Concept Paper

Reclaiming Being: Applying a Decolonial Lens to Gendered Violence, Indigenous Motherhood, and Community Wellbeing

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Abstract: Indigenous women and children in Canada are significantly more likely to experience some form of family violence than their non-Indigenous counterparts. However, biomedical and academic discussions around the violence that Indigenous women and their families and communities face reflect a colonial narrative emphasizing Euro-Canadian perspectives and values; a colonial narrative that disconnects the role of past and ongoing forms of colonial violence and naturalizes family violence within Indigenous communities, informing a view of Indigeneity as risk. Through a decolonial lens, the underlying causes of family violence in Indigenous communities can be connected to the gendered violence of patriarchal colonialism targeting Indigenous women. It is revealed how Indigenous women's bodies became a site of the coloniality of violence as colonization disenfranchised and displaced Indigenous women from their lands, communities, and central roles. Gendered colonial violence attacked Indigenous women's scared status in their societies and disrupted Indigenous relational modes of being. This informed a coloniality of being for Indigenous peoples; a coloniality of being integral to intergenerational trauma and family violence. Through the lens of Indigenous laws as a decolonial approach to family violence, the centrality of Indigenous women's roles and responsibilities as mothers is linked to community wellbeing and intertwined with leadership and governance. By grounding the rights of Indigenous women within relationships, Indigenous women can reclaim their sacred places within respectful, reciprocal, and interconnected ways of being.

Keywords: family violence; colonial narratives; indigenous motherhood; patriarchal colonialism; coloniality of violence; coloniality of being; indigenous ways of knowing; community wellbeing

1. Introduction

Indigenous peoples in Canada—and, in particular, Indigenous women and children—are significantly more likely to experience some form of family violence than their non-Indigenous counterparts [1]. Indigenous women in Canada are three times more likely to face violence within interpersonal or domestic contexts than non-Indigenous women [2,3]. The experiences of these higher rates of family violence for Indigenous mothers and pregnant women lead to a variety of maternal health disparities, as well as harmful consequences for their children [1,4], which may manifest as increased risks of developing personality disorders, mental health problems, poor self-esteem, and low educational achievement [5,6]. Family violence can be understood in contexts where there is "violence, abuse, unhealthy conflict or neglect by a family member toward a family member that has the potential to lead to poor health" [7] (p. 5). Family violence can occur in many forms (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse, neglect, and exposure to interpersonal violence) and can be carried out by either family members or intimate partners [1]. Family violence impacts all members of a community. In this article, I focus on the violence experienced by Indigenous women. For a review of Two Spirit experiences of family violence and the rates of interpersonal violence against Indigenous men, as well as the role of colonization and colonial constructs in this violence, see Holmes and Hunt [8].

Statistics around the intimate partner violence that Indigenous women face paint a bleak picture. As compared to non-Indigenous Canadians, interpersonal violence is more

pronounced for Indigenous peoples, with Indigenous women more likely to experience spousal violence compared to non-Indigenous women [2,8,9]. As Sistovaris et al. [1] summarize, in 2014, 9% of Indigenous people in Canada (10% of women and 8% of men) reported unhealthy conflict, abuse, or violence committed against them by a spouse or common law partner in the last five years, as compared to only 4% of non-Indigenous people (3% of women, 4% of men) [2,7]. The rates of spousal violence among Indigenous men and women vary geographically, being higher in the territories (18% overall) as compared to the provinces (9%) [2]. As compared to non-Indigenous women, Indigenous women are also more likely to experience more severe forms of spousal violence and more severe impacts on their health [7], including homicide; from 2014 to 2019, despite making up only 5% of the total population in Canada, one quarter (25%) of the victims of intimate partner homicide in Canada were Indigenous [10]. Additionally, while the rates of family violence, including spousal violence, have decreased in recent years across Canada, the rates among Indigenous women have not decreased over the same period [7].

