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Researching Inequality and Violence: Qualitative and Indigenous Methodologies and Economic Justice

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Introduction

Is economic inequality a significant causal factor for political violence and civil war? A substantial body of research has emerged which investigates the economic inequality-political conflict (EI-PC) nexus.¹ With only a very few exceptions, large-N statistical studies have dominated the EI-PC literature (Sriskandarajah, 2005; Ukiwo, 2009). However, quantitative research methodologies have been shown wanting in the investigation of economic causes to violent conflict and have served up competing observations, contending arguments, and indeterminate conclusions. There are several areas of struggle: (1) a robust relationship between the two variables has been elusive; (2) there has been little agreement on how variables are to be defined and operationalized; (3) the dominant cross-national research structures increasingly struggle to represent a globalised world; and (4) researchers have struggled with poor quality and incomplete data sets (Besançon, 2005; Cramer, 2003; Lichbach, 1989). After thoroughly surveying the debate, Lichbach (1989), perhaps disparagingly, concludes, “not a single puzzle has been solved, nor do the puzzles seem closer to solution now than a decade ago” (pp. 469-470). We would not dismiss the debate quite so emphatically, but Lichbach does point to the

need for methodological innovation inside EI-PC research something this article explores with a consideration of Indigenous methods.

Specifically, we explore the widely ignored potential of qualitative and Indigenous methodologies in clarifying, expanding, and grounding the EI-PC debate both conceptually and empirically. While perhaps struggling to measure the magnitude and scope of the EI-PC problematic, qualitative and Indigenous methodologies may in fact prove itself capable of effectively exploring the deep-rooted factors that generate the discontents that occasionally turn violent (Autesserre, 2021). Indigenous methodologies are research “by and for Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions and knowledge of those peoples” (Evans et al., 2009, p. 894). By exploring strategically undervalued Indigenous voices and methodologies within the EI-PC debate, we might discover innovating ways for thinking to evolve in relation to the causal factors between economic inequality, political violence, and civil war. In response to these limitations, we propose the integration of Indigenous methodologies to reframe the EI-PC debate around relational, lived experiences of inequality, particularly among communities historically excluded.

To contextualize the argument of this article, it is useful to briefly survey the struggle of Indigenous peoples known collectively as the fourth world for economic justice (Manuel & Posluns, 2019). Indigenous peoples make up as much as five percent of the world’s population, embody 80 percent of the world’s cultural diversity, occupy 20 percent of the land surface, are stewards of 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity, and represent over 5,000 languages and cultures in more than 70 countries on six continents (Henderson, 2008). Nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples have primary attachments to land and culture, and lasting connections to ways of life that have survived from time immemorial (Warry, 2007). Tuhiwai Smith (2021) notes that

the term Indigenous peoples “internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples” that have “been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives” (p. 7). Similarly, Kovach (2021) articulates that “colonial history and contemporary racism persist in disrupting the ability of Indigenous peoples to uphold knowledges by cultural methodologies” (p. 11).

The term “Indigenous” reflects diverse humanities, independent of race, science and biological concepts, which comprise many overlapping and shifting categories in traditional knowledge and legal systems. Indigenous peoples across the globe share concerns about the territorial appropriations of their homelands, about cultural and cognitive imperialism, and exploitation by colonial and decolonized Eurocentric states (Cormier, 2017, p. 42; Henderson, 2008, pp. 10-11). Also described as “communal groups” (Gurr, 2007), they define themselves using ethnic, national, or religious criteria and make claims against the state or other political actors. The current world nation-state system evolved around Indigenous peoples, and many Indigenous groups transcend the (sometimes) artificially placed borders of countries around the world.

According to the United Nations (2009), Indigenous peoples are among the most impoverished groups in their respective countries and continue to be over-represented among the poor, the illiterate, and the unemployed. While they constitute approximately 5 percent of the world’s population, they make-up 15 percent of the world’s poor and about one-third of the world’s 900 million extremely poor rural people (United Nations, 2009, p. 21). Indigenous people’s traditional ecological knowledge, numerous successes, survival of and thriving despite settler colonial genocide (Liboiron, 2021; Tuck, 2009) means that their inclusion, axiologies,

cosmologies, epistemologies, and ontologies would contribute to the study of inequality across the globe.

Evidence suggests most contemporary world conflicts occur in weak or failing states (Ayoob, 2008) or states struggling with post-colonial realities (Levy, 2007). Despite wars between states being far less common and civil wars consistently declining in recent years, there remains cycles of repeated violence, weak governance, and instability affecting one in four people on the planet who “live in fragile and conflict affected states or in countries with very high levels of criminal violence” (World Bank, 2011, p. 2). If we assume that some of these conflicts are the result of post-colonial realities, then we must assume that Indigenous peoples are heavily involved and implicated in these contemporary world conflicts. Indigenous-settler conflict is also embedded within industrialized countries as the intersection of direct, cultural and structural violence continue to exclude, marginalize, and kill them (Cormier, 2017; Te Maihāroa et al., 2022).

The colonial objective is to separate Indigenous peoples from their ancient rights to land and its resources transferring wealth and productivity to the colonists and mother country (Henderson, 2009, p. 64; Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). This created a dichotomy of inequity between Indigenous peoples and European settlers remaining embedded in the economic structures of the world (Wolfe, 2006, p. 389). As a totalizing force, “capitalism ultimately attacks all social forms that impede its progress and oppose or do not accord with its order” (Kulchyski, 1992, p. 174). Indigenous peoples become foreign agents in the national body and are dispossessed through the systematic destruction of social relations and cultures (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 25; Wolfe, 2006, p. 402). This dynamic is especially noticeable in industrialized countries “where advancing colonial powers had oppressed and impoverished Indigenous

peoples to the point of extinction” (Henderson, 2009, p. 16). Some authors have estimated that, “from the time of contact, 80 percent of the Indigenous others have been annihilated as the result of development or utilitarian genocide by the meta-narratives of modernity and postmodernism” (Henderson, 2009, p. 17). Thus, there is a need to consider Indigenous methodologies and voices in the study of economic inequality and political violence.

