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Approaching violence against Indigenous women in the Americas from relational, intersectional and multiscalar perspectives

Stéphane Guimont Marceau[a], Dolores Figueroa Romero[b], Vivian Jiménez Estrada[c] and Roberta Rice[d]

[a]INRS-Centre Urbanisation Culture Société, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; [b]Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS), Mexico City, Mexico; [c]Department of Sociology, Algoma University, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada; [d]Department of Political Science, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

ABSTRACT

The epidemic of violence against Indigenous women in the Americas reveals a broad social dynamic that crosses national and regional borders. The violence of colonization and exploitation is reproduced at different scales, from within the home to the international scene, placing Indigenous women in spaces of exclusion, at the margins of state and society, where violence can unfold and reproduce itself in total impunity. This article presents the methodology of an initiative that aimed to shed light on the endemic violence suffered by Indigenous women and on the resistance efforts, initiatives and strategies to address it. Based on a virtual forum, which was conceived of as a space of exchange between multiple voices and actors from a variety of perspectives, we highlight discussions on the politics of defining violence, the impacts of the exclusion of bodies and territories, the multifaceted strategies of resistance, as well as paths for further policy-relevant research.

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MOTS-CLÉS
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Aborder la violence faite aux femmes autochtones dans les Amériques à partir de perspectives relationnelles, intersectionnelles et multiscalaires

RÉSUMÉ

L'épidémie de violence à l'égard des femmes autochtones dans les Amériques révèle une vaste dynamique sociale qui traverse les frontières nationales et régionales. La violence de la colonisation et de l'exploitation se reproduit à différentes échelles, du foyer à la scène internationale, en plaçant les femmes autochtones dans des espaces d'exclusion, en marge de l'État et de la société, où la violence peut se déployer et se reproduire en toute impunité. Cet article présente une initiative visant à faire la lumière sur la violence endémique subie par les femmes autochtones, ainsi que sur les efforts de résistance, les initiatives et les stratégies pour y faire face.

CONTACT Stéphane Guimont Marceau stephane.gmarceau@ucs.inrs.ca INRS-Centre Urbanisation Culture Société, 385 Sherbrooke St. E., Montreal, Quebec H2X 1ES, Canada

Ce forum virtuel, conçu comme un espace d'échange entre des chercheur(e)s, acteurs et actrices de divers horizons, met en évidence les débats actuels concernant les politiques de définition de la violence, les impacts de l'exclusion des corps et des territoires, les stratégies multiformes de résistance, de même que des pistes pour de nouvelles recherches sur les politiques.

Violence against Indigenous women is a crucial issue for Canada as a settler state. Indigenous women aged 25–44 in Canada are five times more likely to experience a violent death than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Gilchrist 2010, 375). In 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) published a report documenting 582 cases of missing or murdered Indigenous women across Canada. In 2014, a report by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) identified 1,181 such cases (Dean 2015, 147–8). On 8 December 2015, the Government of Canada formally announced the launch of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to seek recommendations on concrete measures to address and prevent violence against this vulnerable sector of the population.[1]

The issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women is not unique to Canada. There is an epidemic of violence against Indigenous and racialized women across the Americas. Much attention has been paid to the phenomenon of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez in northern Mexico, with more than 400 documented cases of murdered poor and Indigenous women workers since 1993, but violence is not confined to this area, or to a specific kind of brutality (Wright 2006). Guatemala now exceeds Ciudad Juárez in numbers of women killed (Speed 2016). The murders of Indigenous environmental activist Berta Cáceres in Honduras in 2016 and social activist and municipal representative Marielle Franco in Brazil two years later are but recent examples. Violence against women has a very broad and complex spectrum that includes domestic violence, rape, forced disappearance, human trafficking, and murder. Nevertheless, statistics on missing and murdered Indigenous women in Latin America are practically non-existent. Women's rights organizations in Latin America, such as the National Coordinator of Indigenous Women of Mexico (*Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas*, CONAMI), are working tirelessly to document cases of violence against Indigenous women and to pressure governments and lawmakers in the region to take action on this pressing issue.

Clearly, we are witnessing a broad social dynamic that crosses national and regional borders. What are the contexts, structural roots, and social processes that engender violence against Indigenous women? How do we conceptualize such forms of violence? This article presents the analysis of a project that tackled the issues related to violence against Indigenous women and girls by creating a space to promote discussion on the topic from a variety of angles, perspectives, experiences, and regions. The article's goal is primarily to capture the relational, multiscalar, and intersectional methodology that we, the coordinators of the project (the co-authors of this article), relied on for this knowledge *co*-creation through a virtual space. The Virtual Forum on Violence against Indigenous Women in the Americas, which ran from 6 February to 10 March 2017, served to create an online space for sharing narratives, experiences, works, initiatives, and research on violence against Indigenous women. This article presents our collective analysis of this material in order

to create common understandings and approaches to address the epidemic of gendered and racialized violence.

The first section of the paper highlights the process of creating a virtual space. It begins with an overview of the methodology we used before delving into an examination of relationality, intersectionality, and multiscalarity and how these perspectives deepen our own understandings. The following section discusses how disparate geopolitical contexts necessitate the adoption of certain legal terms for developing activist work that aims to render visible the systemic oppressions that operate against Indigenous women. The article then discusses how the dispossession of territories through (neo)colonization is related to the dispossession of Indigenous women's bodies. The paper concludes by presenting some paths of resistance and strategies for the prevention, visibilization, and elimination of gendered colonial violence.

