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Article

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FACULTY OF NATIVE STUDIES

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Application of Intersectional Analysis to Data on Domestic Violence Against Aboriginal[1] Women Living in Remote Communities[2] in the Province of Quebec[3]

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Abstract: *This article discusses the theoretical and analytical intersectionality approach, focusing on its application to an analysis of empirical data obtained from qualitative research into domestic violence against Aboriginal women living in four remote communities in Quebec. Nonprobability sampling was used to select and recruit 40 participants. Four focus groups took place, one in each of the participating communities. The qualitative data were subjected to a thematic content analysis emphasizing the feminist intersectionality perspective. The findings revealed the existence of different domination systems, as well as oppressive actions that interlock and interact at multiple and shifting levels, all of which shape and contribute to the reproduction of domestic violence among women living in remote Aboriginal communities. The intersectionality approach highlighted the important role played not only by race, gender, and social class, but also by the historical context and the degree of geographic isolation in the domestic violence experienced by Aboriginal women living in remote communities. All these social systems increase the vulnerability of Aboriginal women to domestic violence. This paper is one of the few scholarly attempts made so far to apply intersectional analysis to empirical data on the phenomenon of domestic violence as experienced by Aboriginal women.*

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1 The Canadian Constitution Act recognizes three official categories of Aboriginal peoples: Indians, Inuit, and Métis (*Constitution Act,* 1982, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 [UK], 1982, c. 11, s. 35 [2]).

2 Isolated Aboriginal communities are dispersed throughout non-urbanized Quebec outside the St. Lawrence Valley. They are remote from metropolitan areas and some cannot be reached by road. The inhabitants, numbering 68,000, amount to one percent of the Quebec population (Duhaime and Godmaire 2002: 330).

3 In 2009, Canada's Aboriginal population represented 3.8 percent of the national population (Statistics Canada 2009). An estimated 1,172,785 people in Canada (108,425 in the province of Quebec) self-identified as First Nations people in the 2006 census (Statistics Canada 2006).

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Introduction

Domestic violence is one of the most important social issues affecting Aboriginal peoples[4] in Canada (Statistics Canada 2006, 2009; Bourque 2008) and constitutes a serious threat to the well-being and prosperity of First Nations communities (Bopp et al. 2003; Chartrand and McKay 2006). In 2004, rates of spousal assault against Aboriginal women are more than three times higher than those against non-Aboriginal women (24 percent versus 7 percent) (Statistics Canada 2006). Chartrand and McKay (2006) report that the proportion of cases of domestic violence is five times higher among Aboriginal women living in Aboriginal communities than among those living off-reserve. Moreover, according to Doherty and Berglund (2008), a woman is more likely to be involved in a violent intimate relationship and to experience certain kinds of domestic violence if she is Aboriginal, and especially if she lives in a community that is both socially and geographically isolated. The data suggest that Aboriginal women are especially vulnerable to domestic violence and that geographic isolation may play a key role in its prevalence among the Aboriginal population. Aside from prevalence, the tendency among scholars is to assume that domestic violence depends essentially on race, ethnicity, social class, and gender. This assumption trivializes both the dimensions that underlie the experiences of these particular victims, and the way in which the prevalence and impact of violence against them is analysed (Richie 2000).

The precarious living conditions of a disproportionate number of Aboriginal peoples in Canada should also be mentioned. For example, using the data from several national censuses, Wilson and Macdonald (2010) have suggested that Aboriginal peoples are not only disproportionately ranked among the poorest Canadians, but that disturbing levels of income inequalities persist as well. Their study also shows that Aboriginal peoples in remote communities are more likely to live in extreme poverty and to experience income inequalities.

This paper uses an intersectionality approach to gain a better understanding of the underlying causes of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women among victims of domestic violence, as well as the overall complexity of this social phenomenon. When applied to the analysis of the social realities of Aboriginal women, the intersectionality framework permits the exploration of how social phenomena in Aboriginal populations (including domestic violence) are grounded in specific sociohistorical and cultural contexts and domination systems (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). Of particular interest here is the role played by geographic isolation and historical context. The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate how the intersectionality approach can be used to analyse empirical qualitative data on domestic violence against Aboriginal women.

Sample and Method

This study takes an intersectional approach to examining the roles of various oppression factors that structure Aboriginal women's experience of domestic violence in remote

4 "Aboriginal peoples" is used here to avoid the illusion of a hegemonic or monolithic group. "Aboriginal people" refers to a group of individuals.

communities. Four remote Aboriginal communities were targeted. We used nonprobability sampling to select and recruit 40 participants (11 men and 29 women). All the participants were over 18 years of age and lived or worked in one of the communities being studied. A total of six two-hour focus groups were held with two groups of stakeholders. One group consisted of 22 Aboriginal residents (17 women and five men) directly or indirectly affected by domestic violence.[5] The second group consisted of 18 practitioners (social workers, police officers, and a psychologist—11 Aboriginal women and one non-Aboriginal, along with five Aboriginal men and one non-Aboriginal) who work with Aboriginal women and families affected by domestic violence.