We will now briefly overview both quantitative, qualitative and Indigenous philosophical assumptions, paradigms, and methods, before we summarise the underlying social theories on which the EI-PC debate rests and review aspects to the debate. Next, we critique the methodological weaknesses of the predominant statistical methodology and discuss a potential way forward involving the supplementation and increased utilisation of qualitative data through the presentation of what academic literature describes as Indigenous methodologies.

Quantitative, Qualitative, and Indigenous Methodologies: An Ongoing Debate

The quantitative paradigm within the social sciences is usually associated with a *positivist* philosophical stance toward science. Positivist research relies on quantitative data generated through experiments, surveys, and inferential statistics, and aims for rigour, exactness, and objectiveness. Positivism contends that science, i.e., the scientific method, will allow the researcher to discover truths about the social world and in particular, social meanings and intentions (Gliner & Morgan, 2000, p. 17).

The underlying axioms of positivist quantitative methodology embrace the realist perspective, which asserts that “there is a reality out there that awaits our discovery” (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 4). Positivists aim to reveal the facts, realize the theory and principles underlying the facts, and develop the techniques appropriate for measuring and testing these facts (Palys & Atchinson, 2008). Positivism is preoccupied with causes and effects in the physical

observable world (Neuman, 1997, p. 64). Thus, only the external and observable “actions” of social beings are considered, while inner forces and processes such as thoughts and motives as well as chaos in the empirical world are carefully avoided (Palys & Atchinson, 2008, p. 5). Positivists also believe that a high level of objectivity is possible by establishing a strict social distance between the researcher and the observed. And finally, positivist scientific explanations are nomothetic in nature as they are based on a system of general laws (Neuman, 1997, p. 65). Thus, positivists claim that a deductive approach produces conclusions that reflect the general social trends or patterns evident for people in general and are, thus, universally valid across time and culture (Neuman, 1997, p. 65; Palys & Atchinson, 2008, pp. 6-7). In contrast to these positivist methods, qualitative approaches like Indigenous methodologies and methods are embedded in cultures, stories, relationships, the land, practices, and communities. Indigenous research includes “claiming rights, testimonies, storytelling, celebrating survival, remembering, indigenizing, intervening to create change, revitalizing, connecting, theory making, representing, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratizing, networking, naming, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering, knowledge making, and sharing” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, pp. 164-183).

Qualitative social researchers also adopt a “human-centered” approach. Humans are viewed as thinking and motivated actors, and thus are inherently different from the objects of traditional natural scientific research (Palys & Atchinson, 2008, p. 7). A human-centred approach necessitates a phenomenological approach, one that highlights human agency in perceiving and making sense of one’s world, giving meaning to one’s perceptions, and identifying the effects of those meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Thus, qualitative researchers believe it is fundamental

to their project to “get into people’s heads” and stories, and seek directly the participants’ experiences and perceptions of their world (Senehi, 2009b, 2022).

Qualitative researchers are *inductive* as they allow their explanatory categories and theoretical perspectives to emerge from the data analysis. They also aim to be *interpretive*. The analysis of socially meaningful action is fed by direct observation of participants in their natural settings (Neuman, 1997, p. 68). This will often affect research proximity as effective researchers must “get close” to participants in order to access experiences, perceptions, motivations, or feelings regarding the topic at hand (Palys & Atchinson, 2008, p. 10). Further, qualitative researchers adopt a *social constructivist* worldview as the phenomena under investigation cannot be fully understood without looking into why, how, and to whom the phenomena applies (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, the research relies upon the participants’ ability to make meaning of and understand the world in which they happen to exist (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). These meanings are complex, varied, and often forged in interactions with other people so that the investigation moves beyond the individual, and takes into account the wider social community and the communal meanings that are produced (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).

Qualitative researchers operate within various (and often overlapping) interpretive communities, each with its own body of literature, and pervasive lens or perspectives on the overall research project (Creswell, 2007, p. 23). Four examples include critical theory, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and feminism. In contrast to positivism, critical theory embraces a dialectical imagination, suggesting that the world can be changed, holding potential for an improved future making acquiescence to the status quo unnecessary. Thus, in scientific inquiry, a critical theory stance will push the researcher to dig beneath the objective appearance of “truth” as a way of transforming class power differentials, heterosexism, patriarchy, racism,

the domination of nature, and other dominations (Agger, 1991, p. 116). Postmodernism reacts to “grand meta narratives” that “attempt to explain the world in terms of patterned interrelationships” (Agger, 1991, p. 116) cautioning against the “iron cage” nature and “totalizing tendencies” of modernisation (Bloland, 1995, p. 524). Scientific inquiry must examine the world from multiple intersectional perspectives (e.g., age, class, ethnicity, gender, race) interrogating the underlying presuppositions of the positivist scientific method (Bloland, 1995).

For example, Doucet and Mauthner (2008) describe several aspects of the methodological contribution of feminist researchers: (1) they have insisted that feminist research should be “not just *on* women, but *for* women”; (2) they have advocated for research to be increasingly concerned with intersectionality, social justice and change; (3) they have consistently challenged the dominant mainstream research methodologies particularly positivist quantitative methodologies; and (4) they have raised awareness of the inherent power differentials separating the researcher and the researched, and how to work with those differentials (p. 328). Finally, post-structuralist theory and Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionism reveal that research methodology contains certain assumptions and values, and that science has hidden interests beneath its surface. Deconstruction invites readers to question scientific claims as hidden assumptions are brought to the surface, i.e., science cannot attain absolute truth since researchers struggle to reflect the world “out there” (Agger, 1991, pp. 112-115).

Each of these interpretive lens critiques and refutes positivism by “interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions about the ways in which people read and write science” (Agger, 1991, p. 116). Every knowledge is historically and culturally contextualized, which places doubt on the

universal claims of positivist research, and rather attempts to explain a social phenomenon for a particular group at a particular time and their individual stories (Agger, 1991, p. 117).

