

Indigenous Environmental Movements and the Function of Governance Institutions

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Abstract: Indigenous environmental movements have been important actors in twentieth- and twenty-first-century global environmental politics and environmental justice. Their explicit foci range from the protection of indigenous environmental stewardship systems to upholding and expanding treaty responsibilities to securing indigenous rights in law and policy. This chapter suggests that these movements open important intellectual spaces for thinking about the function of environmental governance institutions in addressing complex environmental issues such as clean water and forest conservation. Different from institutional functions based on market mechanisms or appeals to human psychological tendencies, a variety of indigenous environmentalists suggest that institutions should function to convene reciprocal responsibilities across relatives as diverse as humans, non-human beings such as plants, entities such as water, and collectives such as forests.

Keywords: indigenous, indigenous environmental movements, indigenous environmental stewardship, environmental governance, environmental justice

Introduction

I understand indigenous peoples to encompass the roughly 370 million persons whose communities governed themselves before a period of invasion, colonization or settlement and who live within territories where nations, such as New Zealand or Canada, are more widely recognized internationally as sovereigns. Groups identifying as indigenous typically exercise political and cultural self-determination through their own laws, rights, and governing capacities—often having to navigate ongoing forms of colonialism, such as settler colonialism, colonial legacies, and numerous legal, political, bureaucratic, and social barriers imposed by nations, international organizations, subnational and municipal governments, corporations, and groups of private citizens (Anaya 2004; Cadena and Starn 2007; Larson et al. 2008; Niezen 2003; Sanders 1977). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) articulates political and cultural self-determination as indigenous peoples’ being able to “freely determine their political status . . . and economic, social and cultural development” (article 3), exercise “autonomy or self-government” (article 4), and “strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions . . .” (article 5) (United Nations General

Assembly 2007). These articles express indigenous renditions of self-determination and cultural integrity in international human rights law.

A significant part of indigenous political and cultural self-determination involves the operation of indigenous *environmental governance institutions*, which refer to systems ranging from customs to social orderings to decision-making processes that coordinate the achievement of environmental outcomes such as clean air and water, sustainable crop yields, and upkeep of culturally meaningful places. UNDRIP also enshrines such institutions by protecting “traditional subsistence economies” (article 20), “traditional plants, animals and minerals” (article 24), and “spiritual relationships with . . . traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters, and coastal seas and other resources” (article 25) (United Nations General Assembly 2007). These institutions are often seen as the practical embodiments of indigenous cosmologies expressing webs of mutual responsibilities shared across human and non-human beings, entities, and collectives.

As major architects of environmental movements, indigenous environmentalists advance important arguments about what the function, or purpose, of environmental governance institutions should be. Different from functions discussed by people of other nations and heritages—like creating trading markets that incentivize pollution abatement or synthesizing diverse scientific sources for climate change planning—many indigenous environmentalists argue that institutions should be structured to function as *conveners*, or orchestrators, of relationships that connect diverse parties (from humans to forests) as *relatives* with reciprocal *responsibilities* to one another.

To make this case, I will provide an overview in the following section of indigenous environmentalism and the theory of institutions. Then, in the third section, I will identify a set of themes about the function of institutions in the communications of indigenous environmentalists. In the fourth section, I will analyze these themes as a framework of indigenous conceptions of the function of institutions. In the fifth section, I will describe in more detail two cases of how indigenous environmentalists have structured institutions that function in this way. I will conclude with some remarks on why indigenous institutional frameworks are important dimensions of political and cultural self-determination and should be at the table in academic and policy spheres.

