi'kmaq, reflected in the concept of *m'sit No'kmaq* (All our relations) to understand differently, ourselves, our responsibilities, and our place in 'a world on fire' (Rupa and Patel, 2021). Guided by *m'sit No'kmaq* we seek to learn how some of the concepts that we employ in our teaching and research—specifically “trauma” and “climate change” reproduce the core of settler colonialism—the disconnection and elimination of Indigenous peoples from the land (Wildcat et al., 2014, 1). Beyond a conceptual analysis, we also consider “the coloniality of gender” (Lugones 2010, 742) in how the materiality of epistemological violence manifests on the land through state violence directed at Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit peoples. Our learning throughout the paper shows us how colonial concepts obfuscate settlers' own relationship to land, which simultaneously undermines the possibility of a generative ethics of settler relationality with Indigenous peoples, and the earth.

**Keywords:** climate change; gender; Indigenous; settler; two-eyed seeing; trauma

**Résumé :** Cet article traite de la violence structurelle du colonialisme relativement aux limites de la planète. En tant qu'universitaires issus du colonialisme, nous sommes complices de cette violence. Dans ce contexte, nous nous appuyons humblement sur l'ontologie territoriale des Micmacs, incarnée par le concept de *m'sit No'kmaq* (toutes nos relations), pour repenser notre identité, nos responsabilités et notre place dans un « monde en feu » (Rupa et Patel 2021). Guidés par le concept de *m'sit No'kmaq*, nous cherchons à comprendre comment certains des concepts que nous employons dans notre enseignement et nos recherches – en particulier les « traumatismes » et les « changements climatiques » – perpétuent une des bases du colonialisme : l'éloignement des peuples autochtones de leur lien avec la terre et l'effacement de celui-ci (Wildcat et coll. 2014, 1). En plus d'une analyse conceptuelle, nous tenons compte de la notion de « colonialité du genre » (Lugones 2010, 742) pour comprendre comment la violence épistémologique prend forme concrètement sur le territoire, par la violence de l'État contre les femmes, les filles et les personnes bispirituelles autochtones. L'apprentissage que nous tirons tout au long de cet article montre comment les concepts coloniaux obscurcissent le rapport des colons à la terre, ce qui mine simultanément la possibilité d'une éthique relationnelle constructive entre colons et peuples autochtones, ainsi qu'avec la terre.

**Mots clés :** Autochtone; changements climatiques; genre; traumatisme; colon; approche à double perspective

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## Introduction

This is a paper about the historic, structural, and ongoing violence of settler colonial systems in relation to the limits of the planet. As settler academics, we are involved in the machinery of this violence. Rather than look to our own western ontological and epistemic views, we humbly seek guidance here from the land ontology of the Mi'kmaq, reflected in the concept of *m'sit No'kmaq* (All our relations) in an effort to understand ourselves, our responsibilities, and our place in the world differently. With *m'sit No'kmaq* as our lens, we learn how some of the colonial concepts that we ordinarily employ in our teaching and research—specifically “trauma” and “climate change”—enact the core aim of settler colonialism: the disconnection and elimination of Indigenous peoples from their sources of knowledge and strength, which is the land (Wildcat et al. 2014, 1). We also come to see how such concepts obfuscate settlers' own relationship to land—naturalizing our presence by obscuring how settler lives have and continue to be made possible through a structure of violence, extraction and genocide. With *m'sit No'kmaq* as our framework, we then look to “the coloniality of gender” (Lugones 2010, 742) to acknowledge the materiality of epistemological violence as it manifests on the land, specifically through state violence directed at Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual) peoples. As we come to see, colonial concepts obscure understanding of the biopolitical entanglement of all of life, which undermines the possibility of settlers engaging in a generative ethics of relationality both with Indigenous peoples and the land. In other words, we come to learn how settler colonial erasures of land, enacted through our western concepts and normalized in our practices, underpin the destruction of earth.