Uniquely placed within qualitative approaches and within a similar interpretative lens, Indigenous methodologies approach the issue of decolonialization through critiquing hegemonic research paradigms that continue to serve colonialist and imperialist ideals and challenging the homogenization of Indigenous intellectual traditions and expression (Johnston et al., 2018, p. x). The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledge is that they form the basis of ways of doing things like coming to know the past, holding alternative histories and thus, alternative knowledge (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Indigenous methods demonstrate a concern for decolonization, working against imperialism, includes disempowered voices, and places the centrality of relationships, the land, narrative, stories, and Indigenous epistemologies at the centre (Kovach, 2021; Q'um Q'um Archibald et al., 2021).

According to recent literature, “Indigenous research methodologies reflect how knowledge is understood and sought in the context of the worldviews, ontologies, and epistemologies of diverse Indigenous nations” (Johnston et al., 2018, p. 4). This enables interactions, engagement, and reciprocity in knowledge exchange with the natural world suggesting that land, place, and non-humans generate knowledge (Hernandez, 2022; TallBear, 2023). Thus, Indigenous methods are relational (Wilson, 2009; Wilson et al., 2019), and can be traced to community, ancestral, and sacred sources of knowledge derived from land and place (Andersen, & O’Brien, 2017).

Fundamental to understanding the efficacy of Indigenous methods to research is a fuller understanding of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous epistemologies are a complex yet common-sense localized understanding of culture and individual agency in the world that is embedded in

worldviews, belief systems and values that is (often) transmitted through stories by elders to youth (Sefa Dei et al., 2002). For example, in Australia Aboriginal people see a clear connection between the Creator spirit, the land, and way of being and acting in a cosmology that incorporates story, song, art, land, language, law, the bush university, stars, and birds into a relational worldview and belief system that has existed for millennia (Taylor, 2014). Taylor (2014) points out that “Indigenous knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as to mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people’s way of living and making sense of their world. It is the sum of the experience and knowledge of a given social group and forms the basis of decision-making in the face of challenges both familiar and unfamiliar.”

The processes of globalization and global inequality continue to disorient and challenge the way of being and knowing of Indigenous peoples and their ways of living (Kovach, 2021). For example, the disappearance of the rainforest in Brazil due to the greed of multinational corporations for land is decimating the natural hinterlands of Indigenous peoples forcing them to migrate to urban settings that, in turn, threatens to overwhelm their Indigenous cultures (Adebayo et al., 2014). In Canada, the legacy of colonization oppresses First Nations Indigenous peoples who continue to suffer trauma from the experience of residential schools, racism, poverty and inequality, and missing and murdered Indigenous women (Battiste, 2000; Wallace, 2013).

In what is today upstate New York, the Peacemaker brought the great way of restorative peace and reconciliation to the people of the Longhouse or the *Rotinonshonni* who were at war with each other (Bedford & Workman, 1997; Rice, 2013). The Six Nations created a governing peaceful structure that both empowers and heals its peoples and influenced and shaped the

development of the present-day U.S. constitutional and political system (Rice, 2013; Wallace, 1994). In the *Haudenosaunee* matriarchal society power ultimately rests with the clan mothers who appoint and remove chiefs who don't follow the people's will and decide if the men are to go to war, and they deal with pressing socio-economic issues like poverty and inequality (Rice, 2013).

These examples speak to the totalizing forces of the global economic system where “poverty is perceived to be the central enemy, for which development is the antidote” (Sefa Dei, 2002, p. 9). Described as the “third world inside North America,” these are the places “where the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and the United States live, the rural and urban ghettos of hardcore poverty that trap racial and ethnic minorities, female heads of households and poor whites” (Sefa Dei et al, 2002, p. 9).

Economic Inequality and Political Violence

We briefly overview both the underlying theories of, and research in economic inequality and its effect on levels of violent conflict before overlaying the quantitative/qualitative/Indigenous debate with the EI-PC debate as part of a decolonial theoretical lens.

Underlying Theories

Three classical and one recent theoretical perspective have shaped current understanding of inequality. Perhaps the best known is the Marxist underscoring of the concept of class as a research category, and its related critique of capitalism. Marx (1964) states, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (p. 108). Marx focused intensely on class struggle since he believed that it would prove to shape the dominant structure and form of society. Max Weber (1958) expands on the views of Marx and adds several layers of complexity by: (1) looking into the value system undergirding capitalism like connecting ascetic

Protestantism and the capitalist order; and (2) investigating the presence of other dimensions of social stratification that moved beyond the economic such as political parties, cultural interest groups, and different types of classes (cited in Kerbo, 2006, p. 96). (3) Émile Durkheim believed that the problems he observed in society did not stem from material sources as Marx proposed but rather were moral in nature. Further, Durkheim viewed society as a biological organism, having various parts (organs), with each serving different functions towards the maintenance of health in the societal system thus showing how inequality is not only inevitable, but desired (Kerbo, 2006, p. 104).

Ted Robert Gurr (1970) also lays the basis for the deprived actor-rational actor debate which continues today in Collier's (2007) greed-grievance discussion. Gurr (1970) argued that as economic inequality increases, relative deprivation increases, which causes some actors to become angry and rebel as rising expectations do not meet people's reality. Relative poverty increases dissent, and dissent sometimes turns violent (Lichbach, 1989, p. 459). At the other end of the spectrum, the "rational actor" theory proposes that inequality will not lead the poor to rebel, but rather, rational actors care only for their personal income, and if the personal returns from rebellion outdo the returns from not-rebelling, rebellion will occur (Lichbach, 1989, p. 460).

A Summary of the Inequality-Conflict Debate

The research on the role of economic inequality in the political economy of violent conflict has produced decidedly ambiguous results (Cramer, 2003, p. 397). Several studies have attempted to put the debate to rest by providing strong evidence for the theory that inequality does not cause violent conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003). However, these findings have run contrary to a bulk of empirical, and theoretical evidence which proposes a significant

relationship between the two variables. As evidenced in recent studies, this has forced the current debate down new paths, with a narrowing of definitions, the reconceptualization of variables, and the disaggregation of variables. In this section we summarise the current research speaking to this debate starting with research that suggests a null relationship between inequality and violent conflict.