Although a variety of factors are considered to put Indigenous women at increased risk for family violence, including individual, community and interpersonal, and societal/policy levels [1], anti-violence programming for Indigenous people employs pathologizing language that tends to individualize the causes, impacts of, and solutions to violence [8]. These perspectives inform a risk discourse that frames family violence in individualistic terms (e.g., interpersonal violence), emphasizing the nuclear family, and renders the role of past and ongoing colonial violence invisible. Further, this individualistic risk discourse sees the construction of Indigeneity itself as risk: "Indigenous identity is a key risk factor for violent victimization among women, even when controlling for other risk factors" [1] (p. 2).

Similarly, the violence that Indigenous women face in domestic and interpersonal contexts is also framed in individualistic terms and has been contested by Indigenous peoples. Lee Maracle [11], for example, uses the term "lateral violence" and frames it as a product of colonial violence and systemic oppression, as well as a form of anti-colonial rage. As Shaw [6] (p. 5) discusses, family violence can broadly be defined as the "serious abuse of power within family, trust or dependency relationships" [12]. Within the literature, there is a preference for the term "family violence" over "domestic violence" to document the intimate forms of violence that occur in Indigenous communities. Although "domestic violence" has been commonly used to describe male-perpetrated violence against women in non-Indigenous contexts, Indigenous groups have critiqued the term "for being overly individualist and devoid of any conception of colonization's link to the prevalence of violence" in Indigenous communities [6] (p. 5). "Family violence" is considered as a better concept to indicate "all forms of violence in intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support" [13] (cited in [6], p. 5). In addition, the term "family violence" is considered to better reflect the suffering of all family members, including the perpetrator, and encompasses the impacts of this violence on children [6].

Through a decolonial lens, the root causes of family violence in Indigenous communities can be connected to colonization and the gendered violence of patriarchal colonialism targeting Indigenous women. Beginning with a discussion of the colonial discourse around family violence in Indigenous communities, I reveal how colonial narratives disconnect the role of past and ongoing forms of intersecting and interrelated colonial violence and naturalize family violence within Indigenous communities, informing a view of Indigeneity as risk. I describe how Indigenous women's bodies became a site of the coloniality of violence and instigated a coloniality of being for Indigenous peoples—a coloniality of being central to intergenerational trauma and family violence. Finally, through the lens of Indigenous laws as a decolonial approach to family violence, I highlight how Indigenous women's roles and responsibilities are central to community wellbeing and are intertwined with leadership and governance. By grounding the rights of Indigenous women within relationships, Indigenous women can reclaim their sacred places within respectful, reciprocal, and interconnected ways of being.

2. The Colonial Narrative

Holmes and Hunt [8] provide a discourse analysis of how family violence has been framed in the Canadian literature over the past 15 years. The authors find that rather than centring the role of colonialism in physical and sexual violence, and making visible the intersections of ongoing state neglect, racism, sexism, and homophobia and other expressions of colonialism, public discourse naturalizes violence within Indigenous families and communities and blames Indigenous peoples themselves. Further, this naturalization of violence pathologizes Indigenous communities and suggests that it is a "trait" or "characteristic" of Indigenous peoples and communities, citing, for example, Bopp et al. [14] (p. 11): "there now exist a wide range of community behaviours and characteristics that actually nurture, protect, encourage and permit violence and abuse to continue as a community trait". Holmes and Hunt [8] discuss how these types of narratives promote colonial and racist constructions of Indigenous peoples and communities as inherently abnormal and defective. The role of colonization and ongoing settler colonialism in contributing to the realities of physical and sexual violence is minimized or absent. Indeed, in this literature, colonization is often perceived as historic, e.g., [5,15,16]. This framing of colonialism as being in the past severs the connections of the role of past and ongoing colonial violence in contemporary family violence in Indigenous communities today.

Discourse, however, is more than a discussion or narrative about a given topic. Discourse can be a product of social power and dominance, as well as a manifestation of power that serves the interests of the dominant group. As the narrative around family violence in Indigenous communities reflects Eurocentric knowledge and associated cultural values (namely individualism and the nuclear family; see Tallbear [17] for a discussion of the colonial violence of monogamy and the nuclear family), it is therefore a colonial narrative that subsumes Indigenous lived experiences of historic and ongoing settler colonialism. The reinforcement of settler colonial power relations is evident in the erasure of the role of colonization, and of ongoing colonial violence, in family violence within Indigenous communities, yet situates intergenerational trauma as a cause of family violence. Family violence in Indigenous communities is often defined as an "intergenerational problem" [14] (p. 8) or a "cycle of intergenerational trauma" [14] (p. 48). Although the role of intergenerational trauma is acknowledged as contributing to family (or interpersonal) violence [8], it is often presented as reflecting past (and unresolved) trauma. For example, Sistovaris et al. [1] (p. 9) discuss how higher rates of IPV among Indigenous women can be "attributed to a number of highly complex factors. . . [including] broader historical factors associated with Canada's legacy of colonialism and the intergenerational effects of unresolved trauma from events and experiences such as residential schools, the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop and millennium scoop".

