



INDIGENOUS
DIPLOMACIES

Edited by
J. Marshall Beier



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For Kaelyn

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Introduction

Indigenous Diplomacies as Indigenous Diplomacies

J. Marshall Beier

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly voted to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a historic development more than two decades in the making. Though its genealogy is complicated, the origins of the Declaration can be traced at least to the 1982 founding of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) through the UN Economic and Social Council. The process was, by any measure, a slow one. Even after it was approved by the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1994, twelve more years passed before the then-“Draft” Declaration was adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2006, a step necessary before it could be put before the General Assembly for ratification. In the end, a clear majority of member states voted for adoption of the Declaration. While eleven of those with representatives present for the vote abstained, more noteworthy was the circumstance that the only four votes cast against adoption came from settler states with large Indigenous populations: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. Notwithstanding this, however, the Declaration is widely regarded as a watershed development signaling a qualitative change in the fraught history of relations between Indigenous peoples and states at the global level.

As these historic events have been unfolding in recent years, disciplinary International Relations, the academic field most self-consciously devoted to the study of global politics, has seen an emergent body of work engaging and seeking to begin redress of its own silence on Indigenous peoples. These contributions join a small but growing scholarly

literature on the global political practices of Indigenous peoples by international legal theorists, historians, and others that is increasingly drawing the interest of students and researchers persuaded that an important part of the story of historic and contemporary international diplomacies has been missed with inattention to those that have been practiced by Indigenous peoples before and throughout the colonial/advanced colonial era. Arising in a field whose traditional focus has turned principally on international relations between states, much of this work has been inwardly preoccupied with broad conceptual questions raised by the “discovery” of Indigenous peoples as increasingly important global political actors—questions made all the more urgent by the sudden recognition that Indigenous diplomacies are not at all new, but merely newly noticed.

The result has been the opening of an as yet small but growing conceptual space which would seem, in the first instance, to invite more focused consideration of increasingly important intersections between Indigenous diplomacies and the foreign policies of states. Proceeding from the opening interventions of recent years, then, the focus of this volume moves from the disciplinary implications of Indigenous diplomacies to consider more directly the character and effect of those diplomacies themselves. Through the chapters that follow, a diverse group of contributors working from a range of perspectives ask what is unique about Indigenous diplomacies, what accounts for their coming into currency and their increasing influence in various global political fora and across a range of international issues in recent years, and what, if anything, these developments tell us about changes in the extant international system and the operant principle of state sovereignty. More than this, though, they also challenge us to think much more broadly about Indigenous diplomacies than the long-established preoccupations of disciplinary International Relations might incline us to do. That is to say, they engage these diplomacies as meaningful in themselves and on the terms of their own founding, not merely for their having come finally and belatedly to be taken seriously by states (and, even more belatedly, by disciplinary International Relations). Accordingly, they find Indigenous diplomacies much more broadly sited, far more nuanced and complex, and more wholly *sui generis* than a focus on recent developments at the UN alone might reveal them to be.

The upshot of this is that those of us working from a disciplinary standpoint in International Relations are very quickly disabused of any pretension we might harbor toward somehow supplementing well rehearsed notions and narratives of what diplomacy is, where it is practiced, how it may operate, and who its practitioners may be. These are not stories

untold, but stories unheard in International Relations and long silenced in hegemonic fora of global governance because they frequently will not be reconciled with dominant concepts and categories, to say nothing of power circulations. Being many and varied, they manifest as counterpoints to state-centric definitions of diplomacy and, by extension, to a body of academic work that persists in centering the state, though it may show an increasing willingness to populate the margins more heterogeneously.

