

# PEEL INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH AND TRAINING (PIRT)

## A Call to Disrupt Ongoing Systemic and Structural Violence

### Editorial

Since 1981, women's rights activists have celebrated the date of November 25th as a day of awareness and action against gender-based violence. The date honours the Mirabal sisters, three activists from the Dominican Republic who “forged a campaign of resistance” against their country’s dictatorship. They were brutally murdered in 1960 by order of Rafael Trujillo, who held power in the country from 1930 until he was assassinated in 1961. On December 20, 1993, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. In the year 2000, the General Assembly officially designated the date of November 25th as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. By doing so, it invited governments, international organisations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to coordinate activities to raise awareness of the issue on that date each year.



### In this Issue:

#### We mark:

INTERNATIONAL  
DAY FOR THE  
ELIMINATION OF  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN

#### Our call:

THE NEED TO  
DISMANTLE  
STRUCTURAL  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN



Despite the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the UN General Assembly in 1979, violence against women and girls persists today as a pervasive global issue. This problem impacts not only women belonging to vulnerable groups, who are at heightened risk of becoming victims, but all women. It is estimated that one in three women have experienced violence in their lifetime.

This newsletter is dedicated to the prevention of violence against women, as well as an examination of motherhood. It is pertinent to discuss approaches, such as the Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy (IMP). This approach is centered on Indigenous women and their maternal values, which encompass care, community, intergenerational and relational knowledge, through ethical, respectful and anti-racist dialogues. IMP is a way of empowering women and honoring their roles in the community through the transmission of intergenerational cultural knowledge. It protects women from violence, by creating communities of support and encouraging empowerment.

The articles in this newsletter explore different forms of violence and their impact on women, particularly on women of colour and Indigenous women, and their communities. They discuss how colonial structures such as the educational and medical systems are based on patriarchy and colonialism and how their practices promote control over women and their bodies, hindering their central roles in their communities. By exploring historical and current practices, this newsletter touches on acts of violence embedded in institutions that provide essential services which are steeped in racism, patriarchy and colonialism.

On the anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, this edition of the Peel Institute of Research and Training newsletter, reflects on resistance to institutionalized violence against women.

“...violence against women and girls persists today as a pervasive global issue.”







“The imposition of patriarchal colonial structures has systematically and intentionally eroded women’s ability to preserve Indigenous culture...”

## VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN: THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Indigenous women experience multiple forms of discrimination consequential to colonialism and the social structures that have been established to maintain dominance over Indigenous peoples, and in particular, Indigenous women. Women’s central role in the transmission of cultural practices and language in Indigenous populations has been particularly affected. The imposition of patriarchal colonial structures has systematically and intentionally eroded women’s ability to preserve Indigenous culture by hindering their leadership roles in Indigenous communities.



In Canada’s history, education was complicit in the abuse of Indigenous communities between the years 1831 and 1996, with the implementation of residential schools. While this tragic chapter of our history has been well documented, the devastating consequences on the identities and culture of Canadian Indigenous peoples have only recently been acknowledged. There has been some progress in education trying to reconcile and vindicate Indigenous culture as an integral part of the Canadian cultural fabric. It is now a requirement for teacher candidates to take courses on cultures and traditions, with an anti-indigenous racism approach. However, despite these efforts, colonial practices and ideas that ignore indigenous people continue to permeate our classrooms. Progressive and inclusive educational approaches need to be integrated in mainstream educational systems.



STOP THE VIOLENCE STOP THE VIOLENCE  
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**“[Indigenous Maternal Pedagogies] offers ways to sustain communities and reconnect with cultural roots.”**

Indigenous maternal pedagogies represent an approach that is centered on Indigenous women and their maternal values, which encompass care, community, intergenerational and relational knowledge. These pedagogies are designed to facilitate the creation of ethical spaces where academia and society are integrated to gain an understanding of the Indigenous worldview. This is achieved through ethical, respectful and anti-racist dialogues that are based on Indigenous epistemologies and rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems. These dialogues allow for the creation of spaces that facilitate emotional learning through the exploration of human and more-than-human relationships.