Further, there is concern for the way in which violent behaviours may be passed down through generations where violence eventually "becomes a learned behaviour" [18] (p. 26) and how male violence against Indigenous women can have a "negative impact on children (nurturing a sense of fear and insecurity and the intergenerational perpetuation of the cycle of violence)" [8,19] (p. 3). In essence, Indigenous families are seen to perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of violence, without an emphasis on where this cycle of violence began or the forms of violence with ongoing settler colonialism maintaining it. Although some acknowledge the role of colonial history and how Indigenous peoples have internalized it, the focus is still on emphasizing Indigenous peoples as the ones passing it on to subsequent generations, "resulting in enduring and perpetuating cycles of family violence and harm", e.g., [1] (p. 20) [3,9]. Such views inscribe family violence within Indigenous families and communities and perpetuate a view of Indigeneity itself as a risk factor. Intergenerational trauma is not the product of Indigenous families and communities who have faced past trauma (and who have not yet healed); it is the product of past and ongoing harmful colonial structures and policies and the associated forms of violence. Speaking as a Mohawk woman and identifying racism, colonialism, and state violence as "inseparable from other experiences of violence in the lives of Indigenous women", Patricia

Monture-Angus [20] (p. 170) called for "expansive definitions of violence that reflect the complexities of colonial power relations and the intersecting and interrelated forms of violence experienced by Indigenous peoples" [8] (p. 11).

Therefore, the colonial discourse on family violence within Indigenous communities disconnects or hides not only the role of past and ongoing colonialism but also the coloniality of different forms of intersecting and interrelated violence. It is a colonial narrative that centres a view of personal violence against "at risk" individuals, severing the connections of the collective nature of intergenerational trauma and how it intersects with colonial structural, systemic, and symbolic forms of violence, a narrative that renders the role of the gendered violence of patriarchal colonialism in the disenfranchisement of Indigenous women invisible. A lack of consideration of the role of colonization potentially naturalizes the violence against women within Indigenous communities and resets the long-standing colonial view that Indigenous peoples need "saving from themselves" [8] (p. 5), reflecting a broader historic colonial narrative about Indigenous peoples in Canada.

3. "The Colonizers Saw… That as Long as Women Held Unquestioned Power of Such Magnitude, Attempts at Total Conquest of the Continents Were Bound to Fail" [21] (p. 3): Patriarchal Colonialism

Indigenous peoples in Canada have endured a centuries-long history of colonization and continue to experience ongoing settler colonialism. As part of the colonial nation-building process, Indigenous peoples in Canada became historically framed within what Duncan Campell Scott [22] referred to as the "Indian problem"—a prevailing belief that Indigenous peoples needed to be assimilated into Euro-Canadian culture because their traditional ways were considered "uncivilized" and "immoral". As Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Campell Scott's intentions were clear: "I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone… Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question…" [22] (p. 55).

To solve the "Indian problem", the government and missionaries applied a variety of forced assimilationist approaches, such as the reserve system, the residential school system, and the Indian Act, to further their agenda aimed at "civilizing" Indigenous peoples. The reserve system segregated Indigenous peoples and severed their connections to their traditional lands, both physically and spiritually, to free up land for White settlement; the residential school system severed the transmission of cultural knowledge and ways of knowing and being across the generations; and the Indian Act and its amendments determined who was "Indian" and sought to end Indigenous identities. These cumulative events are now understood as cultural genocide [23].