The Naysayers. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2004) analysed a large dataset on civil wars spanning the years 1960-1999 and found that inequality had no systematic effect on the outbreak of civil war. In contrast, countries where rebel groups have access to financing from the export of primary commodities, where there are widespread low earnings, and where there exists a dispersed population in mountainous terrain, seemed to face an increased probability of rebellion (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 588).

With similar results, Fearon and Laitin (2003) also cast doubt on economic inequality's ability to escalate conflict into civil war. They state that, "The conditions that favor insurgency in particular, state weakness marked by poverty, a large population, and instability are better predictors of which countries are at risk for civil war than are indicators of ethnic and religious diversity or measures of grievances such as economic inequality, lack of democracy or civil liberties, or state discrimination against minority religions or languages" (p. 88). They note that it often takes only 500 to 2,000 guerrillas to sustain a long-lasting insurgency, thus calling into question whether widespread grievances are responsible for mobilising a population towards violence. Rather, grievances are created by civil war, often as a central part of rebel strategy.

Gudrun Østby (2008), following Stewart's (2009) lead, differentiates between horizontal and vertical inequality. Horizontal inequalities occur between culturally defined identity groups (ethnicity, religion, region, etc.), while vertical inequalities are between individuals and are

described in terms of class and the Gini coefficient (Stewart, 2009, p. 12). Østby (2008) finds no evidence in statistical analysis that vertical social or economic inequalities are causing internal armed conflict. Østby notes that both Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Fearon and Laitin (2003) are also testing the effects of vertical inequality. Østby (2008) finds this approach inadequate and thus includes models in the analysis that are sensitive to horizontal inequalities that produce significantly different results summarised in the next section.

The Yea-sayers. Most research studies, however, seem to find a significant relationship between inequality (social and/or economic) and violent conflict. For example, Nafziger and Auvinen (2002), using the same dataset as Fearon and Laitin, find that “objective grievances of poverty and inequality contribute to war and humanitarian emergencies” (p. 156). However, the convincing “naysayer” project summarised above has caused the competing theoretical and empirical project to rework its research design and focus on several ways. First, studies are noticing a significant connection between inequality and violent conflict when one considers moderating intermediate factors/variables. For example, Schock (1996) puts forward the idea that while inequality is significantly related to political violence, political opportunity structures moderate the relationship (p. 128). Thus, inequalities must be considered in combination with the prevailing political context in explaining violent political conflict. Schock states that, “All forms of discontent that are translated into collective action confront a political context that may influence the form and level of political conflict to a much greater extent than the type or level of discontent” (p. 105). Using a similar argument, Caprioli (2005) argues that gender inequality and discrimination is a significant factor that pushes contexts experiencing economic inequality towards violence (p. 174).

Second, other scholars are reconceptualising and refining their definitions of inequality. Østby (2008) differentiates between the traditionally studied “vertical inequality” and rather focuses on purportedly more explanatory horizontal inequalities. Østby is also much more inclusive of social inequality as an explanatory variable alongside economic inequality. Østby argues that the EI-PC debate so far has primarily focused on individual (class based) vertical inequality. Østby’s (2008) research reveals that when group mobilization around horizontal inequalities is considered, there appears to be a significant relationship between social inequality and conflict.

Third, others have addressed the ambiguous and imprecise nature of the “political conflict” variable and have disaggregated it into sub-categories. For instance, Besançon (2005) disaggregates political conflict into ethnic conflicts, revolutions, and genocides in the research design. Besançon’s results show that inequality seems to be a causal factor in ethnic wars and revolutions, but not in genocides (p. 393).

A Critique of the Research

Perhaps what is most noticeable (and perplexing) in this debate is that both sides can produce statistical evidence in support of their views. This points to instability in the empirical foundations of the current research and calls into question the reliability of inferences made from the EI-PC research and the policy prescriptions they inform. There are at least three broad areas of concern with statistical inquiry in this area – problems related to the operationalization and definition of variables, problems with the data itself, and problems with the quantitative “perspective.” Further, current research and theorizing does not consider the status of Indigenous peoples around the globe.

Definitional Confusion

The EI-PC debate reveals significant methodological confusion and disagreement in terms of key measurements and definitions of variables. Babones (2007) describes a lack of consensus amongst “globalization” researchers in regards to operational definitions of concepts, measurement choices, and data types (p. 144). Readers of inequality research face a similar predicament. Operational definitions should noticeably reflect theoretical definitions of relevant variables (in this case *inequality* and *conflict*), but because there exists significant disagreement regarding theoretical definitions of both inequality and conflict, operational definitions vary widely, perhaps precariously so (Babones, 2007, p. 144). This will affect measurement choices, leading to widely divergent and often contradicting results. Thus, research has been driven by empiricism, where concepts are defined to match the data that happens to be conveniently available at the time as conflict and inequality variables are operationalized as the researchers see fit.

“Conflict” has proven difficult to define by EI-PC researchers. For example, how is war defined? How is peace defined? How many people must perish in battle to label conflict a war? Is the number of deaths recorded for each year, or over the entire course of the conflict? Are there varying kinds of wars that are caused by varying types of economic causes who differentiates between civil conflict, revolution, and genocide? (Besançon, 2005). Are other forms of civil violence related to inequality? For example, Cramer (2003) notes that Brazil, while not experiencing civil war, encounters high incidences of violence with homicide rates of some 20 per 100,000 people (p. 403). These questions just scratch the surface of this definitional challenge. Operationalising “inequality” has also been difficult. A significant challenge faced by researchers is deciding on the appropriate scope or level of analysis for inequality. For example,

Ulrich Beck (2007) believes that a fundamental reorientation of social research from a nationalistic viewpoint to a global (cosmopolitan) perspective is necessary to adequately address current global crises such as widespread poverty and inequality. Beck (2007) suggests that the national perspective is only able to investigate and research “small” inequalities (intrastate inequalities) and is blind to “large” inequalities on the supranational scale (p. 168). This can explain why global inequalities have risen dramatically in the last 50 years with virtually no widespread attention (or resistance) from the research community. A nation-state perspective serves to disintegrate any accountability for global inequalities and hinders the formation of transnational global accountability structures and reporting procedures. However, things may be changing. Stewart (2009), for example, argues that the global component of horizontal inequalities are generally neglected. In response, Stewart’s research finds that Muslims are systematically disadvantaged across the Muslim/non-Muslim divide, both within developed and developing countries, and between Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