Recruitment began in May 2009 and continued until May 2011. The recruitment strategy included advertisements on local community radio stations and in health and social services organizations in the participating communities. Two Aboriginal research assistants were hired to work on the project to help develop the relationship between the researchers and the target communities. They were specially trained to conduct focus groups and recruit participants. The Aboriginal research assistants spoke the traditional community language fluently, thus enabling participants to use their mother tongue if they so wished in order to facilitate dialogue and sharing of experiences. The interview format was semistructured and covered four areas: manifestation and forms of domestic violence; perceptions and representations of domestic violence involving Aboriginal peoples; experiences in seeking help; and representations of solutions to domestic violence. The interview topics were chosen in response to the concerns of the Aboriginal partners on the research team.[6] With the respondents' permission, the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. The resulting data were subject to a thematic content analysis, which included a set of procedures for coding, classifying, and organizing the data into different categories in order to analyse, identify, and interpret their significance (L'Écuyer 1987). The analysis was carried out using NVivo software. This research project carefully took into account all ethical considerations and applied principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP). Researchers protected the confidentiality of participants by not using names and

5 The literature on focus group interview strategies warns researchers about the different kinds of power dynamics that can develop (Krueger and Casey 2000). The taboos surrounding domestic violence in Aboriginal communities were also a challenge to be overcome in this study examining the points of view and experiences of both men and women. To avoid any form of power dynamics and stigmatization of participants (e.g., victimized women and abusive men), we recruited the study population by seeking people who felt they were affected, whether directly or indirectly, by domestic violence.

6 The study was carried out under the Programme Action concertée du Fonds de recherche québécois sur la société et la culture. The aim of the program is to respond to needs for knowledge identified by partners concerned by the issue being studied. The Aboriginal partners involved with the project are Quebec Native Women (QNW), Maison communautaire Missinak Regroupement des Centres d'amitié autochtone du Québec, First Nations of Quebec, and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission and Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones du Québec.

by eliminating any specific reference or utterance that could lead to their or someone else's identification. The goal of the project is to transfer knowledge to political and community organizations and the Aboriginal population.[7]

Intersectionality as Theoretical and Multilevel Analytical Framework in the Study of Domestic Violence Against Aboriginal Women

In order better to understand the complexity of domestic violence against women living in remote Aboriginal communities, we consider it indispensable to use a contextual analysis that takes into account the existence and interaction of different social inequalities, as well as social systems of domination and differentiation processes. This challenges hegemonic conceptualizations of domestic violence, which generally only consider factors such as gender, race, and inequalities of social class (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). In this study, we considered it appropriate to use the feminist intersectionality framework, which involves the concurrent analysis of multiple and simultaneous interacting and interlocking social inequalities, systems, and processes of subordination/oppression and privilege (multiple social locations that are never static) and which goes beyond simple additive models (Crenshaw 1998; Simien 2007). According to Hulko (2009), social location is a dynamic concept referring to the relative privilege and oppression that each individual experiences on the basis of specific identity constructs, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and sexual orientation. The intersectionality perspective relies on the premise that the impact of a specific source of subordination may vary depending on its combination and interaction with other potential sources of subordination (or of relative privilege) (Denis 2000; Hulko 2009). The intersectionality framework is particularly useful for the analysis of the domestic violence experienced by Aboriginal women, taking into account different sources of oppression that are mutually shaped, and at the same time recognizing the singularity of their experiences and the specific historical, political, and sociocultural contexts and processes conditioning these experiences (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005; Damant et al. 2008).

Thus, following Winker and Degele (2011) and Anthias (2012), we acknowledge that intersectionality provides a framework to analyse the interrelatedness of social inequalities, processes of differentiation, and systems of domination on various analytical levels. This multilevel approach prompted us to study the phenomenon of domestic violence against Aboriginal women, taking into account not only categories that have tended to dominate intersectional social analysis at the micro and meso levels (social class, gender, and race-ethnicity), but also other relevant and less-studied social dimensions: geographic isolation, historical context, differentiation processes, and systems of domination (Damon 2011; Waldby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012), in order better to analyse the complex dynamics of power and social inequalities at a macro level. Although much feminist intersectionality research has focused on identity intersections, interactions, and the interlocking among

7 The main impacts of the study involve guiding decisions regarding the prioritization of resources to meet the needs of isolated Native communities and taking into account the specific realities of Aboriginal people in the Quebec government's domestic violence action plan (2012–2017).

different social categories, following Dhamoon (2011) and Waldby, Armstrong, and Strid (2012), this paper focuses on the analysis of the active differentiation processes and social systems of domination (on the assumption that they need each other to function), and at the same time identifies their historical, social class, and geographic dimensions. By differentiation processes, we mean the ways in which subjectivities and social differences are actively produced and organized through discourses and practices (of gendering, racialization, culturalization, sexualization). Social systems of domination refer here to the historically constituted structures of domination, such as racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and sexism. Like Waldby, Armstrong, and Strid (2012), we consider that this revised and more flexible notion of social systems permits the analysis of the intersection of multiple regimes of social inequality, thus allowing the recognition that the different systems shape each other through processes of mutual adaptation without losing their main identity. The focus of this analysis is not on the intersection itself, but on what the interaction and overlapping reveal about power relations, unequal social relations (Dhamoon 2011; Waldby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012), and social inequalities. The focus on processes and social systems draws out the mechanisms and conditions in which representations of difference, othering[8] relations, and normalization are socially produced and organized (Dhamoon 2011). This multilevel approach leads us to consider social structures (including organizations and institutions at the macro and meso levels), as well as processes of identity construction (at the micro level). In addition, this perspective sheds light on the experience of domestic violence of victims from diverse social locations and cultural backgrounds, while still focusing on structural inequalities (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005).