More often, colonial policies and practices targeted Indigenous women and children, such as the Indian Act, which stripped Indigenous women of their status and identity, and the residential school system, which removed children from their families and communities. The inherent patriarchal nature of colonialism disenfranchised and displaced Indigenous women from their lands, communities, and central roles and diminished their status in society, leaving them vulnerable to violence [24]. Due to cumulative colonial historical events and forced assimilationist policies, Indigenous peoples collectively experience intergenerational trauma, which leads to high rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Colonization had a tremendous impact on gender identities and gender relations in Indigenous societies. Prior to colonization, gender was not hierarchical or dichotomous and gender egalitarianism was considered prevalent in many Indigenous societies in Canada. Indigenous women were not dependent on men but rather their role was seen as in balance with men. In pre-colonial settings, Indigenous women had power, respect, and recognition within their families and communities [25]. As Anderson [26] explains, Indigenous women were accorded tremendous status in the family, community, and nation; motherhood, as an affirmation of women's power to bring forth life, defined her central

role in traditional Indigenous societies. However, with colonization, the imposition of the Euro-American family structure stripped Indigenous women of their positions in the family and their powerful role as mothers; this imposition of European family values was "a keystone in the conquest strategy" [26] (p. 115). Under a patriarchal family structure embracing male authority, female fidelity, and the elimination of the right to divorce [27] (p. 28), Indigenous women had to learn how to obey—a key focus of the assimilationist policies of the missionaries and in residential schools [26]—whereas, in pre-colonial settings, Indigenous kinship saw Indigenous governance granting women respect and authority [25]. Thus, patriarchy was an intrinsic aspect of colonialism, leading to different lived experiences of colonization for Indigenous women as compared to Indigenous men and Two Spirit and gender-queer persons. Indigenous writers have embraced "patriarchal colonialism" (the combination of patriarchy and colonialism) as a way of situating Indigenous women's experiences [28] (pp. 282–283) as "the lives of Indigenous women are framed by the 'omnipresence of patriarchal white sovereignty'" [29] (p. 99).

Patriarchal colonial violence against Indigenous women is ongoing and continues to be embedded in colonial narratives. A tragic example of the intersecting colonial structural, systemic, and symbolic forms of violence is the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, often presented as a collective of "at-risk" individuals rather than as daughters, mothers, aunties, and grandmothers [24]. Contemporary biomedical colonial policies continue to control Indigenous women's birth experiences and identities couched in risk discourse: evacuated birth policies remove Indigenous women from their family and community and the ceremonies of birth, and obstetric violence in the form of birth alerts and infant apprehensions pathologizes and criminalizes Indigenous motherhood [30]. Thus, through patriarchal colonialism, Indigenous women's bodies became a site of colonialization and ongoing settler colonialism—a site of the coloniality of power, gender, and violence.

4. The Coloniality of Violence: Power and Being

As Gunn Allen [21] explains, to colonize a people whose society is not hierarchical, colonizers must first naturalize hierarchy through establishing patriarchy: "The colonizers saw (and rightly) that as long as women held unquestioned power of such magnitude, attempts at total conquest were bound to fail" [21] (p. 3). Patriarchal gender violence is the process by which colonizers inscribe hierarchy or domination on the bodies of the colonized. The impact of this colonial gendered violence on the status of Indigenous women and the meanings that came to be inscribed on Indigenous bodies can be explored through the concept of the "coloniality of power", developed by Quijano [31]. Based in understandings of "coloniality", or the set of attitudes, values, ways of knowing, and power structures maintained as normative by colonizing societies to rationalize and perpetuate dominance, the coloniality of power was organized and established based on the idea of "race" as a factor for social classification and identification [31,32]. Colonizers redefined the identities of Indigenous peoples by referring to them as "Indians", a homogenizing category that stripped them of their own identities. These colonial identities were negatively constructed in relation to the identity of the colonizer, "imposing, from the beginning, a global classification of the world that names colonized peoples as inferior by nature" [32] (p. 545), thus reinforcing white superiority. In Canada, the coloniality of power further redefined Indigenous peoples as the "Indian problem" and informed the "civilizing" mission through residential schools, the reserve system, and the Indian Act. The concept of "race" created a dichotomous and hierarchical interpretation of the world in which some populations were seen as fully human and others dehumanized. This colonial construction permeated all areas of life among colonized peoples, stripping them of "their ways of life, interpretation, and relationships to the world, conceived since then as invalid and backward" [32] (p. 546). Through the coloniality of power, and its inherent white supremacy, Indigenous peoples were denied their ways of knowing and being and relational ontologies.