Incorporating these methodologies within the educational context enables the empowerment of Indigenous students by reaffirming their identities, thus facilitating their role as agents of change within their communities. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for non-indigenous students to gain insight into the communities, engage in critical reflection on the legacy of colonialism, and promote social justice. Indigenous maternal pedagogies can help create an environment that respects Indigenous culture and knowledge, heals the effects of colonialism, and offers ways to sustain communities and reconnect with cultural roots.





# THE 94 CALLS TO ACTION: IS IT ENOUGH TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report represents a vital step toward addressing the historical and ongoing harm done to Indigenous peoples, especially through the residential school system. Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their families and placed in schools, which aimed to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian culture, by erasing their Indigenous identity, language, and traditions. This system deeply disrupted Indigenous family structures, and the long-term impact on Indigenous mothers is profound.

Indigenous mothers were often denied the chance to raise their children and experienced immense grief and trauma, as they were stripped of their traditional roles as primary caregivers and knowledge keepers. The loss of their children to residential schools created generational wounds, impacting their ability to pass on cultural values, language, and spiritual practices. This disruption to family bonds led to cycles of trauma, as children who survived residential schools often returned home disconnected from their families and communities, suffering from psychological scars of abuse, neglect, and cultural loss.

The TRC report includes 94 Calls to Action aimed at addressing the harms caused by residential schools and promoting healing and reconciliation. These recommendations focus on systemic change, such as improving child welfare services, ensuring culturally relevant education, and enhancing health care for Indigenous peoples. While some progress has been made, Indigenous women and mothers continue to face structural barriers, including the intergenerational trauma of residential schools and the overrepresentation of their children in the child welfare system. Although the report has brought crucial attention to these issues and laid the foundation for change, ongoing efforts are needed to fully support Indigenous mothers in reclaiming their roles and helping them to heal from the enduring impacts of colonialism.

The TRC is an essential step in the right direction, but the journey toward true reconciliation requires sustained efforts to address the systemic issues that continue to affect Indigenous families.

“...the journey toward true reconciliation requires sustained efforts to address systemic issues...”





**“This exploitation laid the foundation for advancements in gynecology but at an immense human cost”**

## **THE DARK ORIGINS OF GYNECOLOGY: A LEGACY OF EXPLOITATION OF BLACK WOMEN’S BODIES**

The history of gynecology is tainted by a legacy of exploitation, particularly of Black women who were used as test subjects without consent. In the 19th century, Dr. James Marion Sims, often called the "father of modern gynecology," conducted painful surgical experiments on enslaved Black women to develop techniques for repairing vesicovaginal fistulas, a serious complication from childbirth. Sims operated on women without anesthesia, despite it being available; he performed sterilization without consent and utilized the body tissue of women without their knowledge. His justification was rooted in racist beliefs that Black women were less sensitive to pain, a harmful stereotype that persists in healthcare today.

These unethical practices set a disturbing precedent in medical history, where enslaved Black women were seen as expendable research subjects. They were often forced into invasive procedures with little regard for their well-being. This exploitation laid the foundation for advancements in gynecology but at an immense human cost, underscoring the disregard for Black women's autonomy and the suffering they endured.

Today, this legacy contributes to ongoing distrust of the medical field within Black communities, particularly among Black women who continue to face disparities in healthcare access, pain management, and maternal mortality rates. Recognizing this history is essential in understanding current inequities and working towards a more ethical, inclusive medical practice that honours the autonomy and rights of all patients.







## FORCED STERILIZATION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN CANADA

The history of forced sterilization in Canada can be traced back to policies rooted in eugenics and a colonial mindset that viewed Indigenous peoples as "less than". The sterilization of Indigenous women was often justified under the guise of public health, with practitioners failing to recognize or respect the cultural significance of motherhood within Indigenous communities. This approach reflects a paternalistic attitude that disregards the agency of Indigenous women and perpetuates cycles of trauma.



The forced sterilization of Indigenous women in Canada has emerged as a critical issue that highlights deep-rooted systemic injustices and violations of human rights. This practice, often carried out through coercion and manipulation without informed consent, reflects broader patterns of colonialism and the marginalization of Indigenous communities. Women's ability to bear and raise children is integral to the continuation of Indigenous cultures and languages, and when this is forcibly interrupted, it threatens the very fabric of Indigenous identity. The forced sterilization of Indigenous women not only strips them of their reproductive rights but also undermines their roles as cultural bearers and community leaders.