Though growing, the International Relations literature on Indigenous peoples remains quite sparse. As noted above, much of this work has been concerned with the disciplinary implications of (in)attention to Indigenous peoples and what this tells us about how we theorize the international, security, and other established foci of the field (see, for example, Bedford and Workman 1997; Beier 2005; Crawford 1994; Epp 2001; Shaw 2002; Wilmer 1996). Of course, this owes to the necessity of opening a space by challenging the field's silence on and exclusion of Indigenous peoples from narratives of global politics. It is also important that there be sustained introspection on the manner of this opening inasmuch as even the most benignly conceived designs and emancipatory hopes are not immune to working unintended violences of their own. It is important to recognize, however, that as indispensable as all of this is, it is still fundamentally about International Relations more so than about Indigenous peoples and global politics. There remains precious little that is centrally concerned with Indigenous peoples' diplomacies in themselves.

Somewhat closer to the focus of this volume are texts engaging Indigenous peoples' movements in global political contexts. Of these, Franke Wilmer (1993) opens inquiry into Indigenous peoples' historical interactions with and through the states system. In an Australian context, Ravi de Costa (2006b) examines a particular tradition of Indigenous transnationalism. A growing literature, including several book-length contributions, is explicitly concerned with Indigenous peoples' responses to globalization (see, for example, Blaser et al., forthcoming; Brysk 2000; Smith and Ward 2000; Stewart-Harawira 2005). Ronald Niezen (2003) makes an important contribution with specific reference to human rights, while Paul Keal (2003) explores the emancipatory possibilities of political theory and international law, and Sharon Helen Venne (1998) examines evolving international law on Indigenous rights.

The present volume joins this growing body of work dedicated to and arising from the new awareness of Indigenous peoples as global actors. The central focus, though tackled from a variety of sites and perspectives, is on Indigenous peoples' own diplomacies—not for what they mean to or tell us about states, but as meaningful in themselves. Far from being an “add

on” or “supplement” to the notions and narratives of diplomacy that have dominated International Relations, they recommend an inversion of that inclination. That is, in their profusion, their uniqueness, their complexity, and their nuance, they suggest that the understandings of diplomacy that dominate International Relations and the hegemonic institutions and arrangements of global governance might themselves much more fruitfully be understood to “supplement” a vaster constellation of possibilities in human global interaction (of which multifarious Indigenous diplomatic traditions already comprise far and away the greater part).

Why Indigenous Diplomacies?

Despite the attention quite rightly drawn by developments at the UN through the last couple of decades, it is important to acknowledge that these developments have not arisen in that time because Indigenous peoples have only in the same span moved to assert global political agency. As a number of the chapters in this volume remind us, Indigenous peoples the world over have rich *sui generis* diplomatic traditions that long predate the onset of European colonialism. Nor, it is equally important to stress, do the developments at the UN stand as sole expressions of the sum and substance of contemporary Indigenous diplomacies. As is also clear from the chapters that follow, the UN and other hegemonic fora of global governance constitute but one sphere in which Indigenous peoples sustain external relations with other groups, including but by no means limited to states.

Still, many groups interact globally and some, like Indigenous peoples, have even achieved a degree of standing at the UN. What, then, marks Indigenous peoples apart such that it is appropriate to speak of Indigenous diplomacies rather than to subsume the global political agency this describes under existing rubrics such as, for example, “social movements” or “global civil society?” It is important to bear in mind here that Indigenous histories are notable for long historical grievances originating in Europe’s conquest of the non-European world. In many places, these endure in the imposition of the state as the presumed highest form of political community and that which need not claim its global political agency, finding it confirmed already in performances of sovereignty. Even formal “decolonization” consequently fails to undo enduring legacies of colonialism, among which is often counted the postcolonial state itself. At the same time, indigeneity is characterized by a visceral connection to land that is very much in tension with both the logics of the territorial state (not least in border areas) and

the conversion of land into property, juridical rights to which are typically enforced by the state. The goals of self-determination and the land claims that animate many Indigenous people's political struggles are simultaneously profoundly at odds with the territorial state's monopoly on sovereignty and its role in upholding property rights, obviating the possibility that it might be enlisted as an agent of change. This effectively forecloses strategies open to civil society-based movements which frequently invest considerable energies in swaying states to ally with them on the particular politics they seek to advance.

