

BOOK REVIEW/RECENSION

Restructuring Relations: Indigenous Self-Determination, Governance, and Gender

Rauna Kuokkanen, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 368.

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Kuokkanen, a Sámi scholar on faculty at the University of Lapland, has done a comparative study of Canada, Greenland and Sápmi (Sámi territory) that provides a selection of Indigenous women's voices speaking to Indigenous governance, self-determination and feminism. The book undertakes to “conceptualiz[e] Indigenous self-determination as a foundational value that seeks to restructure all relations of domination; examin[e] gender regimes of Indigenous self-government institutions; and interrogat[e] the relationship between Indigenous self-determination and . . . violence against Indigenous women” (1). Self-determination and violence against women are “among the most important and pressing issues for Indigenous women worldwide” (4). Yet Kuokkanen argues that despite Indigenous women's extensive and varied political involvements, their views as women—and particularly as feminist women—“have been systematically brushed aside in formulating Indigenous self-determination and self-government discourses that have been formalized in international law and national legislation” (1). This is not least because Indigenous men are comfortable with male privilege, having internalized and adopted the culture of patriarchal colonialism.

Indeed, the extensive scholarly literature on these matters takes up “processes of Indigenous self-determination as if they were phenomena outside of gendered political structures and relations of power, or outside of processes of gendering in society in general” (4). Thus, Kuokkanen suggests that a self-conscious politically reflective commitment to explicitly and structurally including women's views is essential to counterbalance what is now a structurally male-dominant, male-preferential heteronormative framework that is represented as emancipatory for all Indigenous people. It is also, she argues, essential to gender contemporary treaty negotiations and self-government arrangements from their initiation, rather than trying to add women in after the fact. (This is particularly relevant for British Columbia, where treaty and governance tables abound, although not very successfully.)

Kuokkanen's work is a disruptive intervention into the growing body of work on Indigenous self-determination and its more anemic companion, self-government.

In six chapters, Kuokkanen unpacks the foundational value of self-determination, assesses Indigenous self-government structures in the three national jurisdictions she considers, offers a critical consideration of the implementation of self-determination, provides both theory and argument for the importance of gendering self-government, considers the relationship between self-government and the high levels of violence against Indigenous women, and addresses the objective of Indigenous “gender justice” in restructuring relations within Indigenous nations and communities and across political positions. Throughout, she ties her own research and analysis to the interviews obtained in her comparative study, showing not only commonalities of analysis but also some deviations from the general consensus. The research itself and, implicitly, the reliance on the interviews point to Kuokkanen's commitment to speaking Indigenous

women's voices and views into the scholarly literature and then into the political consequences of it.

Kuokkanen deploys a theoretically informed argument (following especially Jennifer Nedelsky) for including Indigenous women and their varied political analyses both into the foundation of conceptual tools, such as self-determination, and into the implementation of those tools as national political objectives and governance arrangements, rather than adding those voices and views *ex post facto*. She also notes that Indigenous feminism places "the struggle for Indigenous self-determination . . . and the question of land at the heart of its theory and activism" (16). Both the integrity of the land and of the individual are fundamental to Kuokkanen's norm of integrity, which she argues is foundational to self-determination; indeed, she argues it is "the fundamental force behind the ethical and political claims and struggles of Indigenous peoples" (19). Throughout the book she returns to the problematics of the value of Indigenous self-determination; to self-government institutions that are arguably intended to animate this value but which do so imperfectly; and to violence against women, which also violates the core value of self-determination. Kuokkanen notes that, inescapably, self-determination is articulated in conditions of colonialism and its legacy of treating Indigenous female bodies as it does the land it occupies in all three jurisdictions in this study.

Kuokkanen recognizes the difference between articulating from one's gender as female and from one's analysis of one's gendered location as an Indigenous woman in a colonized and patriarchal context. The latter shows that Indigenous self-determination fails unless it takes up violence against Indigenous women. Kuokkanen takes her analysis further to suggest that the nation-state form and settler-state sovereignty must be critiqued against the value of a gendered self-determination. Many non-Indigenous feminist scholars will be seconding that.

I will make only one criticism of this excellent work. A chapter detailing the methodology, process and results of the study would have been helpful. Instead, readers are left to sift through each chapter and intuit the relevance of the research and the connections between interviews and Kuokkanen's own powerful analysis. The closest Kuokkanen comes to laying out her methodology is in her discussion of her "selection of research participants, who were determined using . . . an Indigenous research method of relationality: building sustained relationships with individuals and communities as well as drawing on existing relationships" (10). This does not tell us much about the particulars of the study, including how many participants were interviewed and how and why were they chosen (although we know some were politicians and others were community activists) and whether the responses are considered to be representative or are simply articulations of a relational snowball selection method. While the latter is not problematic, clarity about the methodological approach would have improved readers' understanding of the process.

Despite this concern, Kuokkanen's work is a critical intervention by one of our most important Indigenous feminist scholars into the growing canon on Indigenous self-determination and self-government, one that illuminates Indigenous feminism's legitimacy, significance and relevance for self-determination and self-government.