

# Indigenous Gender Justice and Self-Determination

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## Introduction

INDIGENOUS self-determination is often framed as a quest and vision for justice that centers on gaining equal standing with other peoples. I have argued that for Indigenous self-determination to be successful, the quest for justice must include gender justice and that Indigenous self-determination must involve restructuring *all* relations of domination. These relations of domination include subordination by the settler state; oppression including gender discrimination, violence, the lack of access both to resources (including support for the well-being of children and for teaching Indigenous children their language, culture, and heritage); and meaningful decision-making and participation (Kuokkanen, 2019).

Indigenous gender injustice is a frequently overlooked concern in considerations of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. The imposition of colonial structures, including those of governance, have not only transformed gender relations in Indigenous communities but also instituted gender regimes in contemporary Indigenous political organizations comparable to those in Western political structures. Neglecting to integrate a gender analysis into the efforts and implementation of Indigenous self-determination will perpetuate the principles of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy within the systems and procedures established under the banner of Indigenous governance. In the absence of examining the role of gender and the prevailing gender regimes within current political entities, Indigenous self-determination will maintain the existing order and the marginalization of those whose priorities and concerns do not align with the established agendas (see Kuokkanen, 2019).

In my previous work that drew on interviews and conversations with a broad range of Indigenous women from Canada, Greenland, and Sápmi, I have identified three key aspects of Indigenous gender justice as protecting and upholding Indigenous children, eliminating gendered violence, and rematriating Indigenous governance.<sup>1</sup> I have further argued that there is no Indigenous self-determination without Indigenous gender justice (Kuokkanen, 2019). This chapter expands my theorizing of Indigenous gender justice by drawing on Iris Marion Young's analysis of structural justice and adds a fourth dimension to my theory. I ask: How is Indigenous gender justice an exercise of structural justice? How can structural injustices standing in the way of Indigenous gender justice be addressed? I begin with a brief discussion of the concept of gender justice and the limitations of existing accounts of Indigenous gender justice. Second, I provide an overview of the key structural injustices against Indigenous peoples and consider gender-specific structural injustices. In the final section, I consider Indigenous gender justice through the lens of structural justice analysis.

## Gender Justice

The concept of gender justice is commonly framed in terms of gender discrimination within the justice system or legal frameworks that shape the lives, rights, and opportunities of women. It is a term that is often used ambiguously and can be synonymous with “gender equality,” “gender equity,” “women’s empowerment,” and “women’s rights.” One of the most well-established interpretations of gender justice is articulated within the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which defines gender justice as the absence of gender-based discrimination.

As an international human rights treaty, CEDAW outlines universal principles of gender justice to be applied with as much consistency and impartiality as possible. According to the Convention, discrimination against women encompasses “any differentiation, exclusion, or restriction based on sex” that hinders or prevents women from enjoying or exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with men (Article 1). Notably, CEDAW addresses women’s reproductive rights as a major concern, establishing a connection between discrimination and women’s reproductive roles. Article 5 emphasizes the importance of recognizing maternity as a social function, while provisions for safeguarding maternity and the interests of children are integrated into several other articles.

In recent years the gender justice approach, both as a process and a goal, has emerged to address the limitations of gender mainstreaming and gender equality approaches by acknowledging and rectifying gender-based injustices. However, there is no consensus on the precise meaning, intended objectives, or outcomes of gender justice. It is a term that encompasses considerations of agency, autonomy, rights, and capabilities as well as discussions on democratization, citizenship, constitutionalism, and access to justice. Feminist movements using global norms to contest the subjugation of women illustrate the existence of diverse pathways toward achieving gender justice, each characterized by unique opportunities and challenges to societal progress (Htun & Weldon, 2018).

