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Mobilizing Against Colonial Violence: Centering Indigenous Women-Led Initiatives for MMIWG2S+ People

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Abstract

Through an investigation of grassroots initiatives for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit+ (MMIWG2S+) people, we show how Indigenous women are central to mobilizing against a colonial, racialized, and gendered violence. Drawing on Indigenous feminisms, we first offer a historical contextualization of Indigenous dispossession that highlights how Indigenous women — because of their centrality to the land as life creators and life givers — remain the targets of colonial, gendered, and racialized violence and genocide. Through a case study of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), we exemplify how the persistence of this ongoing violence and genocide is, in part, achieved through the combined practices of spectacles and erasures whereby the violence against Indigenous women is sensationalized, while the quotidian colonial violence is erased. Drawing on several examples in the DTES from the Unearthing Justices resource collection of over five hundred Indigenous-based grassroots initiatives for the MMIWG2S+ people, we show how, through their lived wisdom and experience,

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Indigenous women work to dismantle the quotidian colonial violence in a way that reaffirms relations, builds community, and moves towards Indigenous self-determination. In this article, we argue that while Indigenous women are the targets of a colonial, gendered, and racialized violence and genocide, they are also central to understanding and dismantling it.

Keywords: Gendered violence; Grassroots justices; Indigenous feminisms; MMIWG2S+ people; settler colonialism

Introduction

> In carrying, giving, and then nurturing new life, I also began to understand the significance of women in the life-cycle process. … I was haunted by thoughts of the abuse and neglect that mothers and young children suffer on a daily basis …[and] how far we have strayed from life-affirming principles in mainstream and Indigenous societies alike. (Anderson, 2011, p. 83)

In the above quote, Kim Anderson, Métis scholar, highlights the important but peripheral consideration women are given in life-creation and life-giving processes. As the author notes, the marginalizing and neglect of such life-affirming principles has resulted in all kinds of devaluing and violence against women, particularly for Indigenous women. This violence and devaluing is evident in the thousands of murdered and disappeared Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit+ (MMIWG2S+) people throughout the land known as Canada. Where the repetitive and ongoing violence has been well documented (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [NIMMIWG], 2019), less attention has been given to how Indigenous communities and the women who are targets of the violence have mobilized against it (Chartrand et al. 2016; de Finney, 2014; Palacios, 2016). Indigenous women's central role in mobilizing against the ongoing colonial violence and state neglect is well illustrated in Carol Martin's (Downtown Eastside Women Centre) cross-examination at the National Inquiry where she points out that Indigenous women are

"bombarded by laws, policies, and procedures that work against them at every level." She further notes that "the only recourse is to refuse" (NIMMIWG, 2018b, pp. 186–196). As underscored in this quote, and as we argue in this article, where Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit+ people continue to experience a colonial, gendered, and racialized violence and genocide, they are also central to understanding its pervasive character and to ultimately dismantling it.

Drawing from Indigenous feminist literature (Aikau et al., 2015; Anderson, 2011; Goeman, 2008; Barker, 2008; Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016; Smith 1999, 2003, 2005), we first provide a brief overview of how Indigenous women were historically targeted for destruction through a colonial, gendered, and racialized violence. This was particularly achieved through the dispossession and disbanding of women from the heart of kinship ties and community cohesion, and from relations with people and land. This historical overview sets the framework for understanding the sexualized, gendered, and racialized violence Indigenous women continue to experience today. To expose the expanding and repetitive nature of colonial violence (Saleh-Hanna, 2015, par. 20), we trace how these colonial violences continue today through a case study of the Downtown Eastside Vancouver (DTES). The DTES is commonly characterized as one of the country's poorest neighbourhoods — with high levels of homelessness, crime, mental health concerns, sex work, and Indigenous population — and is often characterized by the media as violent (Culhane, 2003). Within such characterizations, the DTES is an exemplar of where the coterminous processes of spectacle and erasure both sensationalize the violence, while making the everyday colonial violence invisible. Finally, drawing from the Unearthing Justices research project that includes a resource collection of over five hundred Indigenous-based grassroots initiatives for the MMIWG2S+ people (Centre for Justice Exchange, 2020), we highlight several Indigenous women-led grassroots initiatives in the DTES. In looking at the DTES, we draw from this research to showcase how Indigenous women-led initiatives are central to creating intentional relations, revitalizing, and rebuilding communities, and moving towards Indigenous self-determination. We conclude that Indigenous women are refusing and resurging against

colonial, gendered, and racialized violence as they once again find their place at the heart of their communities.