As settler educators, we are newly learning about Indigenous knowledge, which guides us here in growing our understanding of the entanglements of trauma, climate change, and gendered violence. This work builds upon previous efforts of one of the authors (see Olstead and Chattopadhyay 2024) in order to continue to deepen our understanding about Mi'kmaw ontologies in support of decolonial teaching and learning about climate change. For us, this paper is part of an ongoing pedagogic commitment prompted in part by the release of The Truth and Reconciliation Report, which found that, in part with the residential school system, Canada has enacted a “race-based genocide of indigenous peoples” (TRC 2015a). The Report outlined 94 Calls to Action (TRC 2015b), which include pushing Canadian post-secondary institutions to ethically engage Indigenous communities and knowledge systems (TRC 2015a) to undertake efforts toward reconciliation, with the aim of correcting the historical use of education in Canadian colonial endeavours (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018, 221). Our motivations in this paper stem from the TRC but also beyond it: We also understand the necessity of undermining a settler future (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3), to be differently in the world should we ever wish to imagine a place for ourselves within generative networks of relational accountability to all of life. We have come to recognise and continue to learn about the necessity of unmaking the colonial world because even while it makes our lives, it does so by setting the earth on fire (Rupa and Patel 2021, 5).

Accordingly, this paper is about our learning to struggle with the deep and irresolvable contradictions of our own situatedness as settler academics. We feel ethically compelled to engage in a growing scholarship actively seeking to disrupt both the coloniality of the university and normative academic practices, yet our efforts continue to centre our settler expertise and worldviews in knowledge production. Informed by this irresolvable contradiction, we have written this paper not to decolonise our western concepts but, rather to pedagogically animate our own limited learning about the wisdom of an Indigenous worldview.

We are guided here by multiple voices and bodies of knowing—primarily Indigenous Elders, academics, land protectors, knowledge keepers, and through extensive listening of testimony at the TRC's (2015a) accounts of survivors. We

make our lives on the territories of the Mi'kmaq Nation—a land that stretches from Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island) down through the colonial border of what is currently called the United States and into Boston and, as such, we have been drawn to listen and learn specifically from Mi'kmaq peoples who have been in relationship with this land for time immemorial. We would like to especially express our deep gratitude for the teachings of local Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall who shared his guidance throughout the writing of this paper. Elder Marshall's teachings, as we are best able to understand them, are existentially profound and deeply significant knowledge at this time of polycrisis. Specifically, we centre the Mi'kmaq concept of *m'sit No'kmaq* (All our relations) throughout this paper, which offers us a glimpse of the world from a perspective of Mi'kmaq laws of mutual relationships, interconnectivity, sharing, harmony, and respect. As Elder Marshall explains, the concept reflects a Mi'kmaq worldview informed by the land—a knowing and a practice of relationality with all of life (Marshall et al. 2021) which helps us to remain “aware of where you are, of what your responsibilities are” (Marshall, Marshall and Iwama 2010, 176). As settlers, the core aims of our paper are “to become aware of ourselves, of what we are, and our responsibilities.”

Despite the fact that we are focussing our learning on *m'sit No'kmaq*, we are aware of the heterogeneity of Indigenous voices and worldviews around the world. Indigenous concepts are not generalizable and cannot be fully understood outside of their own relational context (Hunt 2014, 29). Thus, it is important not only to acknowledge the particularity of *m'sit No'kmaq* as a specifically Mi'kmaq understanding, but also to signal that our own settler interpretation of this concept is partial at best, given we are not part of the relational context in which this concept “lives.” What we have come to learn, however, is that *m'sit No'kmaq* is one instance of a more generally held Indigenous collectivist ethos expressing a vitally interconnected relational epistemology and ontology. The ontological principle of connectivity with all of life is pervasive among Indigenous worldviews on Turtle Island (North America). The Nuuchah-Nulth (Central and Northern Coastal BC) say *Hishuk ish ts'awalk*, “Everything is one and all are connected”; the Haida (Haida Gwaii) say *Gina 'waadluxan gud ad kwaagid*, “Everything depends on everything”; the Secwepmc (Shuswap, South-Central Interior) say *Kweseltnews*, “We are all family.” Each of these concepts reflect specific land-based ontologies and knowledge systems of the interwoven and relational interconnectedness of all of life (Muir and Bohr 2014, 68).