Some Indigenous scholars argue that Indigenous cultures present preferable frameworks for gender justice (Cunningham, 2006; Hart & Lowther, 2008; Tirado, 2005). Others assert that giving precedence to culture, tradition, or customary law puts Indigenous women at a disadvantage and that expanding autonomy or self-determination within Indigenous communities does not automatically ensure justice for Indigenous women. For a long time, Indigenous women have grappled with the dual challenge of both safeguarding their societies and cultures against the state and challenging essentialist and patriarchal views of culture and tradition. Indigenous feminist research has also examined instances where Indigenous communities, under the banner of sovereignty and tradition, may either inadvertently or consciously uphold and sustain heteropatriarchal neocolonial goals and behaviors instead of actively pursuing decolonization (Denetdale, 2009; Green, 1993; Hernandez Castillo, 2002; Kauanui, 2008; Martin-Hill, 2003; Monture, 2004; Simpson, 2017; Speed et al., 2006). A recurring pattern involves the separation of Indigenous decolonization and self-determination initiatives from gender justice, which perpetuates a persistent gap in recognizing colonialism as inherently entwined with gendered violence.

## Structural Injustices Against Indigenous Peoples

Structural injustices against Indigenous peoples are deeply embedded in social, political, economic, and cultural institutions, norms, and practices of society. In this sense,

injustice and oppression are structural rather than stemming from individual policies. The roots of social injustice lie deep within unquestioned norms, ingrained habits, symbols, the foundational assumptions of institutional regulations, and the cumulative impact of adhering to these regulations (Young, 2011). These injustices have historically and continue to systematically disadvantage Indigenous communities, as reflected in law and policy. The key structural injustices include colonialism, land dispossession, health and educational disparities, economic injustice, cultural erosion, inadequate legal protections and political representation, violence and discrimination, and environmental injustice.

Ongoing colonialism and its past legacies represent a major structural injustice for Indigenous peoples. Catherine Lu argues that a comprehensive understanding of the structural injustice inherent in colonialism necessitates an examination of the social circumstances and dynamics in which these injustices occurred. In pursuing justice for Indigenous peoples, it is essential to place contemporary descriptions of structural injustice within a historical context in order to identify the injustices of current society. To illustrate, the persistent denial of Indigenous self-determination cannot be properly grasped as a contemporary manifestation of structural injustice without a historical understanding of how Indigenous peoples were coerced and forcibly integrated into nation-states. Only through comprehending the distinct characteristics and dynamics of historically unjust political relations between Indigenous peoples, settler populations, and colonial entities, can we arrive at a comprehensive assessment of contemporary structural injustices (Lu, 2017).

The historical colonization of Indigenous lands by European powers resulted in the dispossession of Indigenous lands, cultures, and sovereignty. The enduring practices of colonialism include land theft, forced assimilation, and the destruction of traditional ways of life. This limits Indigenous peoples' ability to practice traditional land-based livelihoods, and impacts their economic and cultural well-being. Further, Indigenous communities often experience significant health disparities, including higher rates of chronic diseases, substance abuse, and mental health issues. Particularly in remote regions, these health issues are further compounded by limited access to essential services such as healthcare, clean water, and infrastructure. Inadequate access to quality education and culturally relevant curricula perpetuates educational disparities among Indigenous youth.

Many Indigenous communities bear the brunt of environmental degradation, pollution, and negative climate change impacts. Indigenous peoples shoulder a disproportionate burden of both climate change and the social costs associated with adapting to it, while their concerns and rights are consistently sidelined in climate adaptation efforts, which tend to prioritize the interests of the majority society (see, e.g., Kuokkanen, 2023). This disparity constitutes a structural injustice. Economic development projects on Indigenous territories disrupt livelihoods, a way of life, and social and kinship relations that extend to the land, leading to displacement and health problems. Legal protections for Indigenous rights, land, and resources remain persistently inadequate everywhere in the world, and state legal systems usually do not recognize or endorse Indigenous institutions, laws, and practices. Further, Indigenous peoples are frequently underrepresented in political processes and decision-making bodies. This lack of representation limits their ability to advocate for their rights and interests. Finally, Indigenous peoples, particularly women, Two Spirit, and queer people, are disproportionately affected by violence, including physical violence and sexual assault.