“The forced sterilization of Indigenous women not only strips them of their reproductive rights but also undermines their roles as cultural bearers.”



# RIGHTS

Dr. Brant's work on Indigenous maternal pedagogies emphasizes the significance that Indigenous women's roles are not just about motherhood in a biological sense; they encompass the broader role of women as educators, leaders, and knowledge holders. When Indigenous women are subjected to forced sterilization, their capacity to fulfill these roles is severely compromised. The trauma associated with such violations is not merely personal; it ripples through communities, affecting future generations and disrupting the transmission of cultural teachings and values.

The forced sterilization of Indigenous women in Canada represents a violation of fundamental human rights and a continuation of colonial practices that seek to control and marginalize Indigenous peoples. It is essential to advocate for policies that respect Indigenous sovereignty, promote reproductive justice, and honor the invaluable contributions of Indigenous women as vital to the health and survival of their peoples and cultures. Only through such efforts can we hope to heal the wounds of the past and create a more just future.

**“It is essential to advocate for policies that respect Indigenous sovereignty, promote reproductive justice, and honor the invaluable contributions of Indigenous women.”**





BODY

MIND

SPIRIT

SOUL

“...urgent need to collectively disrupt colonial and racist narrative, engage in liberatory praxis, and imagine social change.”

## CONFRONTING COLONIAL VIOLENCE: CENTERING HEART-MIND-SPIRIT CONNECTIONS WITH INDIGENOUS MATERNAL PEDAGOGIES

As this newsletter has pointed out, racism, injustice, and colonial violence are pervasive. They are structurally embedded in all systems and institutions and permeate most of their practices. This leads to significant harm enacted, both historically and currently, against Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups.

The persistence of such violence and its structural embeddedness has led to the urgent need to collectively disrupt colonial and racist narratives, engage in liberatory praxis, and imagine social change. This means dismantling the white supremacist, individualistic, and patriarchal foundations of western-centric thought and institutions. Doing so requires engaging in dialogue that can be unsettling, becoming comfortable with discomfort, reckoning with our own complicity with troubling narratives, and experiencing the emotional and affective dimensions of the learning process.



Jennifer Brant proposes Indigenous Maternal Pedagogies as a pathway to teach about colonial and structural violence, work through resistance, and move toward social justice. Brant defines Indigenous Maternal Pedagogies as Indigenous women-centred learning engagements that create ethical and safe spaces to encourage anti-racist and controversial dialogue, embrace vulnerability, and foster emotional learning to promote transformation.





**“Indigenous maternal pedagogies embrace the ‘whole person’ of the teacher and learner to foster heart-mind-spirit connections.”**

Importantly, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogies speak back to the paternal nature of Western approaches to learning and teaching. Drawing on Indigenous ways of knowing that are rooted in connections to the land, kinship, and more-than-human relations, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogies embrace the “whole person” of the teacher and learner to foster heart-mind-spirit connections.



Western approaches call for us to remove emotion and act ‘rationally’, despite emotion being integral to life, relationships, and learning, leading to alienation from the self and others. Indigenous Maternal Pedagogies offers us a way back to ourselves and relationships, bringing emotion and embodied experiences back into the frame, recognizing the “whole person” and the centrality of emotion to living and learning.

As social service and people-oriented agencies, we have an urgent need to center approaches that address the heart-mind-spirit connection and confront the violence that so often regulates and directs the work we do. Indigenous Maternal pedagogies, which center the whole relational being, provide all learners with pathways to reckon with their own positionalities as they relate to settler colonialism, racism, injustice, and other structural violence. It can support us to become active partners in transformation, healing, and social justice.







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Her research in Indigenous maternal pedagogies as liberatory praxis was instrumental to this newsletter.

To read more of Dr. Brant's work and the article that informs this newsletter, please visit:

[Indigenous Maternal Pedagogies](#)  
[Discover Brant's research](#)