Throughout this paper, the Mi'kmaq land ontology of *m'sit No'kmaq* helps us see from a structural and relational view that allows us to “notice ourselves”—that is, to see how settler life and futurity is normatively and invisibly reproduced through dominant conceptions of trauma and climate change, as well as the “coloniality of gender” (Lugones 2010, 742). Our learnings here bring us to greater awareness of the necessity for settler academics like us to take up the Calls to Action of the TRC (2015b) to ethically engage with Indigenous communities and knowledge systems (TRC 2015a). This engagement is to develop a critical awareness and responsibility for how we—even as we may claim to be doing the important work of reconciliation, climate, and gender justice—are instrumental to the reproduction of these crises.

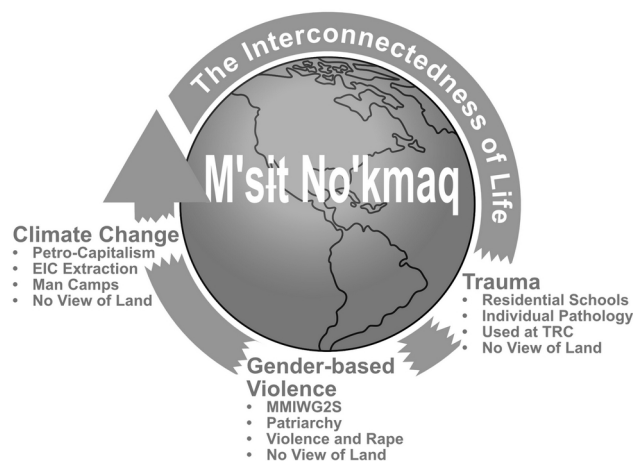


Figure 1. Created by Riley Olstead

## Trauma

The TRC was mandated to “guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation within Aboriginal families and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, governments, and Canadians generally” (TRC 2015a, 23), focusing primarily on Residential Schools. Between 2010 and 2015, the TRC collected and witnessed testimony from over 6750 survivors of Canada’s residential schools and hosted seven national events and 17 regional hearings where survivors and their families were invited to communicate the truth of their experiences (TRC 2015a, 1).

Employed as centers of internment, as many as 150,000 Indigenous children were sent to Canadian residential schools with most being taken by state agents from their families and communities and subsequently submitted to deep physical, emotional, psychological, and corporeal/sexual torture and terror (Nagy 2020, 219). Despite operating until 1997, it has only been recently—with the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Report of Canada (2015a)—that Residential Schools, along with the systemic murder and disappearance of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA peoples (MMIWG), have been acknowledged as part of the specific eliminative machinery utilised by Canada to produce a “race-based genocide of Indigenous peoples” (TRC 2015a).

However, the founding apparatus of the TRC was widely criticized, with one of the most significantly voiced concerns being that the Commission was organised from the start around a western therapeutic framework, which isolated specific acts of abuse rather than locating these within the broader structures of settler colonial violence (Kirmayer, Simpson and Cargo 2003, S19). The TRC was thus seen not as forum for healing but as establishing “certain expectations of performing victimry for a settler public” (Robinson and Martin 2016, 44). Shaped by a colonial-therapeutic view of trauma, the TRC foreclosed understanding of the structural roots of intergenerational injury and loss of self-determination, which traced to the colonial rupture of Indigenous relationships with land.

The core of settler colonialism and the source of Indigenous trauma is the “specific, irreducible element” of “territoriality” (Wolfe, 2006, 388). Yet instead of highlighting how settler colonial violence is fundamentally about land, the TRC portrayed survivor trauma as a specifically “Indigenous pathology” (Million, 2014, 103). Given this framing, settlers could look upon “narrations of horror” (Niezen 2017, 922) without ever having to make the connection between how their/our own bodies, lives, and futures were and continue to be made possible through Indigenous trauma. Unhinged from Indigenous relationships to land, the trauma concept deployed at the TRC was instead made useful to the settler colonial project, which could position Indigenous “healing” as a prerequisite to reconciliatory political action (Million 2014, 150). In such an equation, settlers can say “sorry” for historic abuses and loss but are not held responsible for ongoing colonialism (Whitlock 2015), nor for the return of what continues to be stolen/destroyed. Settlers’ relationship to historic and ongoing trauma—that our lives are predicated on the disconnection of Indigenous bodies from the land we now occupy—was erased.