Not finding their interests well represented by the states that map demarcated claims to sovereign authority over their environs, Indigenous peoples reside in what Kevin Bruyneel (2007) calls a "third space of sovereignty," neither fully inside nor fully outside the state. Their claims are thus addressed both to and against the state in a manner that disturbs the operant assumption of the state as guarantor of rights. The disjuncture is all the more pronounced for the collective rights claims that are frustrated most fundamentally by the very imposition of the (advanced) colonial state itself. In the context of such claims, therefore, the state ceases to be the guarantor of rights and is revealed instead to be a bearer of opposing rights. The state, in these circumstances, cannot be the arbiter of claims that unsettle its own foundations and is thus determined by its own logics to become the object of resistance. For these and other reasons, Indigenous peoples' global political engagements evince particular characteristics that set them apart from those of other nonstate actors who, though they might oppose the policies of states, do not necessarily find themselves irreconcilable with their inherent logics.

Even quite apart from whatever the practical taxonomic considerations may be, however, there is more to recommend engaging Indigenous diplomacies *as diplomacies*. Though this begins with the observation that just one of many varied sets of human diplomatic practices has come to define "diplomacy," it is not simply a matter of broadening the boundaries of an academic subject matter or of a category of global political practice. Rather, and once again inverting the matter at hand, it is to ask why mainstream definitions and frameworks should be permitted to define other diplomacies out of existence when, as the contributors to this volume show, they have proved every bit as able to sustain relations between peoples, facilitating exchange and managing conflict. It is to bear in mind that contemporary diplomacy encloses a set of privileged practices, performed in exclusive spaces, well-resourced and imbued with power.

Explicitly recognizing that inter-national diplomacy has long involved many more actors and a much wider array of practices and possibilities

than our disciplinary conventions have acknowledged or the hegemonic institutions of global governance have permitted, is thus also a counter-hegemonic move inasmuch as it refuses to allow “diplomacy” as foreign policy to definitionally deny the validity of other diplomacies. It is to refuse hegemonic pronouncements upon whom or what counts as a legitimate actor in global politics and what may count as meaningful diplomatic practice. It is a rejection of a conservative politics and status quo circulations of power that would have us forfeit agency in global politics to states alone while reducing Indigenous peoples to an issue area. And in this sense, it comes once again to be “about” International Relations for the simple and important reason that International Relations *is* about Indigenous diplomacies: that is, it is about what they may and may not be allowed to be. In various ways, the contributors to this volume all deny and defy those disciplinary pronouncements as, together, they trace a path from the opening chapters that consider some of the challenges to both the study and the practice of Indigenous diplomacies, through examinations of a series of different Indigenous diplomatic traditions and how they variously negotiate and/or succumb to these challenges, and to the final chapters in which more prescriptive calls are made in terms of both the study and the practice of Indigenous diplomacies.

Organization of the Volume

Chapter 1 addresses the advanced colonial complicities of disciplinary International Relations, weighing some of the problems and the promise inherent in “forgetting,” “remembering,” and “finding” Indigenous peoples in the discipline. International Relations has not only internalized many of the enabling narratives of colonial domination, but remains very much a part and producer of the requisite knowledges of advanced colonialism. As such, it is a disciplinary terrain fraught with dangers for even the most benignly conceived attempts to engage Indigenous diplomacies. And yet, it is argued, refusing to abide these dangers offers no respite from the dilemma given that “knowledges” about Indigenous peoples are already at work. The point, then, is not to counsel against engaging Indigenous diplomacies in International Relations but to insist upon the affirmation of their independent ontological significance and that of the knowledges that underwrite them. The chapter ends with a call to resist academic conventions that would authorize Indigenous knowledges and to seek ways to open conversations that recognize the authority with which they are already spoken.