The Unearthing Justices research project is a government-funded research initiative to collate and showcase Indigenous-based grassroots initiatives for the MMIWG2S+ people, and that highlights the community work of Indigenous women in the DTES. The research project consisted of: 1) over forty interviews with Indigenous family and community members of the MMIWG2S+ people; 2) a national media scan of Indigenous-led grassroots initiatives — projects, campaigns, events, and more in support of the MMIWG2S+ people — which were profiled in a public database (see Justice Exchange, 2020); and 3) a reading, viewing, and coding of the more than 2,380 NIMMIWG public hearings. It is important to note that, from this project, we do not attempt to locate or trace Indigenous grassroots practices to some original or traditional form, but rather consider the activities as what materially and currently exists in communities to address the violence — both within and outside of state operations — in light of the long-term and ongoing absence of state support, formal justice, or other kinds of resources and supports.

Contextualizing Colonial, Gendered, and Racialized Violence

In the land known as Canada, as elsewhere (Loomba, 2015), the historical violent settler colonial evictions and extractions of Indigenous communities were extended to Indigenous women and their bodies (Barker, 2008; Nason, 2016, p. 143). Violence, particularly sexual and racial violence, is an act of extraction and ownership (Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016). As the creators and givers of life and the lifelines of communities and vital relations, Indigenous women represented a life that not only stood between settlers and land — or as the bounty of settler conquest — but a life to annihilate along with everything her life represents – creation, life force, and earthly mystery. The management of gender and sexuality was critical in the displacement and dispossession of entire Indigenous populations. Indigenous women were not peripheral to colonial orderings but rather targets to its organizing forces to establish imperial rule, patriarchal subordinations, heteronormativity, white supremacy, and many other violent colonial hierarchies. Mishuana Goeman (2008) points out

how colonialism relied on sets of gendered spatial metaphors that dichotomized space, such as home from nation, public from private, frontier from cosmopolitan, and women from men's space. As we outline below, these divisions and hierarchies uprooted and severed women's ties to their nations, communities, and families, resulting in all kinds of disconnections, dispossessions, and migrations that institutionalized the violence that continues today (TRCC, 2015; Viens, 2019).

As noted by several Indigenous feminist scholars, although the cultures, languages, and structures differed between nations, many Indigenous communities were matrilineal, with women and men both holding roles and positions in and outside of the family (Anderson, 2011; Barker, 2008; Million, 2013). Prior to the heteropatriarchal orderings of colonization, women were sacred and respected as healers, medicine women, teachers, and leaders (Anderson, 2011). With the Cree, for example, women were conferred at the centre of the circle of life and ensured strong kin relations and were therefore vital for the growth of the community (Frideres, 2011). It is no coincidence that colonizers settled the land through a violent gendered and racialized dispossession and land eviction of the women who were at the heart of life and creation.

Indigenous dispossession more generally was devised on multiple fronts. This included the creation of reserves, enactments of enfranchisement laws, policing of movement, criminalization of ceremonies, mandated Residential Schools, severing of kith and kin ties, and attempted extermination of language and culture, among others. For example, the 1850 *Act for the Better Protection of the Lands and Property of the Indians in Lower Canada,* its consort the 1850 *Act for the Protection of the Indians in Upper Canada from Imposition, and the Property Occupied or Enjoyed by Them From Trespass and Injury*, defined and determined the status of "Indian" by setting conditions around land titles, ownership, and activities (Barker, 2008; Simpson, 2008). The 1876 *Indian Act* was used to consolidate and localize the many colonial laws relating to "Indians" regulating all aspects of Indigenous life, including the marriage of Indigenous peoples and the conferring of lines of descent, property, and landholdings to men.

The Acts overwrote traditional methods of determining belonging and were designed to instill colonial heteropatriarchal values into Indigenous communities as a so-called civilizing mechanism (Barker, 2008, p. 100–101; Harry, 2009). Indigenous women were specifically targeted for dispossession from vital kith and kin relations with their children, family, and land, and removed as healers, leaders, teachers, life givers, and water carriers among other roles and responsibilities (Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016). Women who married outside of their reserve lost band membership and were forced to leave their communities. If they married white men, they were stripped of their treaty rights and their children also lost status. It is estimated that over twenty-five thousand mostly Indigenous women lost "Indian" status between 1876 and 1985, and between one and two million of their children were not entitled to "Indian" status as a result (Aikau et al., 2015). The *Indian Act* later forced the removal of Indigenous children from their communities into Residential Schools, resulting in further violent severing of women from their children and their vital energy as life and care givers. The reorganization and redefinition of kinship, land tenure, relations, tradition, and governance resulted in the subordinating of Indigenous women and children and the overall displacement, dispossession, and elimination of Indigenous nations.