Findings: Perpetuating Domestic Violence Against Aboriginal Women: Intersection and Interaction of Different Social Dimensions

The intersectional analysis of the participants' statements revealed the existence of different interacting and intersecting historically constituted social systems of domination, differentiation processes, and social inequalities that contribute to the reproduction and even normalization of domestic violence against women living in remote Aboriginal communities. This violence is rooted in the specific historical, political, and socioeconomic contexts of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada and increases the vulnerability of Aboriginal people (especially women) to systemic and interpersonal violence, influencing the ways in which they (and society) perceive and make sense of the violence they experience in their lives and communities. On the one hand, the findings suggest that the continuum of violence experienced by Aboriginal women living in remote communities results from multiple interacting and interlocking social inequalities, differentiation processes (discourses and practices of gendering, racialization, culturalization, and sexualization, mostly on the meso and micro levels), and social systems of domination. These inequalities, processes, and

8 Following Lister (2004), we define othering as a "process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between 'us' and 'them' – between the more and the less powerful – and through which social distance is established and maintained" (Lister 2004, 101).

systems amplify each other and are expressed through different social discourses, practices, public policies, and government laws and actions, for example. On the other hand, the findings reveal how these systems, processes, and social inequalities interact and intersect with the geographic isolation of the participant communities, thereby increasing not only the risk of domestic violence, but the specific obstacles Aboriginal women must face as victims of violence.

1) Sociohistorical and Political Context of Domestic Violence Against Aboriginal Women: Domination Systems and Differentiation Processes

The findings of this study highlight the historical nature of the social inequalities, systems of domination, and differentiation processes relating to Aboriginal peoples and their entrenchment in social institutions at all societal levels. Thus, the interaction and intersection of social systems of domination are embedded within the historical and political context of Aboriginal peoples and are expressed through government assimilation policies, laws, and state responses concerning Aboriginal peoples, for example. These systems are also reinforced and sustained by the intermeshed processes through which the hierarchical differences and unequal social relations are socially produced on the basis of the racialization, culturalization, and sexualization of Aboriginal peoples, thus contributing to the legitimization of their social exclusion, control, and subordination, as well as to the violence they experience (Amnesty International 2004; Fiske 2006; Kuokkanen 2008).

Institutionalization of Historically Constituted Intersecting and Interacting Social Domination Systems and Differentiation Processes

In order to understand the violence currently being experienced by Aboriginal women, it is essential to describe the historically constructed nature of the social domination systems and differentiation processes and their entrenchment in social institutions (Waldby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012). It is also necessary to emphasize the central role played by historical conditions and contexts that shaped federal statutes and other federal and provincial policies, laws, and government actions. For instance, the 19th-century Indian Act (which forced Aboriginal peoples to assimilate into the dominant White European society and dictated the right of the Canadian government to define who is and who is not legally Indian) (Irvine 2009), the establishment of Indian reserves,[9] and the residential schooling system[10] have been key elements of the Canadian government's overall strategy

9 The Indian Act gives the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs the right to "determine whether any purpose for which lands in a reserve are used is for the use and benefit of the band." Title to land within the reserve may only be transferred to the band or to individual band members. Reserve lands may not be seized legally, nor is the personal property of a band or a band member living on a reserve subject to "charge, pledge, mortgage, attachment, levy, seizure distress or execution in favour or at the instance of any person other than an Indian or a band" (section 89[1] of the Indian Act).

10 The Indian residential schools of Canada were a network of boarding schools for Aboriginal peoples of Canada (First Nations, Métis; and Inuit, formerly Eskimos) funded by the Canadian government's Department of Indian Affairs, and administered by Christian churches, most notably the Catholic Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada. The system had its origins in pre-Confederation times, but was primarily active following the passage of the Indian Act in 1876, up until the mid-20th century. An 1884 amendment to the Indian Act made attendance at a day, industrial, or residential school compulsory for First Nations children, and, in some parts of the country, residential schools were the only option.

to assimilate and subordinate Aboriginal peoples (Downe 2008; CRI-VIFF 2011). The impacts of these historical government political strategies, as we will see, still continue to be felt by many Aboriginal people and emphasize the intersection and interaction of different systems of domination and processes of differentiation that have historically contributed to constructing Aboriginal peoples as a racialized and culturalized social group in order to legitimize their subordination, social exclusion, and social control. Furthermore, the culturalization[11] process contributes to the social perception of domestic violence as an endemic and inherent, and therefore unavoidable, part of Aboriginal culture (Amnesty International 2004).