A virtual forum as a safe space

The Virtual Forum on Violence against Indigenous Women in the Americas was conducted through a virtual space established by the Canadian Association for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CALACS). This open access online space of exchange between multiple voices and actors aimed to address, from a variety of perspectives, the issue of endemic violence suffered by Indigenous women, as well as the resistance efforts, initiatives, and strategies to address it.

As women (one Indigenous Maya and three allies) and scholars working in Canada and Latin America in collaborative research processes with Indigenous organizations, we wanted to create a multi-directional virtual dialogue, one that incorporated the voices, experiences, and expertise of Indigenous women's rights activists, leaders, and scholars from Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean as an attempt to "undo" the colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal systems of domination that leave Indigenous women at the margins.

The Virtual Forum ran for five weeks and counted on the participation of over 80 individuals (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) from 10 different countries, who had registered with no fees or institutional affiliations required. Registered participants could join the discussion at any point and take advantage of the academic and non-academic material provided in English and Spanish[2]. Launching questions about the type of violence(s) that affect Indigenous women; the extent to which Indigenous women's bodies are rendered invisible or disposable; and the ways in which Indigenous women's organizations document and denounce violence(s) were posted to open the conversation. The vast majority of participants were from Latin America (54) and Canada (17). A total of 71 women and 10 men participated in the forum.

The objectives of the dialogue were threefold: (1) strategically, we sought to link academics and activists working on the issue of violence against Indigenous women from across the Americas to develop a research action network to inform public policy debates and decisions; (2) conceptually, we aimed to identify the social and structural nature of violence affecting Indigenous women's lives in the region; (3) substantively, we proposed to examine which strategies for social change work and why. We expected to share and compare the struggles of Indigenous women at different scales and spaces and reflect on how Indigenous women activists relate to their home communities, the state, and international forums and global governance institutions.

We discussed issues such as definitions of violence; processes of violence; methods of violence, including its invisibilization and impunity; sites of violence, from homes to public spaces and from bodies to territories; roots of violence anchored in marginalization and exclusion; and struggles against violence from local initiatives and everyday practices (see Figueroa et al. 2017). This exploration included a reflexive effort on the effects of structural violence both at the individual level and in the collective lives of Indigenous communities and peoples, as well as in the broader societies of which we are a part. In this vein, we also elicited extensive reflections on the effects of institutional racism and economic and social discrimination against Indigenous peoples, leading us to include how discrimination against Indigenous women happens on various levels. Discussing gender violence from intersectional, decolonizing perspectives and from the concrete experiences of activists reinforced the need to make room for those experiencing different manifestations and degrees of violence. This analysis permeated through the choice of readings, videos, and discussions that also led to debates that sought to prioritize reflections on the complexity of contexts in which acts of everyday and extreme violence attack the bodies of Indigenous women and in which acts of resistance are also generated. Addressing state violence, family violence, and all forms of social violence means not only examining local and national contexts but also the underlying structural nature of gendered and colonial violence. The dialogue helped us see that we need to learn more about how Indigenous women cope with physical, social, cultural, political, and economic exclusion and violence in order to improve their life chances, strengthen their communities, and enhance our societies.

One of the objectives of the forum was to be the beginning of a long-term transnational partnership between the project participants, a partnership which is in fact taking place either virtually through CALACS' Indigenous Studies Working Group webpage[3] or in embodied spaces. Thanks to a 2018 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Engage grant, seven leaders of the National Coordinator for Indigenous Women of Mexico (CONAMI), which emerged as a critical partner organization during the course of the forum, met in April 2019 with Anishinaabeg[4] women in Baawaating (Sault Ste. Marie), Ontario (see Jiménez-Estrada et al. 2019). The transnational dialogue we began online served to encourage in-person meetings and discussions that we hope will continue to make a difference in women's lives around the world.

Relationality

The virtual space was created through the intimate relationships of the co-researchers as allies and friends. Various relationships were then created in its safe space and allowed different voices to be heard. We created this virtual space first from our identities as women, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, scholars, mothers, and others. We used a virtual space, mostly through online video calls, to work through our translocal and transnational situations. As committed scholars, we engaged in late-night and weekend meetings while dealing with child care and other demands. This project became a living expression of working in relation to one another. This concept of relatedness opens up the possibility of expanding consciousness and strengthening relationships with Indigenous peoples (Martin 2003). Relatedness, in this context, leads to relationality as process (Wilson 2008) or self-in-

relation (Graveline 1998), a methodology that builds webs of relationships that make clear our distinctiveness and also our collective/similar struggles.

Through this work, we hoped to sever the colonial and gendered ways in which patriarchy subjugates women's knowledges and roles in society; often leading to violence. Nishinaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson explains how "rigid gender roles, pressuring women to wear certain articles of clothing to ceremonies, the exclusion of LGBQ2 individuals from communities and ceremonies, the dominance of male-centred narratives regarding Indigenous experience [... are] used to control the contributions of women in ceremony, politics and leadership" (cited in Coulthard 2014, 158). This work depicts a highly relational methodology rooted in the relationships needed to face structural and day-to-day violence by engaging in transnational and multi-vocal dialogues to learn from one another and build from our own particularities (Anderson 2018).

This relationality is foundational to Indigenous knowledges and ontologies across diverse cultural, social, linguistic, and geographic spaces (Gunn-Allen 1992; Mihesuah 2003; Smith 1999). In spite of the virtual format in which the forum occurred, the project built upon the pillars of reciprocity, responsibility, and accountability required to engage in addressing violence. This methodology corresponds to the multiple ways in which women's lived experiences facilitate both pathways of resistance and healing. Nevertheless, some participants signaled that they also triggered pain and distress. These realities are difficult to address when engaging in a disembodied virtual public space.