New established colonial infrastructures and governance facilitated and institutionalized a host of violences against Indigenous women. The gendered and racialized dispossession from community and relations left Indigenous women unprotected and exposed, while the patriarchal subordinations degraded their status, title, and life. Smith (1999; 2005) argues that it is through the ongoing colonial assaults on Indigenous women and their bodies and life ways that culture and identity are eradicated. Through such states of dispossession of land and place, Indigenous women are constructed within a "permanent absence" and marked as inherently conquered, violable, and ultimately "rapeable" (Smith, 2005, p. 8–9). Without recognition or community status, Indigenous women were suspended from many life-sustaining forces and subjected the women to all kinds of economic and social dependencies and violence that continue today (Hunt, 2016; Monture as cited in Comack, 2014; Smith, 2003). While there have been several modifications to the *Indian Act* that return

some variation of status to Indigenous women and their children, the amendments nonetheless maintain gendered hierarchies,[1] while the gendered and racialized violence remains deeply entrenched.

Scenes of Spectacle and Everyday Erasures within the DTES

The colonized orderings and hierarchies that continue to make Indigenous women vulnerable to and targets of racialized gendered violence and genocide are thoroughly documented in the NIMMIWG (2019). This includes forced migrations to cities due to lack of opportunities (Lampron & Chartrand, 2020), poor health such as with widespread boil-water advisories across reserves (Arsenault et al., 2018), waves of hardship and grief such as from the unmarked graves of Indigenous children forced into Residential Schools (Martens, 2021), the exponentially high rates of Indigenous child apprehensions (Blackstock, 2019), coercive and forced sterilizations (Stote, 2012), lack of available or negligent healthcare (Denny, 2020), economically starved communities (Leonard, et al., 2020), and poverty by design (Brittain & Blackstock, 2015) to only name a few. As Dian Million (2013) points out, the pervasive gender violence is inherent to ongoing Indigenous-state relations where settler colonialism and logics of dispossession and elimination are naturalized (see also Wolf, 2006) and exposure to sexualized and gendered violence continues.

The DTES is the archetype of both the historical and continuing perpetuation of a gendered and racialized colonial violence in the land known as Canada. The DTES is considered Canada's largest reserve, yet for those who live and work in the area it is known as one of the few places that offer much-needed but nonetheless meagre services (Williams Interview, February 12, 2021). The ongoing murders and disappearances of Indigenous women — with little state intervention, resource, or support (Oppal, 2012) — is indicative of the ongoing gendered and racialized colonial dispossession in the area. As noted by Martin and Walia (2019, par. 2), "Colonial state

[1] These reforms include Bill C-31 *Indian Act amendments* (1985), Bill C-3 *Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act*, (2013) and Bill S-3 *An Act to Amend the Indian Act* (2019). Bill-C31, for example, provides a "lesser" 6(2) status to Indigenous women and their children who are pejoratively referred to as "Bill C-31 Indians" (Day, 2019, p. 176; McIvor 2004).

practices continue to target women for removal from Indigenous lands, tear children from their families, enforce impoverishment, and manufacture the conditions for dehumanization." A case study of the DTES exposes the repetitive cycles of colonial violence across the land.

Indigenous women's continued experiences of colonial violence are, in part, made possible by the parallel processes of spectacle and erasure. Hartman (1997) defines spectacle as a scene created for an audience who seek the experience of both a voyeur terror and pleasure when witnessing racialized suffering. Spectacles, as Audra Simpson (2011) points out, are particularly useful in distracting attention from what is actually at stake in the lives of Indigenous people. Where spectacles maintain a voyeuristic public interest, the erasure of the routine or quotidian violence experienced through poverty, lack of healthcare, child apprehensions, and other day-to-day indignities works concomitantly to further entrench the colonial and patriarchal relationship. In this section, we draw from the Unearthing Justices research project's media accounts and interviews with Indigenous families and community members to highlight the nature and character of spectacles and erasures in the DTES.