Poor Quality Data

Fearon and Laitin (2003) state that, “The poor quality of the inequality data, available for only 108 countries, does not allow us to go beyond the claim that there appears to be no powerful cross-national relationship between inequality and [civil war] onset” (p. 85). Cramer’s (2003) summary of the EI-PC debate notes significant criticisms made of distributional data and the inferences drawn from them (p. 400). Moll (1992) is also concerned by the inappropriate use of statistics by economists in the inequality debate. Moll notes that, “Many of the official statistical aggregates used by economists are not reliable, lack rigorous theoretical backing and are not compatible over time and space” (p. 689). Moll’s survey of the inequality literature concludes

that economists are “slothful,” and are often ignorant of the methodological bases of their statistics and rely on convenient (and sometimes inappropriate) data available to them (p. 690).

These statistical woes are partly a result of problems faced in data generation. Generating reliable data in times of war or in post-war periods (upon which the EI-PC debate is reliant) would seem to be extremely difficult. Researchers face significant security concerns, have very limited access to conflict-affected regions, and can face uncooperative and misleading participants in the socially turbulent post-war milieu.

Coming from a different angle, Wade (2005) addresses the political economy of statistics, specifically regarding the World Bank’s virtual monopoly on data generation in inequality and poverty. Wade describes the tension faced by World Bank statisticians whereby they become prone to not identifying biases and instead may manipulate statistics to “advance the tactical goals of the organization” (p. 14).

Statistical Blindness

A more philosophical critique of quantitative methodology in inequality is emerging from within the constructivist camp of inequality researchers (Berard, 2006; Harris, 2003, 2006). Their basic argument is that significant aspects to inequality “remain something of a black box, only obliquely accessible” in quantitative analysis (Harris, 2003, p. 230). The purported reason for this is current quantitative and naturalist research views inequality as an ostensibly objective social problem, and largely ignores the fact that inequality, as a meaning, is *socially constructed* (Berard, 2006, p. 236; Harris, 2006, p. 223). In other words, positivist and structuralist approaches tend to reify the problem of inequality and assume it means one thing or another without considering the social meaning given it by participants, with project-design failing to reveal what individuals or groups think about, and experience with inequality (Berard, 2006, p.

239). They are not arguing that inequality is merely a subjective judgement, but that researchers must be wary of reifying inequality “as existing prior to and independent of social understandings and judgments” (Berard, 2006, p. 238). Even though inequality does objectively exist in every society, inequality exists as a *social* fact. This does not make it unreal or untrue, but rejects its universality, and explores how and why individuals and groups choose to, or not to invoke inequality in describing a social phenomenon (Berard, 2006, p. 240). Quantitative methodology will inherently struggle to explore the social construction of inequality.

Ignorance of Indigenous Inequality

The available data on inequality is mostly blind to the status of Indigenous peoples in relation to Indigenous-settler, and emancipatory issues (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Inequalities in health care in Canada between Indigenous peoples and settlers are connected to structural inequalities that disadvantage Indigenous communities (Wilk et al., 2018). Similarly, a quantitative study exploring educational attainment, median income, and unemployment levels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand found that it may take decades for Indigenous communities to achieve equity and close the equity gap with non-Indigenous people (Mitrou et al., 2014).

Particularly as it affects Indigenous communities, it is essential to recognize that these countries have implemented a range of policy frameworks, legal reforms, and community-based approaches, but with varying degrees of effectiveness and ongoing criticism as they relate to policy changes to address economic inequality with an emphasis on Indigenous-focused efforts regarding land claims, economic inclusion, TRCs, and Indigenous entrepreneurship. Indigenous peoples’ living within continuing colonial societies have many diverse needs, interests, and worldviews that cannot be encapsulated within Western quantitative research designs focusing

on inequality and other issues that leave the human out that is central to the very core of Indigenous peoples' cultures (Crosby & Monaghan, 2016).

These limitations reveal the need that the quantitative research methodology must be decolonized and emancipated from its positivist roots by deconstructing powerful narratives, including participants knowledge, creating reciprocal relationships, ensuring researcher accountability, and ensuring their standpoints that are centered in social justice outcomes (Andersen, & O'Brien, 2017; Walter & Anderson, 2013). As Coburn (2015) notes, "It seems to me that what is needed is not so much Indigenous quantitative methodologies, but critical Indigenous statistics practiced by Indigenous researchers unafraid to 'unmask' the dangers of statistical fetishization, even as they strategically use quantitative data as a way of knowing and of persuading" (p. 132). In contrast to the neocolonial use of statistics to objectify and disempower Indigenous peoples, quantitative Indigenous methodologies map the ontological landscape of Indigenous paradigms (Walter & Anderson, 2013).

A Way Forward? Qualitative and Indigenous Methodologies

Qualitative and Indigenous methodologies have been almost completely cut out of, or avoided in the EI-PC debate, albeit qualitative versions have been used sparingly in such areas as health and education inequality. The few qualitative studies that do exist like Chua (2003) and Ukiwo (2013), moreover, are framed in different ways and have diverse levels of analysis, thus making amalgamation into a coherent whole, and the building up of a coherent picture of inequality's role in conflict across the globe not possible (Ukiwo, 2013). Qualitative and Indigenous methodologies, however, hold significant potential to further and expand the debate regarding the relationship of inequality to violent conflict.

At a basic level, qualitative and Indigenous methodologies are better suited for “writing people into” the debate. They speak directly to “questions about location, politics, identity, and culture” (Sefa Dei et al., 2002, p. 4). Thus, Indigenous research reflects diverse humanities that prioritize the aspirations, needs, and values of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge (Ray et al., 2019; Wilson, 2009). “Indigenous knowledge originates in oral sources (conversations, stories, traditional teachings) in the day-to-day practices of Indigenous peoples (researchers and non-researchers alike) according to Indigenous worldviews and including insights from the spirit world” (Johnston et al., 2018, p. 4) that deconstructs “colonialism and its historical effects on the colonized” (Getty, 2010, p. 7).