Indigenous scholars readily identified the strategic use of therapeutic conceptions of trauma at the TRC, describing this as “a complex move, where healing encompasses Canada’s dialogue with Indigenous peoples, moving the focus from one of political self-determination to one where self-determination becomes intertwined with state-determined biopolitical programs for emotional and psychological self-care informed by trauma” (Million 2014, 6). Even while survivors resisted this by using the official space of the TRC to speak what was true (James, 2012), they did so “assert[ing] their own agency and empowerment over [what was, for many, regarded as a colonial] process” (Angel 2012, 209).

We offer here one account shared by Wab Kinew (2014) who, like so many other survivors, insisted on identifying how it was the theft and disconnection from land which was and is the structural trauma enacted through Canadian Residential Schools:

We ought to teach that, yes, residential schools happened 150 years—more than 150,000 children. But we also need to teach that the origins of that system, the motivations of it, were to open up our lands for settlement. It's that the residential school project was tied, part and parcel, with the project of creating this country. And that's a much more challenging thing to teach. Because immediately questions are going to follow—like, well, what is my role in that legacy, right? (Kinew 2014, Testimony ABNE204)

Kinew (2014) centers land and brings a structural awareness through which questions of settler ethics and accountability are brought into view. In such ways, survivors' statements about land directly challenged the official colonial narratives fixated on Indigenous trauma as an individual psychological event (James 2012, 18), one tied to Residential Schools rather than a structure of violence that characterizes the ongoing relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous nations.

We are witnessing today shifting political cultures. The very existence of the TRC (2015a) suggests a move away from an explicit politics of elimination toward a "politics of recognition" (Coulthard 2014, 3). However, this political shift is rhetorical in nature and conceals the enduring state fixation on appropriating Indigenous land and territory, which is at the root of Indigenous trauma (Coulthard 2014, 3). A politics of recognition seeks to "ensure continued access to Indigenous peoples' land and resources by producing neocolonial subjectivities that co-opt Indigenous people into becoming instruments of their own dispossession" (Coulthard, 2014, 156). At the TRC, colonial conceptions of trauma were elemental in legitimising a politics of recognition. This, on one hand, accomplished what appeared to be state acknowledgement of harm done by Residential Schools yet, at the same time, survivor testimony was stolen "from collective articulations of Indigenous ontologies and politics and turned into subsumptive forms of neoliberal individualism" (Coulthard, in Martineau 2016). So, while the TRC may have provided some space for survivors to name the profound wounds inflicted through the residential school system, officially the TRC remained a "colonial artifact" (Brown 1995, 101) operationalising an individualist-therapeutic trauma concept that refused accountability for the core objective of settler colonialism, which, always traces back to the rupture of Indigenous people from land (Wolfe 2006, 388).

Intervening in myopic colonial theories of trauma, Indigenous scholars such as Duran et al. (1995, 342) have proposed the soul wound concept, while Brave Heart-Jordan and DeBruyn (1995, 62) have offered the concept of Indigenous historic trauma (IHT). These concepts centre Indigenous relational "world making"—oneness—with land. They make clear that the structure of Indigenous trauma is settler colonialism (Million 2020) and thereby re-establish Indigenous ontological understandings that land is relationship (Coulthard in Walia 2015). This is why within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth.... Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5)

For our own part, working toward relational accountability is also about coming to understand, as best as we are able, how connections to land are elemental to Indigenous life and being—a reality reflected in the many land ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies of Indigenous peoples developed through land-based relationality over time immemorial (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6). Concepts such as *m'sit No'kmaq* express the coherence of Indigenous values, beliefs, customs, and protocols in ways "meant to maintain the relationships that hold creation together" (Little Bear 2000, 81). For Indigenous peoples, it is through relationship of land and people that all are brought into being in particular ways.