Consequently, our findings confirm, as some authors have already suggested (LaRocque 1994; RCAP 1996; Downe 2008), that the government's forced-assimilation policies, laws, and interventions have led Aboriginal peoples to lose their lands and to the erosion of their cosmogonies and their cultural, spiritual, and social practices. In this way, the focus group discussions show how Aboriginal peoples have been forced to live with the pervasive and permanent effects of centuries of structural and institutional violence, which have resulted in their social exclusion and continue to shape contemporary public policies and state responses to them. This has contributed to the normalization and reproduction of violence in Aboriginal communities, thus spreading a culture of violence that is being diffused into almost every aspect of their social life:

> [Here in this community,] violence is very normalized. They've been living like that from generation to generation since it became normal in the residential schools. It's a very familiar lifestyle for them. The violence is therefore altogether trivialized. (female Aboriginal social worker)

The focus groups show how the normalization of violence is rooted in their experiences in the Indian residential schools, where violence in all its forms was omnipresent and indeed institutionalized. The residential schools reified colonial violence and functioned as one of the main institutional agents of the social systems of domination exerted over the Aboriginal peoples.

Moreover, almost all the participants in this study who had been to Indian residential school experienced, or know someone who experienced, poor living conditions and various forms of sexual, physical, or psychological abuse at school:

> In the Indian residential schools, many [children] were brutalized. In addition, they lost their sisters and brothers. They couldn't see them. (female Aboriginal psychologist)

However, it is important to stress that the intersection and interaction of the social systems of domination affect Aboriginal women in specific ways. This requires the recognition that Aboriginal women are differently marginalized than are their male counterparts, since they suffer not only from racism and colonialism, but also from patriarchy and sexism

11 For example, the culturalization process includes the cultural prejudices that help to reproduce discrimination (not only at the individual level) that have played out in government policies and practices.

(Kuokkanen 2008; Clark 2012) in Canadian society and within Aboriginal communities, as a legacy of their contact with Europeans. (We will come back to this point later.) In this regard, it has been argued that one of the main objectives of residential schools was to make Aboriginal communities internalize patriarchal norms (Cooper and Salomons 2010). Furthermore, it has been stated that in the residential schools, many young women were subjected to extreme forms of sexual violence and thus they have internalized the oppressive notions as well as the sexualized and racialized representations of themselves (CRI-VIFF 2011; Clark 2012; Bergeron 2012).

This also means recognizing two things. First, that not only colonial and racial, but also gender dimensions have played a central role in public policies, laws, and government actions that have been key tools for instituting violence against Aboriginal women. Second, that policy and policy processes are central to the reproduction of social systems of domination and differentiation processes among Aboriginal peoples both locally and globally, historically and currently. In this way, in order to understand the domestic violence experienced by Aboriginal women living in remote communities, it became fundamental to situate it at the intersection of these historical systems of domination and differentiation processes outlining the role played by the Indian Act and other federal and provincial policies and legislation relating to these social phenomena.

For example, sexual discrimination was built into the Indian Act (before the amendment of 1985), which removed status and band membership from any Indian women who married non-Indian men (Irvine 2009; Cooper and Salomons 2010). Another example of the sexist dimensions of some Canadian laws that negatively impact women with Indian status who are victims of violence are the legislative provisions contained in the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act[12] (Quebec Native Women 2010). Even today, although the law offers some safeguards to Canadian citizens in the case of divorce, some of those protections are not applicable on reserves (Bergeron 2012).

According to the focus groups, the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in the residential schools have caused intergenerational emotional and psychological trauma and distress, fractured individual and collective identities, cultural dislocation, and anger:

> I was very frustrated and angry because of what I went through in the Indian residential school. One of my friends has to live with the negative effects, too. He has reproduced what he went through in that period. He's very violent and he has committed sexual assaults [in our community]. We reproduce and pass down from

12 "For most Canadian individuals undergoing a breakdown of their marriage or common-law relationship, or on the death of a spouse or common-law partner, there is legal protection to ensure that the matrimonial real property assets are distributed equitably. Such was not the case for couples living on reserves governed by the *Indian Act*. For them, relationship breakdown or the death of a spouse or common-law partner has too often meant insecurity, financial difficulties, or homelessness." Since 2008, the Canadian government has been attempting to remedy the situation by amending the legislative framework. So far, three separate bills have been tabled, but abandoned due to the prorogation or dissolution of Parliament. This situation changed with the Senate's tabling of Bill S-2 in 2011, as the bill was passed on June 19, 2013 (https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1371645998089/1371646065699).

> generation to generation what we experienced in those places. (male Aboriginal community member). I'm changing the "man" and "woman" designations simply because they are sometimes awkward or confusing—"Aboriginal man community member" really sounds strange, and instances of saying something like "Aboriginal woman practitioner" makes it sound like the person is practicing "woman."