## Self-Determination, Consent, and Forced Sterilization

Addressing structural injustice against Indigenous peoples requires a multifaceted approach, including institutional transformation, policy reforms, legal protections, and implementing Indigenous rights and self-determination. Yet, these are insufficient without a simultaneous lens to both the gendered character of structural injustice and the gender-specific dimensions of Indigenous justice. Colonialism has always been and continues to be a deeply gendered enterprise, with gender violence serving as a central tool of colonialism. Among the gravest forms of gender violence is forced sterilization of Indigenous women, discussed in detail below. Indigenous feminist political analysis has further shown how the patriarchal settler state has come into existence through gender violence against Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2011; A. Simpson, 2016; L. Simpson, 2017).

Despite the alarming rates of violence against Indigenous women globally, discussions pertaining to Indigenous self-determination and self-government institutions have not adequately and consistently addressed this violation of fundamental human rights within Indigenous communities (UNPFII, 2012; Kuokkanen, 2019). During the 1980s Indigenous women in Canada were first to highlight the issue of gender-based violence within the context of Indigenous self-government. Their early advocacy was part of the heightened public discourse on Aboriginal self-government, coupled with Indigenous women's efforts to combat sex discrimination in the *Indian Act* (Green, 1993; McIvor, 1999; Moss, 1990).

Conventional nongendered approaches to Indigenous self-determination obscure the patriarchal structures and relations of power, which not only create differential access to resources, representation, and political influence in Indigenous societies but ultimately prevent the implementation and exercise of collective self-determination. Studies have demonstrated that the lack of gender analysis in the environmental and social impact analyses, for example, leads to a failure to obtain a comprehensive understanding and deal with the gendered impacts of increased extractive activities, among the worst being increased levels of violence against Indigenous women (Archibald & Crnkovich, 1999; Campbell, 2007; Tauli-Corpuz, 1998). Other research has demonstrated a positive correlation between the reduction of gender violence and greater exercise of self-determination. A study focusing on the United States and Australia shows that once gender violence decreases, exercise of self-determination increases (Luna, 1999).

I argue that the prevailing models and structures of Indigenous self-determination, for the most part, represent a form of structural violence due to their exclusion of Indigenous women's conceptions of self-determination, which encompass the norm of individual integrity and the right to be free from bodily harm. Many Indigenous women I interviewed argued that collective self-determination hinges on the capacity of every community member not only to participate in collective decision-making but equally importantly, to exercise individual self-determination and bodily autonomy (Kuokkanen, 2019). As Val Napoleon has argued, in Indigenous contexts the concept of "self" in self-determination does not include Indigenous women's "selves," although it ought to (see Napoleon, 2005).

It is important to emphasize that gender-based domination and violence extend beyond intimate relationships and permeate women's interactions with the state and its institutions, including law enforcement, the criminal justice system, the courts, and welfare agencies. Yet explaining violence against Indigenous women only as a result of colonialism, and, consequently, as an outcome of social ills affecting the male population (such as mental health

issues or alcohol abuse) fails to acknowledge individual agency and essentially condones or excuses the actions of perpetrators (Davis, 2011; Sorensen, 2001). For instance, the 2004 Arctic Human Development Report notes that violence against women is a significant concern in the Arctic and attributes its rate of incidence to a loss of male identity and self-esteem, societal tensions, and issues of power and control (AHDR, 2004). It has also been suggested that violence in Indigenous communities results from male powerlessness in the face of colonial violence (Anderson & Lawrence, 2000; LaPrairie, 1987). These analyses establish a hierarchy of subordination, portraying Indigenous men as the greater victims of colonization.