*M'sit No'kmaq* alerts us that, settlers we have yet to appreciate how our own relationship to land is organised through structural trauma which, brings us into a particular kind of 'being'. Unlike settlers, "Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how they came to be in a particular place—indeed how they came to be a place" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6). Ongoing cycles of trauma in Indigenous communities include disproportionately high rates of suicide, homicide, substance use, accidental death, community/domestic violence, child abuse/neglect, and poverty, as well as other complex social problems (Marsh et al. 2015; Brave Heart 2000; Linklater

2014; Duran et al. 1998; Million 2014; Gone 2021). As we are learning about land-based relational ontologies, we are called to recognise our place in this violence and these injuries “perpetuated by the loss of land and the consequent loss of the stories and ceremonies that once connected indigenous peoples to the land” (Methot 2019, 22-23).

## Climate

M’sit No’kmaq teaches us that the unique relationship of Indigenous peoples with land, acknowledged for instance by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP 2007), is also the unique relationship of land with Indigenous peoples. European settlers encountered land that was “profoundly and intentionally altered and managed by Indigenous communities” (Cronon 2003, 88) reflecting a deeply intimate, living, and co-constitutive connection between Indigenous peoples and the land. The central goal of settler colonialism was to destroy that connection, including Indigenous land-based knowledge, materiality, and practice, and in doing so produced ecological degradation of both lands and peoples (Cruz 2018, 8). And this was intentional: it “was always about changing the land, transforming the earth itself, including the creatures, the plants, the soil composition and the atmosphere. It was about moving and unearthing rocks and minerals. All of these acts were intimately tied to the project of erasure that is the imperative of settler colonialism” (Davis and Todd 2017, 770). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson identifies how, unlike many settlers concerned with a “sustainable future,” “Indigenous peoples have witnessed continual ecosystem and species collapse since the early days of colonial occupation.... We should be thinking of climate change as part of a much longer series of ecological catastrophes caused by colonialism and accumulation-based society” (in Harris 2019, np).

We, the authors, are learning that land-based ontological concepts such as m’sit No’kmaq understand “that everything in the natural world stems from one Mother; our Mother Earth” (Marshall 2023). For us settlers, this knowledge of interconnectivity importantly awakens us to witness our own situatedness in both Indigenous trauma and trauma of the earth, or what we call climate change. This understanding is significant, as it reinforces for us how the devastating contradictions of the colonial structures that make our lives are also “a campaign to break the vital loops that constitute life on earth” (Whyte 2017, 153).

As the authors of this paper, we are reflecting as well on how our settler education systems are integral to the colonial project; “noticing ourselves” in conceptions of trauma and climate change shows us how settler colonialism embeds and reproduces itself, and us, through our participation in naturalising colonial concepts and ontologies. Obscured in such concepts is the historic epistemic violence that “shift[ed] relations to land, from the conception of usufruct land use held by many Indigenous communities to the recasting of land as private property by settlers (Cronon 2003, 54). What we are being shown in our consideration here is how Indigenous trauma and climate destruction are co-constructed through our own use of concepts that reify divisions and disconnections in the web of life. Actively working toward relational accountability requires a hyper-reflexive practice in which settlers come to “see ourselves,” and therefore our interests, as we recirculate normative concepts in our teaching and thinking.

Cherokee Elder CornTassel has said: “One of our biggest enemies is compartmentalization, as shape-shifting colonial entities attempt to sever our relationship to the natural world and define the terrain of struggle” (in Smith 2013, np). For instance, the colonial language of “climate change,” or “the environmental crisis” is discursively compartmentalized, much like the use of “trauma” as it was deployed at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). The most common settler approach to climate change reflects this understanding: most settler environmentalists regard ecological restoration as for its own sake (even while in some cases “partnering” with Indigenous peoples), neither recognizing nor acting in ways attendant to the vital interbeing of Indigenous lands and bodies and the historic and ongoing assault on that relationality, occasioned by settler bodies. Through our learning, it is increasingly apparent to us that our western ontologies are functionally dissociative and work against our understanding of how settler colonial traumatization is at the root of climate destruction (Cruz 2018, 40). Because our worldview does not recognize land at the center of life, settlers like us do not generally understand that the violence of the residential school system is part of the same structure of elimination also producing biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, and sea-level rise.