Another entangled space is the debate surrounding the individual and structural dimensions of violence. The virtual forum created a space that fostered openness in spite of not being the ideal safe space. Participants shared their experiences of violence and resistance while realizing that, for many, the stereotype of the hyper-masculine, toxic male is often the culprit. This assumption often masks the larger colonial structures of power that relegate the "problem" of violence as one innate within Indigenous communities and, thus, a private one that needs to remain within the domestic realm. In contradistinction, this dialogue unsettled the Western vision in which intimacy and vulnerability are perceived as embarrassing and "private" (Smith 1999, 51). The discussions highlighted the personal as political, as a collective entanglement that needs to be destabilized. Further, the readings and exchange of experiences led to discussions of how social and legal systems fixed gender roles. This led to valuing males in a hierarchy, obscuring the centrality of relationality and denying Indigenous women the right to participate in public spaces. As the literature demonstrates, assigning economic and political worth to positions held in the public sphere is something that Indigenous feminists (Cunningham 2006; Jaimes-Guerrero 1998, 2003; Kauanui 2008; Smith 2005, 2007; Trask 1996) and tribal feminists (Deerchild 2003; Gunn-Allen 1992) identify as patriarchy. In this sense, patriarchal colonialism, capitalism, and the undervaluing of the unseen and unpaid work women and men do create fertile ground for the dehumanization of Indigenous bodies, and women in particular (Grande 2003). As Nahanni Fontaine states, these personal stories come from their "collective story of struggle and the long, ongoing discourse of being constructed as 'less than,' as 'savage,' as 'disposable' or as 'squaw'" (cited in Macdonald 2017).

Intersectionality

An intersectional approach can provide important insights into understanding the complex articulations of the power structure that places (racialized) women in vulnerable positions (Crenshaw 1993). Crenshaw uses the concept of intersectionality in three dimensions of analysis that are relevant to having a better understanding of the violence against Indigenous women. One dimension is used to describe – sociologically – the relationship between race, ethnicity, and gender in the shaping of African-American women's identities; a second analysis is focused on the articulation of structural orders of racial and patriarchal discrimination that become more evident when government institutions intervene in issues of sexual and physical violence against women; and the third dimension is the analysis of the complexity of African-American women's location at the margins of feminist and anti-racist activisms. Crenshaw (1993) calls this last analytical perspective "political intersectionality" because it precisely refers to the crossroads of conflicting activisms agendas and the strategic silence of feminist activism that fails to challenge the racial and ethnic discrimination of putting aside the particularity of the experience of violence of non-white women.

The criticism of Indigenous women – as well as Afro-descendants – within Western feminism is that, in politicizing gender-based violence, other forms of violence and oppression are underplayed. Women who are subjected to a wide range of discriminatory experiences as well as the minority communities to whom they belong argue that the damages inflicted on them go beyond their physical bodies to include their peoples and territories (Anderson 2018). Indigenous women challenge the universalist thinking of Western feminism by defending the moral and social integrity of Indigenous communities because they represent spaces of resistance against the dispossession of neoliberal colonialism. This positionality is political and epistemologically complex (Hernández Castillo 2001).

One of the entry points of the virtual forum was to talk about violence against Indigenous women by encouraging opinions from different voices – Indigenous and academic – that contributed and redefined ways to call and define extreme violence against women and feminicidal practices. The objective was to politicize all sorts of violence that inflicts harm on Indigenous women in the Global North and the Global South. Together, we came to realize that, in order to make sense of the intersection of several orders of oppression, a dense description – ethnographic and qualitative – of contexts and dynamics of social damage – which are personal but also collective – is required.

The intersections between the personal and political, between class and race, between space and society, and between bodies and territories are vital for Indigenous women because these intersections too often place them at the heart of many forms of violence. It is crucial to understand both the intersection between the different contexts and processes that affect Indigenous women and the multiplicity of struggles and strategies to address them. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) highlights these "multiple layers of struggle across multiple sites."

Intersectionality captures the multiple and overlapping dimensions of Indigenous women's oppression as racialized, gendered, and classed subjects, as well as the dominating, exclusionary, and discriminatory systems to which they are linked. Marginalization is made all the more profound by the multiplication of forms of domination: racist, sexist, capitalist, colonial. "To find solutions to rampant violence against Indigenous women necessitates approaches that address sexual, physical and state violence together and simultaneously"

(Smith 2005, cited by Kuokkanen 2008, 223). In that sense, Smith invites us to engage in a dialogue that crosses and interrogates the positionality and location of the social, political, and activist actors in such a way that allows us to produce intersectional knowledge about identities, acts of violence, and discourses of seeking justice.

The production of intersectional knowledge represents, moreover, a methodological challenge because there is no reliable statistical information on extreme forms of violence against Indigenous women in any of the countries in the Americas. This statistical vacuum impedes a proper understanding of the social dimensions and scales of the problem. It seems crucial to address this vacuum, not only from the quantitative perspective but also from a qualitative methodological exercise based on an intersectional approach that contributes to reconstructing the complexity of circumstances that convey violent acts against Indigenous women.

Multiscalarity

A multiscalar approach aids in the understanding of violence against Indigenous women because the issue encompasses social actors and voices from various locales who work in different scales of power. Violence against Indigenous women cannot be fully understood and addressed from a local or national perspective. We need to confront global neoliberal and colonial processes to start to paint a better picture of the landscape in which violence takes place. That said, local contexts are various, crucial, and should be taken into consideration. The multi-scalar approach eschews simple dichotomies between national and transnational spaces to analyze local, regional, and trans-Indigenous strategies and experiences for social change. Multiscalarity incorporates the conceptual elements of space, scale, and place by viewing social actors as operating among local, regional, national, and international scales. Instead of moving from the local to the global as part of a process of scale-shifting, activists employ scale-jumping tactics that enable them to move between the various scales as political opportunity structures expand or contract (Silva 2013). In other words, social actors do not shift from local to international activism, but expand their collective action repertoires to include both. Indeed, to understand the intersectional impacts of marginalization, one must start from experience and anchor it in structural contexts at different scales (Léger 2015).