These traumas and inherited violence remain omnipresent in the Aboriginal communities that were examined in this study and are key factors in the continuum of violence with which these communities live. Moreover, the focus groups underlined how the massive removals of Aboriginal children resulted in their isolation from their families and the subsequent breakdown of cultural, family, and community ties:

> In the past, the things weren't like they are today. We used to live in harmony [in the community] . . . . Men and women used to have specific roles. Over time, all the knowledge that my grandfather had is going to disappear. Even though we're trying to prevent it, our language is already disappearing. I won't be here when that happens. . . . There are children who don't understand when we speak our own language. (male Aboriginal community member)

The assimilation policy also involved many abuses of power and control on the part of government authorities:

> They took away the children violently, they forced us [to go]. If my father had refused to let us be taken, he could've been put in jail. He did everything he could to keep them from taking us away, but the police were standing right beside him. (male Aboriginal community member)

Social Production of Hierarchical Relations of Othering: Processes of Differentiation and Domestic Violence Against Aboriginal Women

In the 1960s, the new child welfare system took the place of residential schools as the government's preferred method of domination and assimilation. The expansion of child welfare services resulted in the massive overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and youth in the system across Canada. In this way, the government has continued with the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities, placing them in non-Aboriginal, middle-class Canadian families (Irvine 2009). It is essential to address the important role played by the interaction and intersection of social systems of domination and differentiation processes (gendering, racialization, sexualization, and culturalization) in the legitimization of child welfare intervention and other government actions with respect to these populations. Differentiation processes are notably deployed in the social production and organization of hierarchical relations of othering of Aboriginal peoples.

Thus, in a system based on European values and dominated by non-Aboriginal frontline workers, the removal of Aboriginal children is, even today, seen as necessary in order to "protect" them from maltreatment, parental irresponsibility and neglect, substandard

housing, dysfunctional family environments, and domestic violence resulting from systemic and structural inequalities (Irvine 2009).

It is important to stress that the historical experiences with the mass removal of children to residential schools, as well as by the child welfare system, are perceived by the participants in this study as one of the main barriers to denouncing domestic violence and seeking help. For a number of participants, reporting domestic violence could result in other social problems and/or social marginalization (alcoholism, drug addiction, and poverty, for example).

This contributes to the reproduction and perpetuation of domestic violence in these remote communities. According to some participants, one of the main reasons Aboriginal women are reluctant to seek help is rooted in the historical removal and institutionalization of Aboriginal children and is linked to their fear of losing the legal custody of their own children:

> Here, people are afraid of us [social workers] because of everything that happened with the residential schools. (male Aboriginal social worker)

As this testimony shows, social workers are often perceived as threatening because they have been key actors in the perpetuation of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. Some participants also suggested that sometimes social workers are not particularly sensitive to historical, social, and cultural Aboriginal realities and practices. The important role played over time by othering processes in the construction and maintenance of prejudices against Aboriginal people must be underscored. It has contributed to cultural misunderstandings, which can lead to defining some Aboriginal practices as parental neglect and the premature removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities:

> I know one case in which the social worker went to visit a family. They were eating a traditional meal of hare and oats. But the non-Aboriginal social worker wrote in the report that they were eating glue, meaning the children were malnourished. The family was eating a traditional meal, but to the social worker, it was glue. (female Aboriginal social worker)

This indicates that government and nongovernment resources available to Aboriginal women living in remote communities lack perspective on Aboriginal culture. It has been pointed out that there is a tendency among child welfare authorities to depict and define Aboriginal women as "bad mothers" because of the vulnerable situations they face (including extreme poverty, homelessness, and unemployment), without recognizing that these difficulties are grounded in history and in various structural inequalities resulting from colonialism, racism, patriarchy (social systems of domination), and social class inequalities, and their intersections in the women's lives (Kline 1993). This is one example of how these social systems of domination interact and amplify each other, affecting women's lives in specific ways. Moreover, Aboriginal parenting has been attacked, stigmatized, and even criminalized in the attempt to impose and to legitimize the social, cultural, and moral

superiority of White settler society and values, which has had many multigenerational negative impacts on Aboriginal communities and families (Irvine 2009). This is reflected, for example, in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the child welfare system. Some studies suggest that there are three times as many Aboriginal children in the system today as were in residential schools (Blackstock 2003). The fact that the differentiation processes and systemic barriers created by class inequalities (extreme levels of poverty, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, low levels of education, overcrowded and substandard housing), racism, and colonialism are key elements of the social construction of Aboriginal parental neglect and irresponsibility must be addressed: the "bad mother" and "deadbeat father" are stereotypical representations of Aboriginal parenting (Irvine 2009). The social construction of Aboriginal men and women as "bad parents" helps justify the "need" for the removal of children and the imposition of Western child care values and practices that undermine Aboriginal culture, traditions, and parenting practices (Kline 1993). This is another example of how patriarchal, sexist, racist, and colonialist systems of domination shape and permeate today's government policies, actions, and services, and increase the social vulnerability and isolation of victims of domestic violence, limiting their access to social and economic resources and constraining their ability to stop their abuse.