Another sphere of coloniality is the "coloniality of gender", a concept that Lugones [33] sees as part of a "colonial/modern gender system" that "subdues subaltern 'men' and 'women' in all areas of existence" [32] (p. 547). The construction of the colonial/modern gender system was characterized by the hierarchical dichotomization of the population and the imposition of a Western gender binary presented as universal. (For further insights into colonial gendered violence, the coloniality of gender, and the colonial/modern gender system, see Félix de Souza and Rodrigues Selis [34].) Colonization introduced gender differences that previously did not exist; in Indigenous societies, gender would have been interpreted in an egalitarian, non-dichotomous, and non-hierarchical way [33], whereas, within the colonial/modern gender system, gender is "bound to bodies, compulsively dimorphic, patriarchal, heteronormative, and homophobic" [32] (p. 548). In the patriarchal European system of sexual hierarchy, females were inferior beings and subordinate to males. Colonization, therefore, was a violent process of racialization, gendering, and hierarchizing that degraded colonized females as an indispensable component of the colonial project [32].

Bringing together the concepts of the coloniality of power and coloniality of gender allows for the discussion of the coloniality of violence faced by Indigenous peoples. The concept of the "coloniality of violence" allows for the complexities of colonial power relations and the intersecting and interrelated forms of violence experienced by Indigenous peoples to be conceptualized through a decolonial lens. The coloniality of violence views the experiences of marginalized peoples as more than the sum of oppressions [35] (p. 181) but "as manifest through complex, and contextually-contingent systems of meaning and power" [36]. As Sachseder [35] discusses, the concept of the coloniality of violence "contributes to thinking differently about women beyond the simplified and simplifying dichotomies of victim/agent, inferior/superior and backward/modern… [the colonial project] continues to shape conditions of violence against women through the production and representations of identities, practices, and discourses" [35] (p. 181).

The coloniality of violence against Indigenous women is twofold: violence against Indigenous women by non-Indigenous men, as well as violence within Indigenous communities. Violence by non-Indigenous men is informed by colonial narratives that instilled hypersexualized and dehumanizing views of Indigenous women. Violence within Indigenous communities can reflect the internalization of various forms of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, often described as intergenerational trauma, and informs a coloniality of being. Colonial discourses that naturalize the violence within Indigenous communities rely on and reproduce gendered colonial stereotypes about Indigenous peoples and, in particular, Indigenous women [8]: "Sexist and racist colonial representations of Indigenous peoples as savages (i.e., Indigenous men as inherently violent and Indigenous women as subservient and sexually deviant) function to naturalize and actively create conditions of silence that make it difficult to speak out about violence within families" [8] (p. 5). These gendered colonial stereotypes and representations of Indigenous peoples were initially created under the gaze of the colonizers as they sought to end the "Indian problem". Indigenous men and women were racialized and essentialized into negative entities and identities. These views of the colonized Indigenous Other created constructions of self, identity, and subjectivity for both the colonizer and the colonized, instigating a "coloniality of being" [37], as well as the colonizers' sense of superiority [35,38].

Thus, intergenerational trauma and its relationship with family violence can be reframed as part of the coloniality of being. Rather than the view that Indigenous peoples have not resolved past colonial experiences and are passing them on to subsequent generations, family violence can be seen as "the result of, and a reaction to, a system of domination, disrespect, and bureaucratic control. It stems from the consequences and devastation of forced white colonial policies of assimilation and cultural genocide over the past several centuries. [Indigenous] peoples have internalized this oppression and thus its impact is felt in the family. The treatment of women and children within the family is a reflection of the treatment of [Indigenous] peoples in a broader context" [39] (pp. 24–25).

The coloniality of violence survives within intergenerational trauma and its relationship with family violence against women, and it is maintained by ongoing forms of overt, systemic, and structural colonial violence. To address the coloniality of violence and the associated coloniality of being, ancestral health knowledge and ways of being are key to healing from family violence [40]. Through the reclamation of relational modes of being, Indigenous women can be restored to their sacred places of power.