The geopolitics of definitions

A critical aspect we considered during the forum concerns the geopolitics of definitions and the need to perceive violence against Indigenous women as the result of a long chain of social, structural, and colonial discriminations that commonly affect Indigenous women and their communities (CONAMI 2012; ECMIA 2013; IIWF 2006). Moreover, it became crucial to use critical concepts to frame the disappearance and murders of Indigenous women, both in Canada and Latin America, due to the geopolitical differences in naming and understanding this violence. Geopolitics refers to regional differences marked by different histories of state relations with Indigenous peoples and how this has determined different policies of assimilation of Indigenous peoples and their cultural matrices into national societies.

Defining violence in this context highlights the differences between the concepts of *femicide* and *feminicide*. *Femicide* refers to a violent act due to one's identification as a woman, or an individual act (Russel and Radford 1992). In contrast, *feminicide* refers to a systemic process that creates the conditions under which extreme forms of gendered violence can occur without any kind of meaningful intervention from state institutions to prevent them or bring justice to the victims and their families (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; Labrecque 2012; Lagarde 2008; Martin and Carvajal 2015). *Feminicide* is a term coined by Latin American activists concerned with bringing about justice against patriarchal violence that operates in a naturalized way against women and girls in a climate of total impunity. As stated by participants of the virtual forum: "Feminicide is direct, lethal expressions of multiple systems of oppression on the bodies of women" (Francisco, 19 February 2017)[5] or "Today colonial genocide is translated into feminicide" (Doris, 22 February 2017).

Taking Rita Segato's (2013) structural analysis into account leads us to relate capitalism to the patriarchal order of power in society, a fusion that manifests itself in systematic violent acts against specific groups of women. According to Segato, the impunity that accompanies the death of women is part of a larger machinery that protects the perpetrator(s) and ensures that horror silences those who are alive. By creating legal and conceptual terms such as "feminicide" to make visible the violent deaths of women in very specific geopolitical contexts, such as in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the feminist reflexive effort has focused on giving a specificity and legal and punitive name to gender violence, which ultimately aims to make the state responsible to act in such areas as the: (1) prevention of violence; (2) elimination of impunity that characterizes the acts of violence against women; and (3) social and symbolic compensation for the damage done (Lagarde 2008; Radford and Russell 1992).

The feminicide of Indigenous women is easy neither to document nor name (Garcia Del Moral 2018). Feminist activism to render visible the deaths of women due to the fact that they are women responds to a legal definition that was based on/or was derived from a particular sociological type of victim; that is, poor urban women who are working at the margins of border U.S.A.–Mexican cities. Thus, the legal definition of feminicide and the associated socio-typical victim does not include women with other distinct social identities, such as Indigenous and Afro-descendant women (ECLAC 2018). Regional and local particularities, including rural and urban contrasts, impact our understandings of violence as well as the actions taken, or not, to face it. The murders of Indigenous women are often not considered as feminicides because there may be other motives involved that do not necessarily fit the specific legal definition described above. For instance, the defense of territories or violent acts related to the militarization and extortion activities of organized crime may not necessarily be classified as feminicide. Indeed, even where there are national and regional observatories that map cases of feminicide, such as in Mexico for example, these statistics do not record the ethnicity of the victims. As a result, Indigenous women's organizations, such as the National Coordinator of Indigenous Women of Mexico (CONAMI) and the Network of Indigenous Women Lawyers of Mexico, are trying to document and map cases in their territories.

In contrast, the absence of the official use of the term "feminicide" (much less "forced disappearances") in the Canadian context constitutes a void in the use of the appropriate political lexicon. As a consequence, the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous

women in Canada are taken as isolated and individual facts and framed in a criminal logic that avoids any structural responsibility on the part of the government. Adopting the term "feminicide" would mean recognizing the state's responsibility for realizing violence against Indigenous women and perpetuating terror against the most vulnerable citizens of their society (Wright 2017). It also means accepting that "colonial practices target women for removal from Indigenous lands, tear children from their families, enforce impoverishment, and manufacture the conditions for dehumanization" (Martin and Harsha 2019, 25).

Indigenous activists argue for the need to build alternative categories that better explain the annihilation of Indigenous peoples; that is, their own categories of dispossession. The role of state action and inaction to tolerate and even facilitate the dispossession of material and non-material goods that are vital for the reproduction of Indigenous communities is crucial. From the experiences of young Mapuche migrant women in urban areas in Chile, violence against Indigenous women was named "Hetero wingka patriarchal violence" (Doris, 22 February 2017). In introducing the term wingka, the participant meant rape, dispossession, and in general the excessive violence of capitalism. Another participant stated: "Violence that is physical, psychological, economic, patrimonial, social, communitarian, political, as well as institutional and structural racism and discrimination make our bodies disposable" (Patricia Torres Sandoval, 19 February 2017). There is a need to open bridges of dialogue and collaborative work between different activists that are located at the margins of the state in such a way that deconstructing categories and concepts can be created in more inclusive ways.