Guided as we are here by m's̥t No'kmaq, we have been offered the possibility to interrupt our epistemic habits, to see how climate change and the destruction of the land is “a colonial manifestation and a direct attack on Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous nationhood” (L. Simpson 2004, 377).

## The Coloniality of Gender

So far, we have looked at how colonial concepts like “trauma” and “climate change” articulate a worldview in conflict with life and land. We have shown how colonial epistemologies are reductionist, siloed, individualising, and myopic, and therefore unable to recognise vital relational networks among humans and the more-than-human world. However, we are not only learning about the conceptual realm but also about how colonial concepts and views of the world are animated through a materiality of relations. It is that materiality to which we now turn as “by far the largest attack on Indigenous Knowledge systems right now is land dispossession, and the people that are actively protecting Nishnaabewin are not those at academic conferences advocating for its use in research and course work but those that are currently putting their bodies on the land” (L. Simpson 2014, 21).

Maria Lugones offers the concept of “the coloniality of gender” to describe how the modern/colonial gender system is one of the central axes of colonial oppression organising sexual access, authority, labour, control of knowledge, and intersubjectivity (2010, 744). Alongside m's̥t No'kmaq, which reminds us of our interrelatedness and responsibilities to the rest of life, we find the “coloniality of gender” helpful for making sense of how Indigenous relationality is being attacked on the land—largely through confrontations between Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples and settler men who often act as agents of the state or industry. As we shall discuss more fully below, it is disproportionately Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples who are involved in generative resistance, resilience, and creative action, asserting continued Indigenous presence and vitality on the land (Vizenor 1999, 11). In doing so, they protect the land and water from petro-colonial theft and climate destruction. It is also the case that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples are most at risk of violence, criminalisation, harassment, disappearance, and death (Altamirano-Jiménez 2021, 215). As Pam Palmater, a Mi'kmaw lawyer and scholar explains, “The safety and health of women's bodies has always been tied to the land so closely. That's why the state has particularly targeted Indigenous women—to separate them from the land because it helps disintegrate their nations” (Palmater cited in Brake 2018, np).

Pre-invasion, the Mi'kmaq (like many Indigenous nations) were matriarchal and located women at the centre of m's̥t No'kmaq—a circulating, relational, and cooperative social, political, and economic world. Unlike the patriarchal gender structures of the colonists, in Indigenous communities, respect and honour were afforded women and two-spirit peoples for their essential roles and contributions to Indigenous life and well-being (Lugones 2010, 744). Settler colonialism imported a binary gender system which was imposed on Indigenous peoples; Jesuit priests and settlers “steeped in patriarchy, complained about the lack of male control over women and set out to change that” (Fenton and Moore 1969, 182). Since invasion, the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2010, 422) has been a campaign of land theft accomplished specifically by attacking those bodies that “transmit the clan, and with that: family, responsibility, relatedness to territory” (A. Simpson 2016, 7). In other words, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples are the most powerful confrontation to the structure of settler colonialism as they embody, practice, and reproduce sacred land-knowledge of relationality, responsibility, and connectivity such as conceptualised in the concept m's̥t No'kmaq. Because of this, the state seeks the elimination of these bodies as they signify “land itself, of the dangerous possibility of reproducing Indian life and most dangerously, other political orders” (A. Simpson 2016, 15). The historic reality is that it has always been the ambition of the Canadian state to “seek the death and so called ‘disappearance’ of Indigenous women in order to secure its sovereignty” (A. Simpson 2016, 1).

Most notably, we highlight the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2019, 422) as it occurs in relation to the Extraction Industrial Complex (EIC). The EIC is a network of international corporate and industrial entities cooperating in various significant ways with settler and colonial states in the diversion of public resources and other social, financial, and political interests, all to promote petro-colonial state institutions and activities. This includes such things as the police repression of Indigenous land protectors, the manufacture of pro-corporate media ideology, and the establish-

ment of extraction infrastructure, most often on the unceded lands and territories of Indigenous nations. Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples are most impacted by the EIC in explicitly violent ways, particularly through the establishment of man camps (Martin et al. 2019, 3). Despite this, Indigenous peoples, and especially women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples have maintained the knowledge and practice reflected in such concepts as *m'sít No'kmaq*—knowledge and practice of their vital connections to their lands, languages, and cultures. This knowledge is critical to ongoing resistance to colonization, the patriarchy, and climate destruction.