According to Mac Ginty and Williams (2009), several factors have served to write people out of many research projects dealing with conflict and its economic causes. Research has often tended to adopt a technocratic stance preferring manageable number manipulation and graphing as opposed to the complex and messy world of human perception and agency. Peacebuilding towards economic justice is untidy, chaotic, and messy (Mac Ginty, 2016; Mac Ginty et al., 2020). Thus, it is critical to situate Indigenous methods at the location most relevant to Indigenous experience (Evans et al., 2009). Defining methodologies in this way eliminates the issue of research becoming “programmatic” expecting certain outputs given set inputs or becoming “solution-based” in many cases undertaking a problem-solving role and, to maintain simplicity, ignoring local people’s ideas, inclusion, and practices (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009).

Conducting effective qualitative and Indigenous research which considers local conceptions of inequality in conflict-affected contexts will require researchers to abandon their distanced and objectivised role, venture out from the safety and predictability of statistical computer software, and position themselves as closely as possible to where the action is (Strega

& Brown, 2015).² For example, Pouligny (2002) argues for the adoption of a research stance that will access the manner in which individuals and groups have understood events in violence-affected social contexts. The researcher can listen to and value the research participants stories of the conflict and its causes, and account for their experienced reality (Lambert, 2014; Patomäki, 2001; Porsanger, 2004; Pouligny, 2002, p. 206). By understanding that inquiry is both political and moral, we can use methods critically for explicit social justice purposes valuing the transformative power of Indigenous subjugated knowledges', pedagogical practices that produce knowledge, and seek forms of praxis that are emancipatory and empowering (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Researchers must consider the informants capable of affirming and asserting themselves as an authentic actor, who holds significant knowledge about their personal and contextual experience, and are able to comment on it (Pouligny, 2002, p. 204).

Maintaining a closely positioned stance is rooted in Indigenous methodologies as well as constructivist methodologies and strategies. Social constructionism holds a central belief that meaning is not inherent and thus constructionist research aims to investigate what participants "know," how they create this knowledge, and how they act with this knowledge (Harris, 2006, p. 225). A constructionist approach to EI-PC research will thus avoid assuming that inequality is an obvious, objective fact. Researchers will be careful to not pre-define their variables, avoid making claims about the experienced reality of inequality and conflict, and rather defer to the interpretations of their participants. In the EI-PC debate, researchers tend to not assume that violence is the effect of inequality but instead explore the participants' assertions regarding its effects (Harris, 2006, pp. 225-226).

While unable to correlate between variables and generalise between cases like quantitative approaches, Indigenous designs can investigate inequality with greater precision and

rigour and enter the black box of both local level and state level processes to decipher linkages between the variables of inequality and conflict in specific contexts (Kovach, 2021; Ripsman & Blanchard, 2003). Scholarship on Indigenous processes of peacemaking (Tuso & Flaherty, 2016), conceptions of justice as healing (Ross 2006a, 2006b), and Indigenous research (Johnston et al., 2018) suggest that when viewed through an Indigenous cultural lens, the themes of economic inequality, political conflict, and research can be better considered in relation to one another. Indigenous peacemaking and peacebuilding processes, like Indigenous research, are shaped by their respective cultural norms. In an Indigenous worldview, conflict and social change occur naturally as well as comprehending the change cycles relating to the effects on the conflicts causes (Groh, 2018) is the goal. Given the objective of colonial governments to access and exploit natural resources for economic purposes, and the link between “living on the land and with the land, that brings meaning to Aboriginal people,” (Kuokkanen, 2011, p. 215) the interface between economy, land, and people provides the pattern, or cycle of change, for critical reflection and analysis (Q'um Q'um Archibald et al., 2022; Reder, 2022). Thus, an Indigenous research methodology is ethical, inclusive, reciprocal, and respectful as well as relevant and responsible to the community grounded in reciprocity, relevance, respect, and responsibility and includes ecological knowledge and the interconnectedness of all living organisms (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hernandez, 2022; TallBear, 2023; Wall Kimmerer, 2020). Indigenous methodologies include these elements.

Consequently, like Indigenous viewpoints of peace and economic justice, Indigenous methodologies have deep cultural underpinnings (Ray et al., 2020; Strega & Brown, 2015). Indigenous methodologies are intimately connected to local contexts and each group's principles and traditions related to ensuring peace and local justice (Tuso, 2016, p. 509) through fair

economic participation. Like participatory action research frameworks, Indigenous methods and methodologies reflect a commitment to social transformation, to honouring the lived experiences and knowledge of Indigenous peoples, and collaboration and powersharing in the research that must also account for the relationship of Indigenous peoples to the global hierarchy of power, and settlers among other issues (Wilson et al., 2019).

Indigenous research methods reflect approaches within the posthumanist qualitative tradition that lend themselves as appropriate for EI-PC research. For example, participatory action research, storytelling, photovoice, arts based, and critical narrative research approaches which focus on the shared and learned values, behaviours, and beliefs of an entire cultural group (Creswell, 2007, p. 68), allows the conflict researcher to access local perceptions of how inequality is creating conflict, including for Indigenous populations (Millar, 2014). Relatedly, the case study approach, which investigates a particular issue across one or more cases, is being increasingly recognised as a necessary complement to quantitative EI-PC research (Ripsman & Blanchard, 2003) and is useful for considering the broader plight of Indigenous peoples across the globe. Phenomenology, which describes the meaning given to lived experiences by a group of individuals (Creswell, 2007, p. 57), can explore the motivations behind the utilisation of “inequality” as a justification for violence, and the way that Indigenous peoples conceive of their economic relationships within a settler-colonial society and the global hierarchy of power.