Indigenous definitions do not seek to disqualify the defining feminist exercise of gender violence and feminicide but to unveil the epistemological and political limitations of these concepts. First, a whitening of the concept of feminicide is denounced, because it somehow applies to a sociological type of racial victim that does not necessarily correspond to the cases and/or vulnerability of Indigenous women. Second, the feminicide debate revealed a central tension: the divergence between the action of generalizing the term to have a social impact and the pressure to specify a legal utility (a legal use) (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). These two actions emphasize awareness of the centrality of women's vulnerability to violent acts and women as a uniform social category. The legal term feminicide contains a legal aggravating factor that sometimes is difficult to prove by legal defenders and victims' family members, because it implies the gathering of facts that speak to the perpetrator's misogynist hate. It is important to note that the politics of feminicide – which implies the push to specify a juridical utility based on a concrete context and specific type of victim – fails to address the social complexity of contemporary Indigenous women's experiences of horror, violence, and hate that is related to deeper structures of colonial discrimination, state terror, and capitalist exploitation.

Geographies of exclusion

The complexities discussed above are embedded in what we refer to in this paper as geographies of exclusion. Indeed, the forum's discussions underlined the connection between violence and exclusion. Violence of all kinds is interrelated with the spaces of exclusions created by entangled structures and processes of colonization, capitalism, and patriarchy. Former president of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)

Beverly Jacobs' work, *Colonization is Violence* (2013), highlights the fact that the violence with which Indigenous peoples struggle is linked to colonialism. According to NWAC:

> To address the issue of violence, one must understand the history and impact of colonization on Aboriginal peoples in Canada. It is the ongoing narration of violence, systemic racism and discrimination, purposeful denial of culture, language and traditions, and legislation designed to destroy identity that has led to the realities facing Aboriginal peoples. (2010, 1)

Colonialism has deprived Indigenous peoples of their identities, autonomy, knowledges, and territories. As stated by one participant: "Colonization implies the invasion of our territories and when I say territories, I am including our own bodies, our spirituality, our worldview and all of the areas of our individual and collective lives" (Norma Don Juan, 18 February 2017). Others expressed it as the following: "Historically constructed violence is magnified in the bodies of Indigenous women, including the loss of territory, class violence, sexual violence, economic violence and symbolic violence" (María José, 19 February 2017).

Colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist nation-states of the Americas have been built upon the violation of certain subjects and territories (Razack 2016). Systems of oppression and domination throughout the region rely on processes of displacement, invisibility, and erasure. Social exclusion and spatial marginalization create geographies of exclusion. In these excluded spaces, direct violence is allowed; even justified. Bodies and territories placed in these spaces of exclusion exist in a realm of impunity; because they do not serve the progress of the nation, they are not protected by the state and its rules of law and so are condemned to violence. These "spaces of expected and accepted violence" (Holmes, Hunt, and Piedalue 2014, 551) are physical and symbolic and are created by exclusionary economic, cultural, or social policies.

Specific representations construct a "negative identity" that dehumanizes Indigenous women who have been depicted since colonization as "easy squaws" (Anderson 2016). These representations go alongside tolerance of individual and collective acts of violence against them. In the words of Kuokkanen (2008): "As the poorest and most disenfranchised segment of society, Indigenous women are at the receiving end of not only physical or sexual violence, but also structural, political and economic violence all of which reinforce and reproduce one another." Indigenous women are represented and located at the margins of state and society. Objectification, which makes Indigenous women disposable, alongside multiple discriminations and profound marginalization, represents the roots that make violence possible. As participant Norma Don Juan (18 February 2017) expresses in the forum exchanges: "We have been converted into the property of men and of society and in this way we are violated in public and private spaces [...] We are left in a state of vulnerability and invisibility." Indigenous women are relegated to marginal, peripheral, and perilous spaces.

As discussed during the forum, the etymological link between the terms "rape" and "*rapiña*" underlines the connection between violence against Indigenous women and violence against the Earth, Nature, and Indigenous territories; with the English term used to talk about physical rape and the Spanish term referring to the devastation of natural resources. According to one participant: "Women, as well as land, are submitted, abused, raped and assassinated for no other reason than being in a space and living with dignity"

(Ambar, 9 March 2017). To place oneself in a space of life, to place oneself on the Earth, can represent a brake on colonization, capitalism, and patriarchy, as this participant emphasized.

Activists and scholars denounce the impacts of dispossession and violence against the Earth and its resources as violence committed against the bodies of Indigenous women and their cultures (Knott 2018). Beverly Jacobs (2013) states: "The violence against women and the violence occurring against Mother Earth are also directly connected." Several authors show how current neoliberal processes produce exclusion and involve individuals, communities, and territories in complex private-sector processes (Altamirano Jiménez 2013). The acceleration in the exploitation of resources and territories is pushing more people, who are already marginalized, into places of high vulnerability. Indigenous women are among the most affected by these processes. Increasing violence against women takes place in areas affected by major development projects and extractive industries, such as mines and energy production sites.

Border areas represent another particular area marked by violence. Melissa Wright's (2006) analysis of the Mexico–U.S.A. border, where "disposable women" work in *maquiladoras*, is an example of this spatial, social, economic, and political exclusion. One forum participant similarly stated: "we, as women, are objects of appropriation, disposable bodies" (Ambar, 24 February 2017). This exclusion is vivid in border spaces with the brutal criminalization of migrants. Criminal violence also creates particularly violent spaces for women in Canada and Latin America. The work of Aida Hernández Castillo (2017) shows how Mexico today is marked by the existence of racialized geographies in which criminalized violence is concentrated. Human trafficking in isolated northern communities in Canada is also of concern (PACT-Ottawa 2016).