The question is not a matter of prioritizing either colonialism or patriarchy as the more foundational form of oppression or debating who has suffered most. As John Borrows, Val Napoleon, and Emily Snyder contend, attributing gendered violence solely to the legacy of colonialism oversimplifies the issue. Indigenous women often face equal or even greater exploitation and marginalization than Indigenous men, yet they are primarily the victims of violence rather than the perpetrators. Indigenous men do not engage in violence against Indigenous women only due to colonialism. The root causes behind the high rates of violence within Indigenous communities are multifaceted but not well understood or extensively studied. There is also a need to distinguish between violence and conflict; violence is a learned response to conflict and is closely tied to deeply gendered power dynamics (Snyder et al., 2015).

Indigenous gender injustice is persistent and has both historical and contemporary origins. Violence against Indigenous women takes both interactional and structural forms. Recognition and transformation of both individual accountability and structural injustices are imperative to address and rectify the epidemic of systemic violence against Indigenous women. Advocating for forward-looking responsibility, Young suggests that individual agents cannot be held accountable for structural injustice. She further argues that engagement in a structural injustice absolves responsibility for providing compensation to victims of harm. Considering violence against Indigenous women, Lu, however, maintains that if structural injustices have contributed causally or conditionally to the creation or perpetuation of undesirable social positions, behaviors, or outcomes, then the obligation to address or amend such structural injustices consists of both retrospective and prospective dimensions. In its retrospective dimension, rectifying structural harm involves disavowing the injustices that have taken place. The prospective dimension of remedying structural injustices entails eradicating any ongoing unjust consequences that may arise or persist due to structural wrongs. Both dimensions may involve reparations among other remedies (Lu, 2024).

Among the pressing Indigenous gender justice concerns and a form of structural violence against Indigenous women is reproductive injustice. The reproductive justice framework revolves around the principle of consent. Collective consent is an internationally recognized principle and central to Indigenous rights, specifically the right to self-determination and the norm of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) contains several articles related to FPIC. These provisions emphasize the importance of recognizing Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and their unique relationship with their lands, territories, and resources. They range from legislative and administrative decisions and measures that may affect Indigenous peoples, their communities, rights, and mineral and natural resources; cultural heritage; relocation; redress and restitution; and the conservation and protection of the environment. Together, the provisions aim to protect and uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples and ensure their active participation in decisions that impact their communities and ways of life.

Individual consent, on the other hand, serves as the cornerstone of personal self-determination and bodily autonomy but is largely absent in international Indigenous

rights frameworks such as UNDRIP (Kuokkanen, 2014). An extreme manifestation of the lack of individual consent is the forced sterilization of Indigenous women. Forced sterilization represents a severe form of structural injustice and violation where women are subjected to irreversible procedures without their informed consent, exacerbating the systemic undermining of their rights and agency. In many instances, Indigenous women are not provided with any information regarding the medical procedures conducted on them, only finding out about being sterilized against their consent at a later stage (Basile & Bouchard, 2022; IJRC, n.d.).

Currently, several legal cases in different countries are considering forced sterilization, with legal proceedings advancing both domestically and on the international stage to examine cases involving Indigenous women. In Canada, the Quebec Superior Court has granted approval for a class action lawsuit initiated by impacted Indigenous women (Cheng, 2023). Simultaneously, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights is set to deliberate on the case of Celia Ramos from Peru, who died in 1997 following an unnecessary and unwanted tubal ligation that took place due to pressure from health workers involved in Alberto Fujimori's poverty-combating sterilization plan. In Peru, approximately 270,000 women and 22,000 men underwent sterilization procedures between 1990 and 2000. This program primarily targeted Indigenous communities and disadvantaged rural populations (Chirif, 2021). The Ramos case could potentially establish a significant precedent not only in Peru but also in other regions (IACHR, 2023). There are similar ongoing inquiries and appeals for legal action in Indigenous communities in the United States and Greenland (Agosto, 2021; Murray, 2022; Theobald, 2019).

In its latest General Recommendation No. 39, CEDAW highlighted the importance of upholding the right to free, prior, and informed consent for Indigenous women and girls concerning healthcare matters (CEDAW, 2022). The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and various UN Special Procedures have also recently conveyed their apprehension regarding forced sterilization and its link with violence and discrimination against Indigenous women. They have emphasized the imperative to eliminate it, investigate allegations, and provide suitable redress for victims (CERD, 2023; Tauli-Corpuz, 2015).