2) Interaction and Overlapping of Systems of Domination, Differentiation Processes, and Their Class and Geographic Dimensions

Our findings reveal the specific role played by the interrelatedness of the class and geographic dimensions of the systems of domination and differentiation processes in domestic violence against Aboriginal women in remote communities. Indeed, the focus groups suggest that Aboriginal women in remote communities are more likely to be victims of domestic violence and have additional obstacles to overcome when they wish to leave a violent relationship. According to a number of social workers, these obstacles are largely shaped by the geographic isolation and socioeconomic limitations resulting from the social class dimension.

Interaction of Geographic and Class Dimensions, Patriarchy, and Gendering Processes in Domestic Violence Experienced by Aboriginal Women

Some authors (Clark 2012; LaRocque 1994) have suggested that before colonization, most Canadian Aboriginal communities were matriarchal or semimatriarchal and had multiple gender categories. However, the intersection and interaction of colonialism, patriarchy, sexism, and racism have not only transformed gender relations, but also the community, family, economic, and political structures of the Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal women have not only been colonized, racialized, and culturalized, but also sexualized, which has increased their social exclusion and vulnerability to all kinds of violence. These systems have been translated in government policies and laws encouraging the dispossession of Aboriginal women from their lands and their self-determination (Cooper and Salomons 2013), particularly undermining their socioeconomic conditions. To begin with, the

interaction and overlapping of all these domination systems have played a central role in the progressive loss of status and subordination experienced by Aboriginal women in their families and communities. Furthermore, the intersection and overlapping of the domination systems reproduce and validate the existence of the sexist and patriarchal social practices, norms, and gendering processes introduced by the Europeans (Cooper and Salomons 2010), and impact negatively on family and community bonds and dynamics in Aboriginal women's lives (Mailloux 2004). One telling example is certainly the fact that since colonization, Aboriginal women have been seen as if they were men's property and their rights have been transferred to men. This encouraged the devaluation of Aboriginal women at the societal, community, and family levels, thus contributing to the normalization not only of sexist practices, gender inequalities, and gendered hierarchical power relations, but also to the widespread acceptance of the subordination of women. This has contributed to the perception of domestic violence against Aboriginal women as "normal." In this regard, one of the participants of the focus groups said:

> In remote Aboriginal communities, violence is everywhere. It's "normal" and so it's embedded in daily life. . . . So it became normal for women to be beaten. The man is the boss. (female Aboriginal social worker)

This normalization contributes to community and family indifference and tolerance regarding domestic violence, which is reinforced by sexist attitudes towards women's role and responsibility in precipitating acts of domestic violence. It facilitates the perpetuation of social images of Aboriginal women (at the family, community, and societal levels) as deserving victims of violence and normalizes the fact that Aboriginal women are blamed for their victimization. And it promotes the existence of a "culture of resignation" that permits much of the violence to be seen as inevitable, trivial, and an intrinsic feature of Aboriginal societies.

Similarly, independent of their role, gender, and race, many participants indicated that Aboriginal women living in remote communities are particularly afraid of being judged and stigmatized by community members if they report their abuse:

> It's the same in all the remote Aboriginal communities. Everybody knows everybody and there are all kinds of judgments and social pressures when you talk about family violence. (female Aboriginal community member)

> The women are ashamed [of being victims of violence here in this remote community]. So they don't want anyone to notice. So they make huge efforts to hide it. (female Aboriginal community member/social worker)

In addition, according to most of the women who took part in the focus groups, whether as community members or social workers, in remote Aboriginal communities there is an unwritten "law of silence" surrounding domestic violence. It is difficult to talk openly about it because it seems to be a taboo subject:

> I think domestic violence is still a taboo subject and there is so much secrecy surrounding it. (female Aboriginal community member)

> This morning we had a meeting to discuss domestic violence with community members, but no one came. It's not easy to talk about it. (female Aboriginal police)

Moreover, the focus groups suggest that the Aboriginal women living in remote communities are afraid to talk about their experiences of abuse, as they are convinced that they will be judged and blamed by their family and the community if they do:

> People are judgmental. A woman who reports domestic violence will be judged. . . . So victims who decide to talk about their situation risk too much, and are afraid of the consequences. (female Aboriginal psychologist)

> If I talk about experiencing domestic violence . . . then, the family says to me, why do you do that? Look at us, you don't do that, you shouldn't report him. (female Aboriginal community member)

It is evident that, in this context, Aboriginal women tend to remain silent about the domestic violence they suffer in order to avoid being made more vulnerable and being subjected to severe discriminatory judgments by their families and/or the community. Challenging the law of silence could result in their social exclusion from both the family and the community. In addition, the majority of focus group participants suggested that geographic isolation is a major influence on the decision of victims to talk about their experience or hide it in order to protect the reputations of both their communities and their families:

> You can't talk about certain things because you shouldn't talk about them. No one must know. You can't damage your community's reputation. (female Aboriginal police)

Furthermore, there seems to be a strong relationship between the secrecy surrounding domestic violence in remote Aboriginal communities and community and family cohesion:

> We have to protect our family. We have to keep the secret, not talk about it. It's an unspoken rule that protects the family above all. (female Aboriginal community member)

This study confirms Crenshaw's (2005) findings, which suggest that the tendency to keep silent about domestic violence is intimately related to the wish to preserve the social cohesion of the community and the family. The focus groups suggest that what differentiates remote Aboriginal communities from other communities in terms of the law of silence is the premium placed on preserving their sociocultural traditions and the social cohesion of the family and community:

> We should've let the girl get beaten. We should've let him do it. Because that's often . . . that's what . . . that's what my mother-in-law said, and she's an elder. I think that for many other elders in the community, to keep their family image from being tiny bit tarnished, it has to stay taboo. You can't talk about it.