That said, grounded theory seems to hold significant potential in furthering the EI-PC debate. Grounded theory aims to move beyond mere description of a phenomenon to generate a theory regarding the experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007, pp. 62-63). Kathy Charmaz (2014), for example, argues that constructivist versions of grounded theory offer a suitable structure in which to integrate critical theory methodologies in the study of social justice issues

such as the EI-PC nexus. A “critical” grounded theory approach can “anchor agendas for future action, practice, and policies in the analysis by making explicit connections between the theorized antecedents, current conditions, and consequences of major processes” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 512). In other words, the approach provides a path to change through critical investigation. In contexts concerned with the inequality of Indigenous peoples, critical investigations of economic structural change are vital for shaping local Indigenous conceptions of peace and economic justice, and should motivate culturally-based learning processes that are designed with and, ideally, led by local Indigenous partners.

It should be noted, however, that Charmaz (2005) believes we should not abandon the traditional positivist quest for empirical detail, but rather we advance it, albeit with its biases and values exposed. Contentious studies regarding inequality from an Indigenous viewpoint will likely challenge the status quo, and thus must be backed by thorough data generation and interpretation to be credible and instigate needed social change.

Indigenous Perspectives of Peace and Economic Justice

Indigenous approaches to peace and economic justice are mostly left out of the dominant liberal peacebuilding process in societies transitioning out of violent conflict often into a liminal peace. Given the pervasive poverty among Indigenous peoples, how can this inequality debate be conducted without consideration for these groups in relation to settler-colonial societies? How might Indigenous methodologies and methods as well as Indigenous conceptions of peace and economic justice inform the EI-PC debate? What can the larger PACS field learn from considering this perspective in the EI-PC debate?

For example, Kuokkanen (2011) suggests the need to more closely examine the effects of the global market economy on Indigenous communities. Kuokkanen contends that, “If

Indigenous economies are not taken into account, there is a serious danger of losing the very identities that constitute Indigenous peoples” (p. 217). Kuokkanen’s arguments are based on the colonial belief that Indigenous methods of production are considered inefficient and backward by the global economic market economy, and economies like “subsistence” carry “negative connotations of primitive ways of life, a low standard, or ‘eking out’ a wretched existence in conditions of poverty” (p. 218). However, subsistence in Indigenous contexts is “both an economic and a social system, encompassing various spheres of life that often are inseparable from one another” (Kuokkanen, 2011, p. 218).

Everyday approaches to peace and economic justice exist in traditional Indigenous societies whether it is in poor urban and rural settings in Brazil (Linstroth, 2016), in intragroup and regional conflict settings in the Philippines (Barnes & Magdalena, 2016) or in local disputes in Northern Ireland (Mac Ginty, 2016; Rahman et al., 2017). Indigenous justice systems have been employed in a multiplicity of Indigenous societies for millennia. However, there may be complexities, tensions, and contradictions within the power structures of Indigenous communities when dealing with inequality. For example, in some contexts, patriarchal power structures often work to the benefit of men and to the detriment of women, youth, disabled people, LGBTQ+ citizens, newcomers, ex-combatants, and the very poor (Byrne et al., 2022; Engle-Merry, 2005; Mac Ginty, 2008), and in other communities’ women have a prominent role in decision-making and were/are leaders of their communities (Rice, 2010).

There is a need to recognize Indigenous peacebuilding and research methods and the role of traditional approaches to resolving conflict and economic justice in our contemporary global civic society when designing studies to understand Indigenous realities (Wilson, 2009) especially when addressing poverty and inequality. We must remember that research is a political

endeavour and the processes we choose to conduct research reflect a worldview, way of doing and being based on non-Indigenous approaches (Thiessen & Byrne, 2017). This constitutes nothing more than ontological violence, epistemological tyranny or cognitive imperialism, and to eliminate that violence, researchers need to decolonize methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021) by considering approaches more in-line with Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being. For this article we highlight the roles of culture, rituals, “constructive transcultural storytelling” (Senehi, 2009a), Indigenous knowledge and peacemaking systems, and the external challenges Indigenous justice systems face.

Culture and Conceiving of Indigenous Economic Justice

Separate cultures are attuned differently to inequality, economic power relationships, and economic justice. Indigenous people cope with inequalities foisted on them by an unjust structure embedded in racist practices, beliefs and processes (Ross, 2006b). Indigenous methodologies embedded within Indigenous cultural practices are necessary in researching inequality and injustice within Indigenous communities (Strega & Brown, 2015). “Indigenous methodologies are not only socially and political productive, but they also likewise challenge colonial methodologies that erase colonial power and violence and that deny the ongoing existence of distinct Indigenous peoples, whether through (more or less deliberate) omission or through failures to appreciate distinct Indigenous national histories and peoplehood” (Coburn, 2015, p. 127).

Indigenous rituals and epistemologies are best connected with the issue of understanding and better researching inequality and economic justice within Indigenous communities. Rituals like *Potlatch* assist Indigenous people in situating themselves in their cultures and ground them

in cocreating resilient local development systems and in their resistance to dominant economic structures (Ross, 2006a).

Storytelling is one important aspect of building peace through social inclusion and economic justice (Senehi, 2002). Indigenous researchers are “transcultural storytellers” (Senehi, 2009a) who are a vital bridge between Indigenous cultures and settler cultures and who can determine which research methods are used to address social justice issues. They can highlight colonial assumptions about research. “Indigenous quantitative methodologies may valuably unmask the routine ways that white racialized power is reproduced, including through scholarship” (Coburn, 2015, p. 129).

It might also be more appropriate in some instances to hybridize Indigenous cultural approaches with liberal cultural approaches when Indigenous communities encounter external researchers so that they can “resist, subvert, and exploit” them (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 3). “International (neo)liberal peacebuilding has begun to expose its inherent contradictions and struggles. As a technology of the global liberal politico-economic system, it is certainly creating conflict and dependency. Thus, it appears necessary to critically transcend current peacebuilding practice and strive for more emancipatory and culturally empowering methodologies” (Thiessen, 2011, p. 131).