We must remember that trade liberalization and the marketization of women's productive and reproductive labor are couched within a developmental logic based on the exploitation of natural resources on traditional Indigenous territories. Women's bodies and lands/territories are then seen as the "ultimate frontier" to conquer, undermining Indigenous peoples' inherent right to self-determination.

Resistance: values and limits of transnational Indigenous/ally/intercultural dialogues

Gendered colonial violence is directly related to many issues. Contemporary Indigenous issues in the Global North and Global South, although similar in terms of lived experiences, embody complex institutional processes that tend to make it difficult to determine the factors underlying the issue of violence against Indigenous women in both regions. It is clear that the struggle is waged at a grassroots and community level that at times feeds into institutional support processes and networks through bodies like the Native Women's Association of Canada, the National Coordinator of Indigenous Women of Mexico, and the International Forum for Indigenous Women in the Americas.

Notwithstanding the increasing support and efforts on the ground, there are legal processes and frameworks that rely on normative instruments in both Global North and South contexts. In Canada, the establishment of the Indian Act in 1876 continues to serve as a way to alienate and control Indigenous peoples until they become assimilated or annihilated (Voyageur 2011). In addition, colonial laws and genocidal policies specifically

targeted Indigenous women and men's roles. Women have been the stronghold of communities, and devaluing their roles and limiting their participation by imposing new governance structures have created havoc (Wolski 2009). However, the constitutional commitments as outlined in Section 35, which acknowledges the existence of Aboriginal land and title prior to Confederation as exemplified by the numbered and modern Treaties, as well as the recommendations proposed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action (TRC 2015), provide a measure of political and economic leverage that is not available to Indigenous peoples in Latin America. In contradistinction, Indigenous peoples in the geographic south or Latin America rely on constitutional reforms that recognize their existing rights within a Western legal framework. The socio-political context impacts the ways in which legal frameworks and penal processes are established, which, in turn, determine resolutions to the issues of femicide and feminicide. The roots of systemic processes that produce and maintain violence are embedded in Eurocentric legal systems which approach justice from a position of understanding Indigenous peoples and women as individual rights subjects, whereby individualism and self-preservation for economic gain and profit reign.

Social change and recognition rely on legal advances based on national constitutional reforms and international human rights frameworks, such as ILO 169 (1989) and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007). The pressure exerted by Indigenous organizations in Latin America has impacted national legislation that recognizes Indigenous and collective rights. Combined, these bodies provide oversight and some guarantees to Indigenous peoples in general and, to some extent, to women in particular. In this sense, analyzing the issue of gendered and colonial violence in the Global South necessitates an understanding of the histories and particularities of the geopolitical, legal, and socioeconomic contexts for Indigenous women to deconstruct assumptions of how women experience the issue in the Global North and South. These context-based realities point to a methodological necessity to rely on analytical tools that make room for multi-vocalities, multiple ways of seeing/understanding/being in the world as espoused by Indigenous discursive frameworks, and, fittingly, intersectional theory (Lugones 2015; Quebec Native Women Association 2012).

Pluri-vocality is a strength that enriches discussions and understandings of the issue of violence and yet contributes to the difficulty in choosing entry points to discuss gendered and colonial violence. This includes identification of processes of gendered and colonial violence as well as further deconstruction of how geographies, political boundaries, and even semantics come to bear on the issue and the direction to follow in addressing it. Many Indigenous women activists, academics, and allies, both inside and outside of institutionalized contexts, have provided evidence that working collectively across geospatial and intellectual divides can provide multiple ways of addressing an issue that is pressing for all who seek social justice.

Likewise, the safe space we tried to create might not have felt safe for some, given, for example, the presence of non-Indigenous peoples or of men. This issue around safe spaces and allies' place and role needs to be further addressed. These concerns are linked to issues of the appropriation and construction of indigeneity. Talking about Indigenous women is, of course, an abstraction of plural and diverse realities that should not be simplified. As Sarah Radcliffe puts it: "indigeneity is to Indigenous peoples as cartography is to the earth's surface" (2015, 2).

The analysis of the process of the forum highlighted some crucial information about the need to keep these factors in mind when working across national, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts and boundaries. Indigenous conceptualizations of gender relations have yet to be legitimized within Western academic and activist spaces. We need to acknowledge Indigenous knowledges and ways of being as valid ways of addressing these issues.

The importance of this type of forum is the ability to debate concepts, experiences, and strategies across geographical, identity-based, linguistic, digital, and epistemological divides. This forum provided the chance for Indigenous and racialized women, gender conforming and non-conforming, and their allies to connect in cyberspace to discuss this issue in depth, in spite of the geospatial distance between all the participants. Of course, working in a virtual space presented many issues and tensions; the first tension being the contradiction between the aim to embody a crucial issue through a disembodied mechanism. In the words of one participant: "I have read all of your comments and feedback and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for this very 'real' space, even it if is 'virtual'" (Doris, 22 February 2017).

The virtual forum oscillated between academia and activism and between theory and practice, which could have represented a barrier for some participants coming from one world or the other. We were very conscious of that issue and tried to make the space as open as possible, but we are aware it might still have sounded unwelcoming for some.

The Virtual Forum on Violence against Indigenous Women in the Americas provided us with strong elements to forge lines of analysis concerning issues related to the multiple forms of violence experienced by Indigenous women. It also opened various paths pointing to strategies to resist this violence.

Beverly Jacobs (2013) notes the importance of creating a community of solidarity that goes beyond Indigenous women as a means to counteract acts of terror that threaten the survival of Indigenous women. Violence against Indigenous women's bodies is violence against Indigenous nations and points to the gradual disappearance of Indigenous nations, lands, and territories, as well as their right to live in dignity and respect.