Media spectacles of extreme violence and urban disintegration are common in the DTES where poverty and law and order pornography prevail (Dymock, 2017; McKittrick, 2011). Dara Culhane (2003, p. 594) points out that media spectacles create "virtual voyeurs" who consume "disturbing — or titillating — images of emaciated heroin, crack cocaine, and prescription drug users buying, selling, injecting, and smoking." One news report referred to the DTES as Vancouver's "ugly underside" (Smyth, 2020). Another article remarks that the DTES is "Vancouver's most broken neighbourhood," where police "turn a blind eye to drug deals and property crime that would not be tolerated anywhere else" (O'Brien, 2020, paras. 5-7). Such accounts of the DTES disappear the colonial, gendered, and racialized violence into the folds of the hyper-exposure and pathologizing of poverty and drug use. These sensational accounts similarly legitimate the ongoing violent evictions of homeless and transient people, sex trade workers, or drug users that continue to remove people from any sense of place or community (CBC News, 2021; Laube, 2021). These media

spectacles of extreme violence and urban decay common to the narrative of the DTES contribute to what Culhane (2003, p. 595) refers to as the "regime of disappearance" that project Indigenous women as commonly belonging to places where violence is expected to occur (see also Palmater, 2016; Razack, 2002).

It is well documented that policing reports and news accounts often project Indigenous women within the tropes of prostitute, drug-addicted, childlike victims, and coming from partying, criminal, and risky lifestyles (Drache et al., 2016; Gilchrist, 2010; Jiwani, 2009; Stillman, 2007; Strega, et al., 2014) According to Jiwani and Young (2006), such news accounts began as early as the 1800s where Indigenous women were projected as "prostitutes" deserving of violence. This projection of Indigenous women within tragedy narratives in the DTES is also documented by Longstaffe (2017, p. 240) in the 1960s whereby the media used infantilizing and paternalistic headlines to depict Indigenous women such as "'Skid Row Killed My Girls' and 'Where Were You Going, Little One?'" Tropes such as the truant child or nomadic sex worker are discursive colonial framings that naturalize the disappearances of Indigenous women from urban settings while a lack of opportunity, systemic racism, street lives, or other colonial contexts are ignored or deemed irrelevant (Pratt, 2005). Bonnie Fowler and Cindy Cardinal (Interview, July 1, 2016), for example, learned of their sister's violent death from the DTES through police reports to the media that gave graphic detail of how her body was found. This mediated violence reflects an ongoing voyeurism whereby the audience is called upon to participate in a macabre and sensational display of Indigenous victimhood (Hartman 1997). Such spectacles maintain Indigenous women within a subjugated (non)status that normalizes an ongoing violent colonial dispossession from a sense of family, community, or home.

Where the "virtual voyeur" has access to all kinds of seductive and fascinating stories of individualized and pathologized pains, the everyday institutionalized and common violence and hardships are normalized and ignored. News and public accounts not only construct sensationalized tropes of urban violence and death but contribute to an erasure of Indigenous women and their racialized, gendered, and

colonial trajectories of everyday violence (Hartman, 1997). Martin and Walia (2019, par. 3) note that "the over-representation in statistics on homicides, poverty, homelessness, child apprehensions, police street checks, incarceration, and overdose fatalities is not a coincidence; it is part of an infrastructure of quotidian gendered violence." These ongoing hardships are further reflected by Aleck Clifton (Interview, June 26, 2016) — an Indigenous support worker who lived most of his life in the DTES — addressing the day-to-day struggles of those who live there:

> We'd help clean up, we helped with their daily hygiene … we did laundry, we provided showers, minor first aid, and quite frankly, a lot of times we provided counselling. It wasn't part of our job, but we provided it anyways because we were concerned about their health and well-being.

Even today with growing attention on the MMIWG2S+ people — and despite state interventions including a national missing persons database, Family Liaison Units, or policing projects such as Project Evenhanded in Vancouver, E-PANA in British Columbia or the more recent National Action Plan (Government of Canada, 2021) — the conditions of racialized and gendered poverty have not changed and neither has the violence (Gladys Radek Interview, July 1, 2016; Bernie Williams Interview, February 12, 2021). The DTES remains a decontextualized scene of danger and suffering where only extreme forms of violence are made visible, significant, intelligible, and relevant while the erasure of ongoing colonial hardships lends itself to an otherwise invisible or seemingly inevitable nature of Indigenous women's deaths or disappearances.