Consequently, mainstream researchers need to make a “paradigm shift” (Kuhn, 1996) and incorporate critical and Indigenous methodologies into their research that take into consideration the role of Indigenous knowledge with regards to social injustices and economic inequality (Tuhivai Smith, 2021). It is critical to bring Indigenous communities and their unique and respectful ways of doing peace in from the margins if we are to truly include and empower all the citizens on our planet (Wallace, 2013).

Conclusions

Statistical measurements of inequality and economic injustice are certainly informative. Widely accepted research shows that pro-capitalist policies have enriched those at the top of the global economy, but have immiserated most of the world's population, including large Indigenous populations under settler colonialism and neocolonial rule (Wade, 2004). However, despite the recognition of increasing global inequality, the research community has been generally unwilling and/or unable to challenge the expansionist global capitalist status quo and adopt a critical social justice lens. Because of this, the research enterprise must undergo fundamental transformations in strategy, focus, and values. To this end, this article has explored several paths forward in better attuning academic research to the negative effects of a socially unjust world in particular, inequality-induced destructive political violence.

Joe Feagin (2001) argued for reclaiming and adopting a “countersystem” approach to social research eschewing the detached-science approach with its emphasis on securing grants from corporations or states, and its heavy investment in quantitative approaches. Feagin believes the goals of social, and sociological, research have “long reflected a dialectical tension between a commitment to remedy social injustice and the desire to be accepted as a fully legitimate discipline in the larger society, especially by the powerful elites” (p. 6). Rather, social research must commit itself to social justice in its ideals, and re-establish the centrality of differences, oppression, and inequality in practice. Further, by adopting a “countersystem” approach, research becomes deeply concerned about social and economic inequality, and actively investigates alternative social systems, which might replace current free-market models (p. 11). This approach requires the researcher to step down from the ivory tower, reject requirements of scientific “neutrality,” and engage politically and as an advocate for the disadvantaged in many

ways embedding the premises of the “critical” social perspectives of Indigenous groups and worldviews; critical theorists; feminist, LGBTQI+, BIPOC, and disability scholars; postmodernists; and neo-Marxist researchers. The social research enterprise thus gains a comfortableness with constant and penetrating self-reflection, emancipatory action, and an expanded knowledge base as once-ignored perspectives are embraced (p. 13). In this article we propose that Indigenous methodologies and methods contribute to a critical and important turn to such emancipatory approaches.

Similarly, in PACS, research has often strayed from its critical and emancipatory Galtungian roots and has become an uncritical positivist science whose researchers have become “servants of Western foreign ministries” (Patomäki, 2001, p. 734). PACS has evolved into a “normal” science in line with other mainstream disciplines such as International Relations or Sociology. There must be a more critical turn in PS research, adopting a much more emancipatory ontology and methodology (Juttila et al., 2008).

Further, a critical research turn will require a broadening of an “acceptable” research strategy to include qualitative and mixed methodologies, embracing an inter/transdisciplinary approach, and submerging inquiry down to the level of the “local.” The resulting research environment will be increasingly open to alternative Indigenous perspectives. Jettisoning the quantitative EI-PC research project seems unhelpful and counter-productive. Thus, when considering the significant potential of qualitative and Indigenous research methods to carry the debate down more fruitful paths, it seems logical to increasingly adopt mixed and/or other pragmatic research approaches that can consider a wide variety of voices regarding economic justice and equality.

Moving beyond design choices, we have pointed to alternative ways of thinking about economic justice, including Indigenous viewpoints. This requires a multi and trans/interdisciplinary and strategically integrative approach to investigation in the EI-PC debate and in other areas of social justice inquiry (Galtung, 2010). For example, there needs to be a unification of approaches that moves well beyond the narrow and misleading over-reliance on statistical modelling but rather incorporates the wisdom of theory builders and other qualitative sources including Indigenous peoples (Lichbach, 1989, p. 466). Feagin (2001) concurs and proposes that the complex social justice crises facing our world such as inequality will require a trans/interdisciplinary approach being both intellectual and methodologically pluralistic (p. 6). Agger (1991) views critical theory, poststructuralism, and postmodernism as accusing the traditional professional/amateur separation as positivist, and suggestive of the rigorous, disciplined, and professional nature of more “unofficial” knowledge.

In addition, there is other “valid ways of ‘seeing’ and understanding the world besides those of the dominant west” and that “local peoples must be seen as key in the construction of knowledge about their societies” (Sefa Dei et al., 2002, p. 16). If we consider this stance emphasizing that Indigenous knowledge plays a central role in this decolonization and transformation of research, like the growing body of literature related to Indigenous research methodologies suggests, (Hernandez, 2022; Johnston et al., 2018; Kovach, 2021; Lambert, 2014; Liboiron, 2021; Q'um Q'um Archibald et al., 2022; Ray et al. 2020; Strega & Brown, 2015; TallBear, 2022; Wall Kimmerer, 2020; Wilson et al., 2019), can we open new avenues for understanding the impact of economic inequality within our discipline? Can including strategically undervalued voices in PACS research debates like the roles of culture, rituals, constructive transcultural storytelling, Indigenous knowledge and peacemaking systems, and the

external challenges Indigenous justice systems face help inform complex debates like EI-PC?

We believe they can.

EI-PC research must both transcend current levels of analysis by broadening its overall scope, and auger down to the grassroots local level to investigate the effects of inequality in the close quarters of individual relationships. Concurrently, definitions of research variables must allow significant relationships including those relevant to Indigenous peoples to become visible in data analysis. Is it possible that data generated locally, at the relational level, can be integrated together with “local” data from other contexts to produce a bird’s-eye view of the effects of inequality for Indigenous peoples?

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Notes

¹ See Besançon, 2005; Caprioli, 2005; Collier, 2003; Cramer, 2003; Nfziger & Auvinen, 2002; Østby, 2008; Schock, 1996; Spoor, 2004; Stewart, 2008; Thiessen & Byrne, 2017; Thorbecke & Charumilind, 2002.

² This brings into question whether non-Indigenous researchers should study Indigenous communities, whether researchers should not be outsiders to the local communities they research and work in (Vine Deloria, 1988), or whether local and Indigenous researchers can partner in hybrid research teams with external researchers.