In Chapter 2, Nevzat Soguk traces the “taming” of transversality and the territoriality that became the basis for “excommunicating” Indigenous peoples of the Americas from politics, most particularly in the international sphere. Suppressing the performance of alternative epistemologies that would resist territorialization, an interactive dynamic of Europe as “rule” and America as “exception” underwrote a “radical eclipse of Indigenous agency” effectively denying Indigenous peoples a place in the international sphere and forcing them into relations of “ban,” as elaborated by Giorgio Agamben (1995). Following Armond Mattelart (2008), however, indigeneity may yet be recommunicating itself through “resurgent transversal instincts” that reopen the possibility of activating new forms of resistance that could yet radically alter Indigenous peoples’ traces on “the conqueror’s map.”

In Chapter 3, Mark F. N. Franke argues that such possibilities will not easily be realized in the interactions between Indigenous peoples and states. From a position of indigeneity, Indigenous peoples’ possible subject(ed) positions (“pre-political, sub-political, or anti-political”) have already been marked out for them in the mutually recognitive performances of sovereignty according to which states “accept each other’s credentials as valid” and defend “each other’s right to subordinate all other social and political groupings as legitimately subject to themselves or one another.” Indigenous diplomacies of the sort that have been instrumental in the historic developments at the UN in recent years have turned vitally on an Indigenous identity with which peoples find they must ultimately “contract” in order to be recognized. The challenge is to construct a “neither-here-nor-there” politics that resists the straight-jacket of ascriptions which too easily become the price of recognition in contemporary global diplomatic practice.

In a manner of taking up this challenge, in Chapter 4 Ravi de Costa finds contemporary Indigenous diplomacies rooted in classical Indigenous traditions founded upon distinctly non-Western cosmologies that urge us to rethink the boundaries of hegemonic understandings of diplomacy as well as what constitutes bona fide diplomatic practice. Often unsettling and exceeding the conventions of conduct established in modern systems of international governance, the diplomatic practices of Indigenous Australian peoples signal that to invoke Indigenous diplomacies is not to speak merely of borrowings from European traditions and practices or of a wholesale insertion into those traditions. Though the colonial encounter will undoubtedly have left its marks to greater or lesser extents in different cases, what are revealed here are practices deeply rooted in *sui generis* diplomatic traditions that have proved

themselves every bit equal to facilitating and regulating peaceful interaction and interchange between peoples.

In Chapter 5, Laura Parisi and Jeff Corntassel show how the inherent complexity of diplomacies that cannot be severed from spirituality and which are enacted through the multiple roles of Indigenous women raise a thoroughgoing challenge to state-based diplomatic conventions. Through examination of cases such as the Haudenosaunee reoccupation of lands in Caledonia, Ontario, it is argued that a politics of intersectionality and multilayered citizenship practices suggest not only more complex but also more deeply rooted and resilient diplomacies than those sustained by the habits and institutions of the states system. Denying hegemonic understandings of diplomacy, Indigenous women's diplomacies are inseparable from spiritual, familial, and community relationships. Simultaneously in pursuit of individual rights (as women) and collective rights (as Indigenous peoples) unique diplomacies have been "mobilized to ensure that the Indigenous male experience is not read as the only Indigenous experience at all levels of governance" and in ways that "reveal the limitations of traditional definitions of state-based diplomacy, as well as a purely collective rights understanding of Indigenous self-determination."

Drawing in part on her own involvement in the work of the Sami Council, in Chapter 6 Rauna Kuokkanen reflects on Sami political organization and attendant diplomacies that have worked to differing effects toward the achievement of self-determination in Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Here, linked to an enviably high degree of international influence and recognition seems to be a relatively conservative outlook that is self-consciously juxtaposed to what are perceived to be more "militant, radical, and adversarial ways of Indigenous peoples in North America." This is not simplistically reducible to something akin to a comprador mentality, however, given claims to a tradition in which "Sami strategies have always been adaptation and withdrawal." Nevertheless, it "has led to framing equality as sameness, minimizing differences and emphasizing similarities," which "takes place in the framework of individualism in which there is very little, if any, attention paid to structural relations of power."