Mobilizing Against Colonial Violence

Facilitated by spectacles and erasures, the dispossession of Indigenous women from families, communities, and land remains pivotal to colonial orderings. As hooks (1989) posits, however, spaces such as the DTES also exist as sites of radical possibility. Through a field of visibility with direct lines to the histories and roots of colonial violence, Indigenous women exist within a place from which to imagine and create new worlds (see also Palacios, 2016). As Million (2013, pp. 131–132) points out,

> Indigenous women articulate a polity imagined in Indigenous terms, a polity where everyone — gender, sexualities, differently expressed life forms, the animals and plants, the mountains — are already included as subjects of the polity. They are already empowered, not having to argue for any right to recognition; they form that which is the polity, that which is respected and in relation.

This imagined polity of experiencing, seeing, and knowing is evident in the magnitude of anti-violence mobilizing for MMIWG2S+ people and is predominantly led by Indigenous women in the DTES and across the land (Centre for Justice Exchange, 2020). As documented in the Unearthing Justices resource collection of more than five hundred Indigenous entries for the MMIWG2S+ people, these activities range from advocacy, coalition building, community care, public education, and search support, to only name a few. These initiatives are responsive actions to violence, working both within and outside of state institutions and arrangements, in a way that centers women, children, and community. Indigenous women are at the heart of revitalizing, supporting, building, resourcing, and healing families and communities. As we further evidence below, mobilizing against colonial violence attends to the many spaces and people abandoned by the state and trivialized through spectacles and erasures while developing relational accountability, building communities, and moving toward Indigenous self-determination.

Contrary to the portrayals of urban decay and disintegration is a spirit of community that has been prevalent in the DTES for many years. This is reflected in the short film *Survival, Strength, Sisterhood: Power of Women in the Downtown Eastside* that documents the past twenty years of the Annual Women's Memorial March in the DTES (Centre for Justice Exchange, 2020, Entry #242). A key theme of the documentary is the struggle for visibility and self-representation. The stated purpose of the film is to remove the spectacularizing or morbid curiosity of the DTES and highlight the everyday lives and community of the people who live and work there. Organizers of the Annual Women's Memorial March seek to make the women, their families, and the people working in the area the focus of the event

and the most important part of the story (O'Flanagan, 2018). Through community gathering, memorials, and practices of remembering such as telling stories of the women's names, lives, and relations, the women are connected back to the larger web of people and community to which they belong.

Also exposing the daily violence of colonialism is the Faceless Dolls Project — originally created by Gloria Larocque in 2005 to bring a visibility to the murdered women of the DTES — the project works to give an artistic visual representation to the Indigenous women who have been made "faceless" through criminal statistics and "victimhood" narratives (Centre for Justice Exchange, 2020, Entry #48). The project has since moved across the land is now a curated memorial of the MMIWG2S+ people to showcase that each "number" tells a story. The Faceless Dolls Project is not only vital to re-represent the MMIWG2S+ outside of colonial narratives, but also weave continuity and relationality between each story and each woman to reshape how Indigenous women are conceived and reestablish their connections. This approach to colonial violence returns the collective memory to the communities and families from which the women are lost and shows the value Indigenous women hold collectively and individually.

Where the practices of storytelling and remembering challenge colonial narratives, Indigenous women-led initiatives also establish a relational accountability whereby community members take part in actively addressing violence by building community through grassroots support and resources. Indeed, it is often the Indigenous grassroots women to whom families turn for answers rather than the state or public that have been consistently absent or intrusive.

> They're literally at your fingertips. … people that support and go "above and beyond" … people like Gladys herself, she's somebody that family members count on. And those are the kinds of people that connect people. (Connie Greyeyes Interview, February 22, 2021)

An example of such a relational accountability are the searches that occur throughout the DTES and elsewhere. The group SisterWatch, for example, is made up of Indigenous women and volunteers, the

Vancouver Police Department, and members of the Women's Memorial March Committee to create networks of information to better protect women in the DTES and to make the community safer (Centre for Justice Exchange, 2020, Entry #160). This collaborative and multi-level approach involves as many available community resources as possible to build a web-like approach to both support and create community accountability (Lorelei Williams Interview, January 28, 2021). Similarly, the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre houses a group called the Power of Women (POW) (Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, 2020). The program uses a grassroots approach to empower women in the community (Martin & Walia, 2019). Group facilitator Harsha Walia describes POW "as building community and going through a process of dialogue about how to collectively overcome the barriers that are placed in front of women in this neighbourhood" (Hundert, 2011, par. 3). Similarly, Bernie Williams (Interview, February 12, 2021), along with others, is on the DTES streets most days providing food to community members: "We try to put meat packs and food together just for the families who are suffering. [Child] apprehensions are so high because mothers can't even simply feed their children." These relations of accountability not only centralize and support Indigenous women based on their needs and experiences, but also builds communities of support and accountability that counteract the brutalizing dispossession and erasures of the state and media.