> I think that the elders here in remote communities, that's what they say about younger people experiencing violence, too. . . . Several generations have actually gone through the same things. It becomes a way of life from generation to generation. The violence is kind of trivialized. They say, maybe I'm not as bad as the other guy, or my father used to do it, my mother used to do it, it's my way of solving problems. If a woman reports it, say the one it happens to, she's looked down on. It's frowned upon. I've known people who are so afraid of their own families. Others don't feel safe if they report it. (female Aboriginal community member)

Thus, the patriarchal and sexist values and norms prevalent in these remote Aboriginal communities where social and family cohesion are overvalued help legitimize and perpetuate not only the law of silence surrounding domestic violence, but domestic violence itself.

However, the focus groups suggest that despite the persistence of taboos and the overimportance ascribed to family and community ties and social cohesion, things are gradually changing and making it possible to talk more openly about domestic violence:

> Personally, I think we've made progress . . . thanks to violence awareness and prevention campaigns. People talk about sexual abuse and some even do something about it. There used to be total silence. People didn't talk about it in the family, but now it's more out in the open. In these things, there's been progress. I think violence is a lot less taboo than it used to be and in the year-and-a-half that I've been here, I know a lot of progress has been made. A lot of people have been arrested and I think some examples have been made. Yes, things are changing. Honestly, in a year-and-a-half, it's changed a lot. (female Aboriginal social worker)

The participants in the focus groups perceive a close relationship among social exclusion, social inequalities concerning the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal women, and the reproduction of domestic violence in remote, isolated communities:

> You feel totally lost in the middle of nowhere . . . . 'Cause you're stuck here, you can't do anything. . . . You tough it out. (female Aboriginal community member)

> We have no jobs up North because we have no opportunities for economic improvement. . . . That has negative consequences on everything. It causes all kinds of social problems. We've experienced economic violence, we own no land, nothing. That's what I think. . . . I'm convinced it's related to violence and I think the economic violence plays a major role in that. Everybody talks about domestic violence, and no one talks about economic violence. But our communities have to live with it every day. (male Aboriginal community member)

> I'm going to tell you my story, how I treated my children. Yeah, I've been abusive, too. It was easy, since there was no police. (male Aboriginal community member)

According to the majority of women social workers, the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal women living in remote communities are particularly limited because of

the sexism, the patriarchal systems, and the gendering processes in their communities. This restricts their access to many symbolic and material resources, thus increasing their vulnerability and their risk of experiencing domestic violence. This observation forced us to recognize the class dimension of the systems of domination and differentiation processes and how they interact and overlap with the dimensions of geographic isolation and gendering processes, and, as we will see, with class inequalities, which increase Aboriginal women's vulnerability to domestic violence in specific ways.

> Of course, because the man has more control, it's easier for him, and the next morning he can rent a house, if he has to. He has a job in the community, you know, he has more economic resources than the woman who runs away with her children. (female Aboriginal psychologist)

For instance, many study participants said that when domestic violence occurs, men are usually the main providers for the family, and women often lack the financial and social resources to guarantee their subsistence if they decide to leave a violent relationship:

> You can't go to your mother's house. You can't. Because you have no money, you have no economic power. . . . Because when you're talking about tolerance, about poverty in the community, overcrowding, you can't rent a place. (female Aboriginal community member)

Besides, in situations of domestic violence, it is often the woman who has to leave the marital home, because traditionally, the house belongs to the husband:

> You're the one who has to leave. If the house belongs to him, you can't say, "I'm staying, get out." (female Aboriginal community member)

> And the house—of course, it's valuable, but it belongs to the husband, too. His signature is powerful. You don't have any share in it. (female Aboriginal community member)

Moreover, violent men tend to exert significant control over the family's economic resources, and female victims of violence often lack the economic resources to survive and take care of their children properly if they leave their marriage. This makes it particularly difficult for them to break the cycle of violence:

> The women are isolated in their homes, they have no income, they're economically dependent, they sometimes have two or three children. So maybe they'll wait longer before reporting it. (female Non-Aboriginal social worker)

> You're stuck. There's nothing you can do, except bear it. (female Aboriginal community member)

Most of the Aboriginal women in the participating communities who are victims of violence are thus made vulnerable by poverty, by parental responsibilities, by a lack of formal education, and by social and geographic isolation:

> You can't go to your mother's, you just can't. Because you can't afford it, have no money to do it. . . . That's the reality. (female Aboriginal community member)

Furthermore, in these remote Aboriginal communities, women frequently lack access to good jobs and to any support in facing poverty, unemployment, and housing problems, and also lack transportation to seek help outside of the community. This highlights how the interaction and overlapping of gender, class inequalities, and geographic isolation have negative effects on Aboriginal women's lives. As explained earlier, despite increasing concern about domestic violence in remote Aboriginal communities, access to and development of victim services is still very limited, as one Aboriginal woman stated:

> We need more human resources and all kinds of help to eradicate domestic violence. (female Aboriginal community member)

These factors have negative consequences for the reproduction and perpetuation of domestic violence in these remote communities. Thus, as the focus groups show, class is a significant aspect of the structuring of social systems, processes, and social inequalities, and intersects in complex ways with all of them (Waldby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012), thus playing a central role in the reproduction of domestic violence, especially for Aboriginal women living in remote, disadvantaged communities. It must be recognized that the degree to which a community is geographically or socially isolated can reinforce both the isolation and the control measures that abusers, family, and Aboriginal communities attempt to impose on the victims of domestic violence, thereby obstructing considerably their search for help and opportunities to leave violent relationships. The personal accounts also show how domination systems and differentiation processes at the structural and micro levels interact, amplifying each other's adverse effects. We must therefore address how the lack of adequate institutional support in the form of social services for domestic violence in these communities is strongly related to the systems of domination (at the structural level) and the active processes of differentiation, thus constituting another level of violence experienced by Aboriginal women in remote communities. Domestic violence is rooted in the history of the Aboriginal peoples and can only be understood by taking into account the interaction and overlapping of systems of domination, and the differentiation processes at work (such as gendering, racialization, sexualization, and culturalization).

Discussion

The application of intersectional analysis to the empirical data of this study facilitates viewing the domestic violence against Aboriginal women in remote communities as an extension of interacting and overlapping broader social inequalities, domination systems, and differentiation processes embedded within an historical context. The interaction and interlocking of these systems and active processes produce and legitimize social differences and hierarchies and political asymmetries that have real material impacts on the social actors' lives (Kuokkanen 2008; Waldby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012). The contextual and intersectional analysis allowed us to focus on the intersection and overlapping of

different historically constituted structures of domination and differentiation processes (gendering, sexualization, racialization, and culturalization) at another analytical level, thus highlighting how they amplify each other's negative effects on the lives of Aboriginal women who are victims of domestic violence. Like Dhamoon (2011), we can affirm that the intersectionality approach and the historical contextualization of the processes of subject formation (processes of differentiation) and the systems of domination reveal power relations and social structures in ways that the focus on identities and categories tends to mask. At the same time, this approach highlights the complexity and interrelatedness of the different analytical dimensions of domestic violence. Furthermore, the intersectionality approach permits a better understanding of the role played by the systems of domination and othering processes (and their interaction and intersection) in the perpetuation of social inequalities within public policy and government actions. This study shows the important role played by the historical and geographic dimensions in the specific experiences of Aboriginal women living in remote communities, highlighting how they are not only more likely to be victims of domestic violence, but also have to face additional obstacles and social pressures when they try to leave violent relationships. For example, as our findings show, Aboriginal women living in remote communities are under social pressure to keep quiet about the violence they are experiencing in order to protect and preserve the family and the community's reputation and to avoid social rejection. In this way, not only family cohesion but also strong social cohesion and the fact that everybody knows everybody else force women to keep silent about the domestic violence they experience.

Additionally, the long distances abused women must travel to seek help, combined with the lack of economic, social, and institutional resources, increase their likelihood of experiencing domestic violence and are huge obstacles to these women leaving violent relationships. Thus, the results of this study allow us to state that geographic isolation is a key factor that increases the social vulnerability of women experiencing domestic violence and accentuates the negative effects of all the other social factors and dimensions that play a role in the reproduction of domestic violence. This study also reveals the extent to which the violence experienced by Aboriginal women living in remote communities is a function of both history and their geographic isolation. We can therefore assert that geographic isolation and the history of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada shape the other social factors that are involved in the domestic violence that these women experience. This leads us to emphasize the importance of taking into account not only the traditional social categories (gender, class, and race) that have predominated in social analysis and interventions in this domain, but also other, less-studied but no less important social dimensions (and their interactions and mutually amplifying negative effects), such as history and geographic isolation, when analysing Aboriginal women's experiences of domestic violence. Thus, the results uncover the fundamental role of geographic isolation and its interaction with socioeconomic limitations (related to class) in these women's experiences of domestic violence. This also requires recognition that the root causes of the reproduction of domestic violence in remote Aboriginal communities are embedded within colonialist and

neocolonialist historical and contemporary policies and state responses (which have played a fundamental role in the social exclusion of the Aboriginal peoples), as well as within the prevalent community and family social arrangements and dynamics shaped by the systems of domination and differentiation processes that we have analysed. The findings show that in the communities studied, geographic isolation not only increases Aboriginal women's vulnerability to domestic violence and to specific community social pressures and violence, but it crucially limits their ability to seek help and formal resources, thus contributing to the normalization and reproduction of domestic violence. Although the intersectionality approach gives us a better understanding of the multiple interactions of different social inequalities and systems, and the role of geographic isolation and processes in the experience of domestic violence, it cannot assign a specific weight to each system and process in the analysed phenomenon. This is a major challenge that should be tackled by other studies.

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