In Chapter 7, Frances Abele and Thierry Rodon argue that Inuit have succeeded in transforming the colonial logic in the Arctic and have done so by relying upon long traditions of peaceful external relations. A tradition of free movement, for instance, is brought to contemporary effect in concert with "a sophisticated elaboration of earlier diplomatic techniques" for avoiding unnecessary direct confrontation with particular nation-states. These complex and multilayered Inuit diplomacies have proved remarkably successful both within and without the hegemonic

circuits of global governance. Without losing sight of their uniqueness, it is argued that a core of political Realism is here bound up with what might be a more sustainable approach to engaging other communities than that given us by European diplomatic tradition.

In Chapter 8, Marcela Vecchione Gonçalves looks to the diplomacies practiced by Indigenous peoples in the border areas of the Brazilian Amazon rain forest. The chapter is offered as a counter-narrative to prevailing accounts about Indigenous peoples in the region, taking up “how their idea of being Indigenous, how their explanations about indigeneity, counters the discourse of sovereignty and the political attributes of the state performed by the practice, concealment, and denial of citizenship.” Disturbing dominant ideas about sovereignty and citizenship, the concept of relationality finds Indigenous peoples of the Brazilian Amazon in a situation in which, in perennial negotiations of identity which take place in the “interstices of broader negotiations of Brazilian sovereignty,” they “are never political, they are constantly becoming political.”

Challenging dominant academic and juridical conventions aimed at regulating knowledge and author-izing the veracity of documentary sources, in Chapter 9 Keith Thor Carlson foregrounds hybridity and other (than Western) ways of knowing in a discussion of differing Indigenous and Euro-Canadian accounts of defining diplomatic encounters. Though the Indigenous accounts are marginalized for not conforming to dominant standards of reliable evidence and objective reportage, the prescience of the truths they impart is not understood or appreciated and, consequently, is lost. The implications of this go well beyond the details of the particular “facts” in dispute since, “to dismiss such stories is to close the door on another way of knowing—and to the possibility of building future respectful relations built upon the foundations of past ones.”

In Chapter 10, Heather A. Smith and Gary N. Wilson elaborate the complex and multivalent relations conducted with states, with and through intergovernmental organizations, and between Inuit groups within the Inuit Circumpolar Council. The multiple and varied articulations of Inuit forging links within states, across state boundaries, and within institutions of global governance disrupts dominant ideas of citizenship. Leaders of the ICC “situate their citizenship in multiple locations, challenging the traditional construction of citizen/state.” In so doing, they enact not only unique diplomacies, but unique and multi-sited citizenship practices as well. Similarly, they reframe sovereignty as a relationship to the land as opposed to ownership over it.

In Chapter 11, Franke Wilmer places the contemporary political struggles and justice demands of Indigenous peoples in settler states

within the context of recent postcolonial theory and narratives. A series of requisites of justice identified by Indigenous activists and leaders as an ideal set of conditions that would enable Indigenous peoples and settler states to make progress in reconciliation is reviewed. This points toward possibilities for a progressive social justice in settler states like the United States, where greater gains have been made in terms of women's issues, children's rights, and protection of racial minorities, while "social justice for Native Americans lags far behind the other emancipatory struggles that define progress in American democracy." Read in the context of diplomacies, we are reminded that it was the four settler states considered in this chapter that voted against UN General Assembly adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Finally, in Chapter 12, Makere Stewart-Harawira explores "the intersection of particular global and local interests" that are "redefining Indigenous diplomacies and ontologies in ways that have important political and ethical consequences" manifesting "bifurcations": between economic interests and self-determination, between Indigenous politics and Indigenous philosophies and ontologies. At a time of major systemic politico-economic crisis and its attendant dislocations, "at the end of empire," Indigenous political practice must more urgently than ever proceed from a "re-embedding of Indigenous philosophies and ontologies." This is not an appeal in the ethnographic present to an idealized pristine tradition, but an imperative call to recapture and sustain vital survivances in present practice.