Forced sterilization of Indigenous women is deeply intertwined with the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism. It reflects a deliberate attempt by colonial states to exert control over and undermine Indigenous peoples, nations, and communities. Throughout history, colonial powers have sought to exploit and dominate Indigenous lands and resources, viewing Indigenous peoples as obstacles to their imperialist and extractive ambitions. One way to achieve this has been through population control, aiming to reduce the numbers of Indigenous peoples. By denying Indigenous women the right to decide on their reproductive choices, colonial powers have inflicted lasting trauma and contributed to the erosion of Indigenous identity and heritage.

## The Three Dimensions of Indigenous Gender Justice

Young defines justice as the social and institutional conditions required to attain freedom from domination and oppression. For her, justice involves the institutionalized conditions enabling everyone to acquire and apply fulfilling skills in social settings, engage in decision-making, and articulate their emotions, experiences, and views on collective affairs in circumstances where others can attentively listen. Every individual should be entitled and have opportunities to take part in the discourse and decision-making within institutions

influenced by their actions or directly impacting their conduct (Young, 2011). Building on Young's work, I have argued that Indigenous self-determination must involve non-domination in all relations, not only those between Indigenous peoples and states. I suggested that there is no Indigenous self-determination without gender justice. Drawing on my empirical work (see note 1), I have conceptualized Indigenous gender justice as comprising three key dimensions: protecting and upholding Indigenous children, eliminating gendered violence, and rematriating Indigenous governance. In my empirical data, many Indigenous women emphasized the ways in which the long-term survival of Indigenous peoples and communities hinge on the ability to protect Indigenous children and actively advance the well-being of future generations. They argued that prioritizing children's welfare should be at the heart of community life and political decision-making. In their vision, decisions should revolve around creating the best conditions for the children. Raising and supporting the next generation was also seen as a way for individuals to fulfill their responsibility in contributing to the collective objective of Indigenous self-determination. Some Indigenous women further called for challenging and transforming traditional gendered upbringing, which often perpetuates harmful gender roles and ideologies (Kuokkanen, 2019).

The proposal to place children at the center of decision-making fundamentally reshapes the rules, procedures, and social dynamics that uphold hierarchical and dominating social relationships. It also represents a deliberate effort to question the norms, customary practices, and underlying assumptions that govern institutional rules and to recognize and address the collective impact of adhering to these rules. The suggestion involves Young's idea of acknowledging and including the voices and viewpoints of marginalized or disadvantaged constituent groups as a means to advance justice. It is a structural approach that embraces a process-oriented comprehension of society with a focus on power dynamics and decision-making structures. The idea of placing children at the center of decision-making represents an example of a group-conscious policy framework that would be not only a means to achieve equality but also integral to the vision of social equality (Young, 2011).

Addressing and eliminating violence against women within Indigenous communities is a multifaceted endeavor that is not achievable without a structural justice approach. Gender violence does not just affect individuals; it deeply impacts entire communities and perpetuates cycles of violence and intergenerational trauma. This includes the breakdown of familial and kinship bonds and the removal of children to foster care and child welfare systems. The repercussions are far-reaching and affect the cohesion and capacity of the community, ultimately influencing their ability to exercise control over collective affairs, a core aspect of self-determination (see Kuokkanen, 2019). Both justice and the ability of a community to self-govern effectively hinges on enabling all individuals, including women who are disproportionately impacted by violence, to participate fully in community decision-making and governance institutions.