5. Reclaiming Being: Indigenous Motherhood, Relationships, and Community Wellbeing

In their analysis of the family violence literature, Holmes and Hunt [8] find that a discourse about healthy relationships runs through much of the literature. The authors note that an emphasis on "healthy relationships" emerged with the development of violence prevention programs during the feminist anti-violence movement in North America in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, as the authors further discuss, there are complex effects of this discourse. One concern identified by the authors is that it reproduces an individualistic and paternalistic framework—for example, advocating for "educational programs to teach Aboriginal women about healthy relationships" [18] (p. 8) or "compulsory personal growth programs" in shelters and second stage houses such as co-dependency groups to help women form "normal healthy relationships" [41] (pp. 31–32). These approaches can lead to blaming and pathologizing Indigenous women who have experienced violence, "especially when the context of ongoing colonial violence that has created unhealthy relationships in Indigenous families is missing" [8] (p. 31). These conceptualizations of relationships reflect a colonial perspective; in Indigenous perspectives, relationships—and, in particular, reciprocal and respectful relationships—are central to Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

As Frideres [42] explains, Indigenous ways of knowing and being are embedded in the cumulative experiences and teachings of people, transmitted orally through storytelling from generation to generation, and involve a connection to the land through ceremony. Ways of knowing and being are sacred as they are derived from the Creator and, as such, all things, animate and inanimate, have a life force and are interconnected, existing in relation to one another. Indigenous ways of knowing are shaped by human actions and goals and emphasize respectful relationships. Within this view, the individual is connected to the whole and "people travel through life in a relational existence" [42] (p. 49). As nothing can occur without a corresponding reaction, one may remain in balance through reciprocity, which further informs interdependency. Therefore, key cultural values inherent in Indigenous ways of knowing and being include sacred and respectful relationships, reciprocity, and interdependency. Wilson [43] further elucidates Indigenous perspectives on relationships: "In this world view, we are each our own person, but we are also defined by our relationships to others. We are one person's mother, another person's daughter, and a third person's family of the heart. We are connected to our ancestors, to the land where we come from, and to future generations. In short. . . we are not just one person; we are the sum of all the relationships that shape our lives" [24] (p. 95).

To contextualize relationships within views of safety and justice for Indigenous women, the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [24] emphasizes the roles and responsibilities of Indigenous women, as crucial to community wellness and collective identity, within understandings of Indigenous cultural values and Indigenous law. Indigenous women, as mothers, grandmothers, and aunties, ensured the intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge and values and strengthened the resilience and health of communities [44]. In many Indigenous communities, creation was often understood within the context of childbirth and was reflected in a variety of birthing traditions (e.g., treatment of the placenta). Prior to the arrival of missionaries and, later, colonial state policies controlling Indigenous birth experiences, e.g., [30], many Indigenous women acted as midwives, "setting up a child's life in a secure, loving, and connected way" [24] (p. 169). Women are considered the heart of their nations and communities [24]; the dehumanizing and disempowering impact of colonialism on Indigenous

women disrupted the process of teaching and learning, damaging the heart of Indigenous life [45]. However, as Janet Smylie, quoting Cheryllee Bourgeois [24] (p. 170), explains, "The link among cultural teachings, identity, and resilience was fractured through the process of colonization—but not broken. The fact that ceremonies, teachings, and languages do survive today is a testament to those women, those cultural carriers who, along with male, female, and gender-diverse Elders, continue to carry the ancestors as a potential path forward toward healing and safety".

Thus, women's roles and responsibilities in Indigenous societies are crucial to community wellness and resilience. As revealed in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [24] (p. 166), many of the stories shared show Indigenous mothers and caregivers as the first leaders, "who shape a people's identity as a Nation is born". Many Indigenous societies replicate these kinship principles within their governance structures: "just as motherhood is a leadership role, leaders may take on mothering roles". In many communities, the role of women in decision-making was not only related to their roles as mothers or as relatives. Indigenous women were central to, rather than excluded from, decision-making processes and leadership roles, as has been the case for women in Western politics [46]. As per Joann Green, who testified as part of the Heiltsuk Women's Community Perspectives Panel at the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "Women are known to be the backbone of the community and play a large role in Heiltsuk leadership. . .. The omux are a society of women of high standing in the community who give advice to our Humas, our Chiefs. Their advice centres on maintaining the unity and well-being of the community, including advice on justice, family, and cultural practices" [24] (p. 166). These roles and responsibilities of Indigenous women are relational and reciprocal and are linked to various systems of Indigenous laws and rights based on the values of respect, reciprocity, and interconnectedness.