As they embody and reproduce the knowledge/materiality of land, women play a key role in its defense. Despite this absolutely vital work, there is a profound absence of studies reflecting on the gendered and racialized impacts of resource extraction. In the face of this “invisibilisation,” Indigenous women from Canada, Latin America, and the Philippines have themselves gathered data showing an alarming increase in violence against Indigenous bodies when resource extraction projects are established (Kairos Executive Summary, 2014, 3). These data are reinforced by findings from a 2019 study (Martin et al. 2019) on the Bakken oil-producing region of Montana and North Dakota, where reports state that incidence of aggravated assault has increased 70% alongside the rapid rise of oil workers to the region. Tellingly, violent victimization in areas surrounding the Bakken counties fell by 8% during the same period (Martin et al. 2019, 5). Amnesty International has likewise confirmed that “the presence of a very large, young, mostly male transient workforce adds to [the] risk [faced by Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples], because young men are statistically more likely to be perpetrators of violent crime” (2016, 4).

In Wet'suwet'en territory, in what is currently called British Columbia, the Unist'ot'en clan matriarchs and land defenders explain that man camps are “temporary housing facilities for up to thousands of mostly non-Indigenous male workers brought into different Indigenous communities for industrial work” and that these “create the social conditions for an increase of violence against Indigenous women and children” (Unist'ot'en, n.d.). The Unist'ot'en (C'ihlts'ehkhyu / Big Frog Clan) are the original peoples distinct to the lands of the Wet'suwet'en. The Unist'ot'en have built a resistance camp, blocking seven proposed pipelines from a Tar Sands gigaproject and LNG fracturing projects. This extraordinary resistance to industry has been led by the matriarchs and women of the clan who have persistently made links between industrial extraction and violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples. In a blog post on the Unist'ot'en website, they magnify the relationship between climate change, industrial extraction, Indigenous sovereignty, and gender violence in their demand to “end the rape of our territories” (Unist'ot'en, n.d.). Through this statement, the Unist'ot'en help the authors of this paper, recognise how the colonality of gender (Lugones 2010, 744) seeks to undermine Indigenous self-determination through the elimination of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples from the land, which is directly tied to accelerating climate change (Million 2014).

In Canada, the intersection between destruction of the earth and colonial gender violence is evidenced further in data on missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples. The MMIWG Inquiry Report found there is “substantial evidence” that natural resource projects increase violence against Indigenous women, children, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals and that “work camps, or ‘man camps,’ associated with the resource extraction industry are implicated in higher rates of violence against Indigenous women at the camps and in the neighbouring communities” (Reclaiming Power 2019, 584). The Report explains further that “increased crime levels, including drug and alcohol-related offences, sexual offences, and domestic and ‘gang’ violence, is linked to ‘boom town’ and other resource development contexts” (Reclaiming Power 2019, 586). Citing Statistics Canada, Tasker (2019, np) reports that Indigenous women make up 25% of all national female homicide victims and are 16 times more likely to be slain or to disappear than white women.

While some data exposing the colonality of gender (Lugones, 2010, 422) is being made available, the epistemic siloes of colonial thinking maintain the common perception that the activities and operation of the EIC—even when acknowledged as “bad for the environment”—are unrelated to the ongoing violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Indigenous women themselves have been left to draw attention to the impact of the EIC through such efforts as the REDress Project. The REDress Project is an installation art project launched by artist Jaime Black in response to the staggering number of murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and



2SLGBTQQIA peoples across what is currently called Canada and the United States (Black, n.d.). Despite the findings of the MMIWG Report (Reclaiming Power 2019) that clearly outline the systemic harassment, intimidation, and violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, the Canadian state implicitly condones this violence through an informal policy of non-intervention (Martin et al. 2019; Amnesty 2016; Kairos Executive Summary 2014). As Coulthard reminds us, the liberal recognition paradigm in Canada has replaced the more overtly genocidal framework that preceded it; however, the eliminative aims of the state remain (2014, 3). In terms of Canada's non-intervention into the violence associated with the EIC, Audra Simpson argues that "states do not always have to kill, its citizens can do that for it" (2016, 5).

The coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2010) is visible in the rise of extractive populism—an inflammatory, rhetorical "strategy through which 'the people' and the petro-industrial complex are sutured together in symbolic nationalization" (Gunster 2019, 14). This "suturing" is supported by well-funded media campaigns through which the EIC is routinely constituted as a moral expression of white, working class, settler-patriarchal petro-nationhood. For instance, "Keep Canada Working" was an advertising campaign of the Alberta government, for which millions of dollars was spent over the past two decades to convince Albertans of their shared interests with the EIC (Gunster 2019, 14). Indeed, the EIC labour force is tasked with operating and maintaining, as well as guarding, promoting, and fortifying the petro-colonial infrastructure, which is "an unmarked center of whiteness, and definitely heteropatriarchal" (A. Simpson 2016, 3).

The growth and operation of the EIC is discursively organised to appeal to workers as their "lifeblood," particularly in ways that draw out historical connections to settler patriarchal masculinity—a particular version of colonial-manhood that has developed alongside global capitalist expansion, processes of colonization, policing, and frontier warfare. The EIC version of manhood is uniquely situated to extract from land and women on behalf of and with the armed protection of the state and funding from industry. We wonder whether other working class versions of masculinity receive this kind of direct/explicit government support or if it is exclusive to frontier masculinity?

Pointing out the role of settler men in the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2010) is not about ignoring or excusing women from involvement in settler colonialism, climate destruction, or even the patriarchal violence of MMIWG. Even without direct participation in the EIC, women's lives are structurally aligned with the extractive interests of colonial capitalism, even while the benefits of the patriarchy are in other ways withheld from them. Such is the understanding that m'sit No'kmaq offers, that reveals that all settlers—regardless of the intersections of our identities or our ethical claims and efforts otherwise—have a relationality to the land and her people that is organised through a structure of elimination. We believe that for settlers like us, generating relational accountability with Indigenous peoples will not be possible unless we actively recognise our own investments as well as our direct involvement in reproducing colonial structures. By centring a Mi'kmaq land based ontological concept in our learning, we have sought to practice reflexivity, to ask questions about how colonial concepts like trauma and climate change—terms we and so many others like us use uncritically in the academic context—do the work of reproducing settler futurity. As we are coming to see, these concepts conceal the ways that our lives are made possible through harm done to Indigenous bodies and the land. It may be very challenging but m'sit No'kmaq has helped us disrupt, albeit only momentarily, our colonial ways of thinking to see how our settler interests are resourced through MMIWG and climate destruction.

## Conclusion

Even though we are sure to have made mistakes in our novice understanding here, our learning about the wisdom of m'sit No'kmaq has been invaluable in helping us to glimpse beyond our limited settler categories and concepts, to begin to see our place in the world in a new and relational way. This is, for us, a starting place for the ongoing hyper-reflexivity necessary, should anything that comes close to looking like relational accountability to Indigenous peoples and lands be possible. Of many of the important lessons we have been offered through m'sit No'kmaq is that settler ontologies and epistemologies trouble our ability to recognise ourselves in relation to what has been done for, and to, the land and this undermines our own ability to ethically respond to the root of crisis. As we have sought to show, co-

lonial concepts dangerously limit both settler self-recognition and accountability for our roles in the ongoing history of trauma and genocide of Indigenous peoples, which is at the same time the existential crisis of climate destruction. We have looked, for instance, at how colonial gender structures mobilize violence against the very bodies that seek to protect both the knowledge of and relationships with land, which are central to life on this planet. Uncritical reproduction of these seemingly innocuous concepts forecloses settler efforts around climate action, gender justice, and decolonisation. Indigenous worldviews that understand “we are all one” awaken us urgently to a need to displace the centrality of colonial registers and structures upholding our settler futurity (Tuck and Yang 2012), as all of life depends upon it.

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