Young highlights the systemic character of violence as a social practice. She maintains that the defining feature of violence as an aspect of oppression is not solely the specific acts, although these are frequently profoundly traumatizing, but rather the social context in which they occur. This context not only allows such acts but even condones them. Violence is not just an individual moral transgression but a phenomenon of social injustice due to its systemic nature and its status as a pervasive social practice. Its systemic quality stems from its targeting of individuals within a group based solely on their membership in that group. For instance, any woman has a rational basis for fearing the possibility of sexual assault, and an Indigenous woman even more so due to her belonging to an Indigenous group. In this way, victimization through violence extends beyond the direct acts of harm to encompass

the constant awareness experienced by all members of oppressed communities that they are at risk of violation solely due to their group identity (Young, 2011).

Indigenous law holds a central position in the pursuit of gender justice, providing an avenue to address violence against women. Culture, including traditional principles and values that collectively guide an Indigenous nation, can provide an important foundation or starting point, but some legal scholars emphasize a critical gendered approach within Indigenous law as needed to deal effectively with gendered violence (Snyder et al., 2015). Others maintain that restorative justice approaches that also draw on Indigenous cultural traditions, although valuable, must grapple with inherent challenges such as victim safety, coercion, and the risk of excusing criminal behavior (Coker, 2006; Deer, 2009; LaRocque, 1997). It is also important to acknowledge the limits of Indigenous law—to recognize that no legal system should be the sole approach for dealing with violence against women (Snyder et al., 2015). This closely aligns with Young's view of justice, which says it is not achieved by simply changing laws or making new ones. In any society, addressing structural injustices requires fundamental shifts in institutions to eradicate entrenched domination and oppression.

The third dimension of Indigenous gender justice, repatriation, entails a critical re-evaluation and restoration of Indigenous women's historical and contemporary *political* roles as a crucial step for decolonized practice of Indigenous governance that includes recognizing the role of gender in colonization. Repatriation also necessitates dismantling the division between so-called self-determination issues and gender issues (Kuokkanen, 2019).

The first facet of repatriation involves recognizing diverse forms of participation in Indigenous nation-building and self-determination efforts and valuing activities beyond formal politics, such as raising children, preserving Indigenous languages, and challenging patriarchal norms as central to Indigenous governance. The second facet focuses on ensuring Indigenous women's full participation in formal politics, not as a token inclusion but by transforming political systems to address gendered power structures. Lastly, repatriation involves challenging heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy within political institutions and Indigenous societies and advocating for Indigenous gender egalitarianism that honors the dignity and integrity of all genders, including the normalization of Indigenous queerness (Kuokkanen, 2019).

Gender justice in the form of repatriation fosters inclusive participation in Indigenous nation-building, acknowledging a range of perspectives and positions within the community and confronting gendered power imbalances that marginalize and silence particular groups. Like the proposal to prioritize children in decision-making, repatriation is a means of envisioning alternative institutional forms that promote justice. As Young suggests, preventing group domination through equal participation processes is possible only when oppressed groups can voice their interests and experiences on a level playing field with other groups in the public sphere. Moreover, in a structural justice framework, the premise is that actors accountable for structural injustice must disavow and reform the structural elements that facilitated the wrongdoing and strive to create circumstances wherein those who were victimized can reclaim meaningful moral and political agency within the pertinent social and political contexts (Lu, 2024). In the context of Indigenous gender justice, this implies that Indigenous women excluded by settler colonialism from their previously held political positions are able to regain their social and governance roles in their polities.

Some scholars express doubts regarding the fairness of participatory democracy, questioning whether democratic processes consistently produce equitable outcomes. This concern regarding the assertion that democratic processes advance justice deserves careful consideration. I concur with Young, whose response to criticisms has been to emphasize the

constitutionality of participatory democracy; that the fundamental rules governing the participatory democratic process should remain constant, not subject to alteration based on the prevailing majority of the polity, Indigenous or non-Indigenous. This leads me to propose that constitutionalizing the basic premises of Indigenous gender justice is also needed and must form the foundation of any repatriation initiatives.