Despite violence and exclusion, Indigenous women are not passive victims. Their agency and strong commitment show their resistance and profound vitality. This continuity was revealed by the multiple forms of resistance evidenced from diverse parts of the Americas and the many initiatives shared in the forum to, as one participant put it, "Break those circles of violence from women who have jumped out of it" (Montse, 13 March 2017). Initiatives such as the Mujeres Sembrando Dignidad/Women Sowing Dignity or the Observatory of Violence against Indigenous Women on the State's Margins express the strength of the resistance that women and communities deploy in the face of lived violence.

Strategies for the prevention, visibilization, and elimination of gendered colonial violence

Violence against Indigenous women in the Americas is a multifaceted problem, requiring multifaceted solutions at local, national, and transnational scales. The strategic development and implementation of grassroots and institutionalized responses to gendered colonial violence is crucial to make clear the links between conditions of inequality for

women and their vulnerability to violence. Recommendations and strategies for the prevention and elimination of violence against Indigenous women must be culturally appropriate, community-based, and language sensitive. Alternative solutions based on cultural models of conciliation and dialogue may more effectively guarantee access to justice for Indigenous women. At the same time, the creation of transnational networks, such as the one we created with this initiative, is crucial. It is not common for a diverse group of women to connect and address pressing issues while sharing their knowledge with each other about their experiences, perspectives, and strategies. Here are some of the recommendations that emanated from our network.

Indigenous women's experiences, perspectives, and priorities must be at the heart of any programs, plans, strategies, or policies to address violence committed against them. Indigenous women's contributions to settler colonial societies have been rendered invisible for too long. The marginalization of Indigenous women's voices and ways of knowing and being in the world has made them "disposable," "less than," and vulnerable to myriad forms of violence. Solutions to ending violence against Indigenous women must be developed in consultation with Indigenous women. Putting Indigenous women at the center of the process will not only create more effective public policies but also recognize Indigenous women as social actors in their own right.

Furthermore, Indigenous women's councils and organizations need to be meaningfully consulted about a subject matter in which they are deeply invested. The research activities conducted by Indigenous women's rights organizations hold a number of advantages, including having greater credibility within Indigenous communities, shared languages, solidarity, capacity building, and being based on lived experiences (IIWF 2017). Support for new and existing Indigenous women's councils and organizations strengthens their authority within their jurisdictions and their ability to serve the needs of their members. It is also relevant to include organizations of Indigenous women in urban centers and Indigenous migrants in any kind of spaces wherein the condition of migrants and those out of their communities make them more vulnerable and invisible.

Indigenous women in Canada and Latin America tend to conceptualize their rights as women within a collective Indigenous rights framework (ECMIA 2013). Indigenous women, alongside men, youth, and elders, need to be included in an intergenerational, community-based discussion on the topic of violence against Indigenous women. Policies to address domestic violence and discrimination against women must be developed with an understanding of gender roles within Indigenous communities and be based on the perspectives of Indigenous women (Sieder and Sierra 2011).

Addressing violence against Indigenous women is a shared responsibility and will require collaboration between governments and communities. No civil society organization or government agency working alone can end violence against Indigenous women. This work must be done in partnership across levels of government and in collaboration with Indigenous peoples. Raising public awareness with the aim of changing attitudes and practices that devalue and demean Indigenous women and girls is also an important educational tool for violence prevention. The invisibility of crimes committed against Indigenous women and girls throughout the Americas provides the perpetrators with impunity. The failure of governments and courts to act on behalf of the victims makes them complicit in the violence being carried out against Indigenous women. More research and publicity is needed to make visible, denounce, and counteract such violence.

Private sector actors working in or near Indigenous lands must obtain free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) from Indigenous communities and in a way that respects gender roles and responsibilities. The extractive sector as a whole has paid little attention to the impacts of its activities on women. Indigenous women who become active in defense of their lands and livelihoods do so at great personal cost. In addition to the risk of repression and criminalization of their activities, external pressures exerted by mining and other resource-extractive industries can damage the social fabric of Indigenous communities and put women at greater risk of experiencing violence (Li 2008; Rondon 2009).

Improving the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous communities and the socio-economic status of Indigenous women will reduce women's unequal vulnerability to violence in the long term. Unresolved trauma and abuse within Indigenous communities resulting from colonial legacies, such as residential school systems and the dispossession of land and language, creates a vicious circle of violence and undermines successful development outcomes (NWAC 2017). Clearly, more work needs to be done to visibilize the structural and historical roots of violence against Indigenous women and reject the false narrative that they are at fault.

Legal and technical assistance for marginalized individuals is an important first step. The case of Jacinta Francisco Maciel of Mexico, an Indigenous woman who was falsely imprisoned for close to eleven years before authorities realized their error (*La Jornada*, 22 February 2017) highlights the need for legal assistance in Indigenous languages for some of the most marginalized in the region. Work to improve the relationship between the justice system and Indigenous peoples needs to be done so that the police and legal professionals protect and assist Indigenous women who are victims of violence. More work also needs to be done to develop accurate and reliable databases to track the incidents of violence against Indigenous women.