Together, these chapters offer a modest call to further scholarly inquiry on a vast and varied terrain of Indigenous diplomacies whose richness and significance has thus far been better sensed by foreign policy practitioners than by academics and analysts. But they also raise cautions and caveats that, among other important considerations, care should be taken to engage Indigenous diplomacies as meaningful on their own terms, as practices of the present rather than artifacts of the past, and without succumbing to the pretension to re-render what might be regarded as nominally familiar in terms of hegemonic founding. As much as on these diplomacies themselves, interest and inquiry should look always to the circulations of power that variously frustrate, enable, and remake them.

Forgetting, Remembering, and Finding Indigenous Peoples in International Relations

J. Marshall Beier

Introduction

Perhaps more than any other area of academic inquiry, disciplinary International Relations is deeply invested in the project of understanding historical and contemporary diplomatic practices both in themselves and as grist for the conceptual mill. It seems somewhat counterintuitive, then, that Indigenous diplomacies would not figure prominently in International Relations, even if only as a counterpoint to the state-centrism of conventional treatments of diplomacy that seldom exceed the narrow confines of foreign policy analysis. And yet, the field has been almost completely silent on Indigenous peoples, their diplomacies, and the distinctly non-Western cosmologies that underwrite and enable them. An interesting and important development in recent years, however, has been the emergence of a small body of literature inquiring into precisely this silence. While some of these prefatory engagements have been made on matters of empirical interest, most have sought to glean some sort of conceptual insight from particular Indigenous knowledges or ways of knowing. Promising to unsettle hegemonic state-centric renderings of politics and the international, the latter offerings have been welcomed by a range of critical voices that have long decried the field's rigid statism, its tightly bounded subject matter, and its exceedingly parochial conceptual terrain.

But as laudable as these interventions may be, any call to scholars of International Relations, diplomatic history, or associated fields and

disciplines to inform their work with reference to Indigenous traditions bespeaks appropriation and raises the specter of violences of ascription, erasure, or both. Most fundamentally, the problem here is in the framing of the project—that is, in the hope that our existing conceptions of diplomacy or theorizations of the international might unproblematically draw on Indigenous knowledges. The distinctive worldviews and ways of knowing of many Indigenous traditionalisms, for example, do not at all lend well to any of the field's existing discourses on security, the good life or, more broadly, the global. The result is that the attempt to make Indigenous knowledges present in International Relations paradoxically marks an absence of the voices that have spoken them. An important caveat is thus in order before, as is one aim of this volume, calling on International Relations scholars to engage seriously with Indigenous diplomacies: the essays that follow do not merely offer up novel cases to be rendered intelligible on our disciplines' own accustomed terms; rather, they unsettle those very terms in a variety of ways, not least by problematizing the apparent ease of their exclusion.

Two main lines of pathology are immediately discernible in attempts to “bring in” Indigenous knowledges: first, the terrain of possibility marked out by the operant cosmology of Western academic discourse works violences upon commitments and ideas “otherwise constituted” when they defy its confines; and, the authority of scholarly voice is reconfirmed, even as it exceeds its competencies, while Indigenous peoples are reduced to repositories of knowledge whose speaking positions can only audibly be those of credentialed surrogates. Even sincere emancipatory designs are implicated in this to the extent that they evince a sense of ethical responsibility *for* rather than *to* the Others of mainstream academic discourse, speaking them into the discipline more than affirming their independent authority. Moreover, it turns out that Indigenous peoples have never really been absent from our theorizing after all—essential knowledges about them are bound up in and consequently reproduced by orthodox and critical approaches alike. The indeterminacy of these knowledges invites much more in the way of critical reflection, revealing that while knowledges *about* Indigenous peoples have always been an integral part of international theory, the same cannot be said of Indigenous peoples' *own* knowledges. Inquiring into how the field has forgotten, remembered, and still not found Indigenous peoples, this chapter will explore these issues and suggest a rethinking of our accustomed ways of author-izing knowledge that might begin to make more audible in International Relations the voices of Indigenous people(s) already audible in international relations.¹