The fourth facet of Indigenous gender justice is the role of institutions of creating and conditioning Indigenous women's vulnerability to violence beyond those directly affected, and consequently, the institutional responsibility for Indigenous gender justice. This dimension draws on Lu's arguments on responsibility and structural injustice in settler colonial contexts rather than my empirical work or conversations with Indigenous women. The susceptibility of Indigenous women to victimization and structural injustice is not solely the result of individual perpetrators' actions, but it also stems from elements of settler societal frameworks that relegate many Indigenous women to positions of structural inferiority, marginalization, and disadvantage. These factors collectively contribute to the heightened collective vulnerability to victimization and structural injustice of not only individual victims of violence but also the entire group of Indigenous women who occupy a structurally vulnerable social status. In short, recognizing the significance of structural injustices entails acknowledging that the victims of structural harm encompass broader categories of individuals than those who could be identified as individual victims of severe human rights violations. (Lu, 2024). What follows is that both mainstream and Indigenous institutions, including policy and legal reforms, are accountable and bear responsibility for justice not only to those Indigenous women directly impacted by violence and other harm, but to all Indigenous women. Necessarily, this entails ensuring gender-responsive implementation and exercise of Indigenous self-determination and other rights, including FPIC in its collective and individual forms.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the concept of gender justice needs to be expanded beyond gender equality and considered what gender justice entails in Indigenous contexts. There is a growing recognition and mobilization around Indigenous gender justice which acknowledge the intersectionality of structural injustices faced by Indigenous women. Any group oppression, Young reminds us, is not a single structure but multiple forms of interacting oppressions. Embracing diverse forms of participation, valuing nontraditional roles and practices, and amplifying the voices of marginalized individuals have the potential to restructure governance paradigms, creating a space where Indigenous gender justice is not only acknowledged but also seen as central to self-determination. Concurrently, integrating a critical gendered lens into Indigenous law and governance frameworks offers a path to address violence against Indigenous women.

For the vision of Indigenous self-determination to be truly just, inclusive, relevant, and meaningful to all, it is necessary to prioritize the recognition and dismantling of existing structured social gender structures and gender-based oppression, including gender-neutral policies that consider male lives the norm (cf. Young, 2011). The realization of nationhood cannot occur amid crisis conditions, and the high levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls should be recognized as a state of emergency that profoundly impacts the future of Indigenous self-determination. If Indigenous justice is constitutive of self-determination (Lu, 2024), I have argued here that Indigenous gender justice is constitutive of self-determination where first, the "self" comprises individual selves and second, involves repatriation of Indigenous governance in which Indigenous women excluded from

their political positions by settler colonial regimes (and consequently in many cases, by their own), can reclaim those roles.

Structural justice analysis highlights the need for structural changes to achieve gender justice and genuine self-determination in Indigenous communities. It is crucial in understanding the interconnectedness of gender violence with broader societal structures and systemic impediments to Indigenous self-determination broadly defined. In particular, forced sterilization of Indigenous women epitomizes a profound structural justice issue, encompassing a web of interconnected historical, social, and institutional factors that have systematically deprived Indigenous women of their autonomy, reproductive rights, and bodily integrity. It reflects deep-rooted, ongoing settler colonial and discriminatory practices embedded within healthcare, legal, and political structures.

Advancing Indigenous gender justice as a central dimension of Indigenous self-determination presents both significant challenges and promising opportunities. Addressing entrenched patriarchal norms and existing power structures demands not only legal and policy changes but also a fundamental shift in societal attitudes and behaviors. Yet there is a growing determination and momentum toward a more equitable and just future—one where Indigenous self-determination fully encompasses gender justice and enables thriving communities that honor and respect the dignity and integrity of all genders.

## Note

1. The interviews were conducted as part of my SSHRC funded research during a period between June 2011 and September 2014 in Canada, Greenland, Finland, Sweden, and Norway. A total of 76 semistructured interviews were completed and transcribed. Most interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Some participants requested to remain anonymous while others gave permission to use their names. Sections of interviews have been published as part of my book *Restructuring Relations: Indigenous Self-Determination, Governance and Gender* (Kuokkanen, 2019).

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