More research is needed from marginalized perspectives, including non-institutionalized perspectives that stem from Indigenous worldviews. Important themes include the epistemological complexity of social identities as political representations of those speaking. For example, how do Indigenous peoples and women center their epistemic and ontological positions to advance their claims to self-determination and dignity? Epistemologically, Indigenous conceptualizations of gender are often dismissed as utopia. It is often difficult in research to incorporate the value of horizontal gender relations that complement, balance, and seek equity based on different gendered roles. This concept of equity supposes that all genders have equal value as espoused by Indigenous knowledge systems. However, such conceptualizations are disregarded because Indigenous women too often face violent and repressive conditions, like women in other societies face. The argument posited by many Indigenous feminist/tribal/woman-centered scholars calls for the use of Indigenous concepts in lieu of only Western, white stream gender relations (Grande 2003; Green 2007; Monture-Angus and McGuire 2009). There is a need for Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies to decenter the Western-settler patriarchal order and stop the vilification of Indigenous cultures, peoples, and societies.

Addressing systemic colonial and gendered violence needs to go beyond an individual-based analysis of how violence against women happens and rather to look at the ways in which the colonial settler state, including the academy, does not acknowledge, value, or refer to Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and feeling as "proper" ways to address the

issue of colonial gendered violence. Instead, Western approaches to solving issues continue to be applied and imposed.

Processes of decolonization, depatriarchalization, and deheteronormalization will go a long way toward addressing the root causes of violence against Indigenous women. The intersectionality of oppression faced by Indigenous women can only be addressed by efforts to decolonize states and societies by stamping out racism, male privilege, and discrimination according to sexual orientation. Given that colonial governments in the region have historically refused to work with Indigenous women (Lawrence and Anderson 2005), it is now time to put Indigenous women front and center in public policies and programs.

Conclusion

As reported by Kuokkanen (2008), since the *Stolen Sisters* report of Amnesty International in 2004, we know that "acts of violence against indigenous women are not isolated incidents but rooted in society's general attitudes." Focusing on reclaiming, protecting, and reinstating Indigenous knowledges and ancestral practices is crucial for social justice. Change cannot originate solely from Western ways of knowing, concepts, frameworks, and languages, which includes different definitions of justice and different legal frameworks. The issue of violence against Indigenous women needs to be addressed from Indigenous women's multiple perspectives and knowledges. It is crucial to continue asking questions, as there are no monolithic identities, perspectives, or realities.

In this manner, the approach of our forum as relational, intersectional, and multiscalar, as well as multi-lingual and trans-Indigenous, opened up the floor for analyzing the simplistic and dualistic analyses that fail to unveil the complexities of colonial, gendered violence, and specifically that of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The forum also highlighted the need to discuss how colonial and gendered violence impacts Indigenous men and boys, and non-Indigenous racialized women as well. Again, an important lesson is the need to address the history, legacy, and impact of legal definitions of indigeneity, which vary from country to country. Confronting racialized and gendered geographies of exclusion is crucial to making transformations in the lives of Indigenous women in the Americas. In the words of Lawrence and Anderson (2005): "Because gender discrimination has been a central means through which the colonization of Native communities has taken place, particularly in Canada, addressing the marginalization and devaluation of women's voices becomes central to decolonization."

More than anything else, our virtual forum highlighted the fact that Indigenous women of the Americas resist violence in multiple ways. Resistance against the socio-spatial organization, structures, mechanisms, representations, and policies that place them in positions of vulnerability to violence has always existed and it continues to be strong. This vitality was shown by the multiple analyses and forms of resistance evidenced through the forum from diverse parts of the Americas.

Through this forum, the participants shared experiences, personal stories, and analysis that led to a collective sense of responsibility for what has happened and what is happening, as well as a responsibility to find strategies to make it stop happening. As Beverly Jacobs demands: "for all of us, taking responsibility" (2013). Taking responsibility to end the root causes of this issue is not easy. As the Native Women's Association of Canada

(2010, 39) has argued: "Ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls lies with both men and women, with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, as well as all levels of government. It ends with recognition, responsibility and cooperation."

Notes

1. The Final Report of the National Inquiry on MMIWG is available for download at https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/
2. The language barrier was a major limitation of this type of initiative, even though tremendous efforts were made for translating the conversations.
3. https://can-latam.org/working-groups/indigenous-studies
4. Anishinaabeg is the term used by the Ojibway peoples upon whose lands Baawaating (Sault Ste. Marie) was founded.
5. Participants are cited to respect their input in the analysis presented. They are referred to with the username they used to register with in the forum. All quotes in Spanish are translated by the co-authors.

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Notes on contributors

Stéphane Guimont Marceau is Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Scientific Research (INRS UCS) in Montréal, Québec, Canada. She works in collaborative research processes from an ally posture. Her research concerns individual and collective territories of citizenship, urban Indigenous spaces, the renewal of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, the processes and geographies of colonization and exclusion, and violence against Indigenous women.

Dolores Figueroa Romero is a research fellow at the Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) in Mexico City, Mexico. Her research focuses on the gender politics of Indigenous movements, the political participation of Indigenous women in the public realm, and the subjective construction of Indigenous leaders as mediators of their communities in different levels of governance. Her work has been published in *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*; *Bulletin of Latin American Research*; *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*; and *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, among others.

Vivian Jiménez Estrada is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Algoma University, Canada. She is dedicated to research, teaching, and learning based on Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. She works locally with the Indigenous Women's Anti-Violence Task Force of Baawaating (Sault St. Marie) and internationally with the National Coordinator for Indigenous Women of Mexico (CONAMI). Her work has appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* and the *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

Roberta Rice is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Calgary, Canada. She is the author of *The New Politics of Protest: Indigenous Mobilization in Latin*

America's Neoliberal Era (University of Arizona Press, 2012) and the co-editor of *Protest and Democracy* (University of Calgary Press, 2019) and *Re-Imagining Community and Civil Society in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Routledge, 2016). She is currently completing a book project on Indigenous rights and representation in Canada and Latin America.

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