Grassroots initiatives also create spaces of remembering and honouring for family and community members that prioritize processes of healing. Unlike spectacles that often breed retribution, a healing approach to the murders and disappearances establishes connections between family and community members that are vital for returning Indigenous self-determination. This is evident in the Healing Circle in the DTES organized by the Pacific Association of First Nations Women — an Indigenous women-led non-profit — and facilitated by Métis Grandmother Alline Laflamme (Centre for Justice Exchange, 2020, Entry #287). The Healing Circle invites and honours families who have experienced loss to be in ceremony and experience traditional healing methods. A similar initiative is the ReClaim Project that connects women, girls, and Two-Spirit people

to the land, sacred teachings, and one another. The aim of the project is to

> re-assert presence and power on the land itself as a way of reclaiming the sacred feminine, promoting safety and wellness, and transforming the narrative around Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. It creates opportunities for families, women and youth to come together to reconnect to the matrilineal knowledge and teachings of scared Indigenous sites. (Centre for Justice Exchange, 2020, Entry #295)

Lorelei Williams, who founded Butterflies in Spirit, uses dance for healing and connecting families and community (Interview, January 28, 2021). The Moose Hide Campaign, rooted more broadly in British Columbia, is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys who organize against violence towards women and children through an awareness campaign couched in ceremony and protocol (Centre for Justice Exchange, 2020, Entry #265). Participants are not only engaged in awareness but also often experience transformational shifts themselves through various practices such as fasting, witnessing, ceremony, and sitting in circle. By de-centering the state and centering and connecting Indigenous women, families, and communities, a healing approach to the violence builds communities in a move towards self-determination.

Conclusion

Through a case study of the DTES, we show that while colonial operations continue to perpetuate gendered and racialized violence against Indigenous women, it is also the women who are at the heart of dismantling it. Since contact, colonial violence has been directed at Indigenous women to remove the life-weaving and binding force that held families, communities, and structures of governance together. This ongoing violence continues through a devaluing of life and day-to-day violence sustained through spectacles and erasures of Indigenous women's life worlds. Spectacles in the DTES maintain the tropes and stereotypes that reinforce the belief that Indigenous women are somehow deserving of violence, whereas erasures serve to trivialize and normalize it. Where the public, media, and state

continue to perpetuate the colonial narratives and tropes, at the heart of revitalizing communities and their peoples are Indigenous women who are strategically mobilizing against not just the murders and disappearances, but colonialism itself as the source of the violence.

Indigenous women's organizing and mobilizing run counter to the historical colonial trajectory of dispossession and violence by centering women through a relational accountability and community healing that grows connections, resources, and networks among others. This site of the margin "nourishes one's capacity to resist" and enables a sense of solidarity (hooks, 1989, p. 20; see also Sunseri, 2008). Through their central positionality, Indigenous women's grassroots work is informed by their own lived experiences — the lived experiences of generations of colonial structures and injustices. In this article, we seek to increase the visibility of Indigenous women-led grassroots mobilizing against violence that moves beyond the racialized, patriarchal, and colonial tropes. Much of this work is, however, done with few or no resources, and often comes at a personal and emotional cost. It is equally important to preserve and resource these models of caregiving and support.

Indigenous women-led initiatives for the MMIWG2S+ people not only offer an important framework for mobilizing against colonial violence, but for building intentional relations and community. Indigenous women-led mobilizing ensures that actions and supports are local, understood, community directed, and based on a context of what is needed. This work is vital in forging new paths toward Indigenous self-determination, as the more traditional matrilineal energies and life force are revitalized within such grassroots approaches. These initiatives highlight the scope of Indigenous women's understanding of the level and breadth at which a colonial, gendered, and racialized violence operates, and the extent to which their efforts need to be directed. The centering of women returns a collective identity and a place of belonging where they are protected and coming home in themselves and with their communities.

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