Relationships form the foundation of Indigenous law [24]. As Val Napoleon [47] describes, "It's tools for social ordering; it's problem-solving; and it's the way that we resolve conflicts, and we manage conflicts" [24] (p. 133). Conflicts, and violence, did occur within Indigenous communities in precolonial times. Laws were in place to deal with behaviour that was not accepted by the community, including violence; members could be banished, punished, or otherwise held to account for violence inflicted on other members of the community [24]. But a failure to acknowledge the existence of this violence disempowers Indigenous societies' ability to deal with these issues by insisting that these issues are new and stem from colonization: "While a great deal of the violence has links within the history of colonization, the tendency to sanitize the past makes the existing resources in the area of Indigenous laws seem invisible and irrelevant" [24] (p. 138). As Snyder, Napoleon, and Borrows [48] (p. 610) contend, "It is possible to work with the idea that colonialism has negatively impacted gender norms and is reliant on gendered violence, without necessarily having also to claim that gender relations prior to contact were perfect". Indeed, part of the role that Indigenous women fulfilled as midwives was to mediate conflict: as Smylie, quoting Cheryllee Bourgeois, explains, "Indigenous midwifery is not just about providing pre-natal care and attending births. Historically and currently, it's about medicines to treat sick children, counselling people, including counselling people who were fighting. So, midwives in Métis communities were important interveners when we did have family violence" [24] (p. 169).

Grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and emphasizing relationships and social order, Indigenous laws can serve as a foundation for a decolonizing strategy for family violence [24]. Although there is no one strategy to promote safety and justice, the values of respect, reciprocity, and interconnectedness can help to connect principles across the diversity of Indigenous communities. Centring the roles, responsibilities, and rights of women, and thereby reclaiming their sacred places and being, can provide a new foundation for an understanding of the rights of Indigenous women as rooted in relationships [24]. As Kim Anderson [46] (p. 9) emphasizes in her discussions on reconstructing Indigenous

womanhood, "We recognize what we once were and what we still carry through the generations. At the same time, we need to recognize this being, to re-think and re-construct it so that it works with our realities today. Thus, we draw on our spiritual, emotional, and physical resources as we make conscious decisions about who we are today and who we will be in the future".

6. Conclusions

The high rates of family violence that Indigenous women face in their communities are a continuation of the colonial violence that Indigenous peoples have experienced for centuries and continue to experience. Indigenous women's bodies became a site of colonialization and ongoing settler colonialism—a site of the coloniality of power and violence. Patriarchal colonialism targeted and disempowered Indigenous women and disrupted Indigenous relational modes of being, instigating a coloniality of being for Indigenous peoples. Contemporary biomedical and academic approaches to family violence in Indigenous communities emphasize Eurocentric values of individualism and the nuclear family and reflect a colonial discourse that naturalizes the violence within Indigenous communities and informs a view of Indigeneity as risk, a view that resets a long-standing colonial narrative that Indigenous peoples need saving from themselves.

In contrast, rather than individualism, Indigenous ways of knowing and the associated value systems encompass reciprocal and respectful relationships and interconnectedness. Indigenous understandings of motherhood go beyond an individual pregnant body or a woman in relation to her children to views of Indigenous women as mothers, grandmothers, and aunties, as the hearts of Indigenous communities. Indigenous women's roles and responsibilities are central to community wellbeing and are intertwined with leadership, governance, and Indigenous laws. Grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and emphasizing relationships and social order, Indigenous laws, and women's place within them, can serve as a foundation for a decolonizing strategy for family violence. By rooting the rights of Indigenous women within relationships, Indigenous women can reclaim their sacred places and respectful, reciprocal, and interconnected ways of being.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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