Indigenous Environmentalists and Institutions

As a citizen of an indigenous nation, activist, and scholar, I have participated in and am aware of diverse indigenous environmental movements. The collective actions of these movements include declarations, public performances, direct actions, reformation of law and policy, court victories, and grassroots institution building. Numerous indigenous-led organizations spark these actions, such as networks, clubs, coalitions, nongovernmental organizations, governmental agencies and committees, intergovernmental or multiparty organizations, and research centers. Moreover, diverse persons in wide-ranging walks of life and professions are involved, including elders and youth, people of all genders, indigenous knowledge keepers and scientists, employees of indigenous governments, and indigenous activists/advocates, among many others. While certain literatures on indigenous environmentalism tend to focus on the appropriation of romantic or false conceptions of indigenous peoples’ cultures as rhetorical tools (Churchill and Jaimes

1992; Harkin and Lewis 2007; van Ginkel 2004), I emphasize instead how indigenous peoples have taken on substantial intellectual and organizational leadership.

Indigenous environmental movements have achieved too many outcomes to document here. For example, international activists shaped the environmental dimensions of UNDRIP, such as articles 23 to 25 (United Nations General Assembly 2007), and succeeded in ensuring the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) would include an International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change and support the Indigenous Peoples Biocultural Climate Change Assessment (2014). Indigenous environmentalists have pressed scientists to recognize indigenous peoples in assessment reports such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports, Arctic Climate Change Assessment, and US National Climate Assessment (Maldonado et al. 2013; McLean et al. 2011; Bennett et al. 2014; Smith and Sharp 2012). Idle No More, the Midwest Treaty Network, and the Indigenous Environmental Network have solidified both greater awareness of and concerted actions on significant environmental issues such as pollution, mining and extraction, deforestation, and removal (Idle No More Berry and Camacho 1998; Clark 2002; Gedicks 1993; Goldtooth 1995; Grinde and Johansen 1995, 2014; Igoe 2004; LaDuke 1999; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010).

Māori organizing, including the Waitangi Tribunal and its report on the river claim, spurred New Zealand's government to recognize the legal voice and rights of the Whanganui River (Te Aho 2010). Indigenous organizing in Ecuador motivated the government to recognize legal rights of tropical forests, islands, rivers, and air in its new constitution (Postel 2012; Pachamama Alliance 2008). Court victories, such as the *Saramaka People v. Suriname* in the Inter-American Court in 2009, or the *Voigt* decision in the Great Lakes region in 1983 by the US Court of Appeals, have served to protect, in certain respects, indigenous ways of life (Carlson and Coulter 2012). Western Shoshone grandmothers, Mary and Carrie Dann engaged in legal and direct actions at the US federal and international levels to resist gold mining and land seizure, achieving victories such as a 2006 review of their case by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which decided against the United States (Fishel 2006, 2007). Indigenous peoples have repurposed (*indigenized*) non-indigenous legal and policy mechanisms by creating conservation easements (Middleton 2011), tribal national parks in the United States (Carroll 2014) and protected conservation zones (Corntassel 2008).

In all these collective actions, indigenous environmentalists actively criticize, reform, envision, create, and participate in many environmental governance institutions. Specifically, environmental governance institutions refer to any systems of customs, norms, conventions, social orderings, and decision-making processes that function to coordinate various aspects of a society toward achieving certain environmental outcomes, such as pollution abatement or biodiversity conservation (Borrows 2002; Napoleon 2013; Richardson 2008; Shockley 2012). Institutions range from massive state actors such as the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, to networks such as Idle No More or the Coalition Against Tarsands, to civil society organizations such as the Sierra Club, to widely practiced cultural norms in some societies such as frugality or respect for non-human life. Theoretical debate in many academic, public, and private sectors occurs over what functions institutions should serve. I understand an institution's function to refer to the

purpose it should be structured to accomplish for achieving targeted outcomes such as safe air quality or forest conservation. The structure is made up of the specific ways in which customs, norms, conventions, social orderings, or decision-making processes are designed, articulated, and arranged strategically to carry out the function.

Possible functions of environmental governance institutions range widely, and I can only account for several here. They can integrate individual decisions through market-based mechanisms, such as carbon trading in the Kyoto Protocol or credits for conserving forests in the UN Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) program. Institutions can function to gather and synthesize critical sources of knowledge, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, US National Climate Assessment, and the Transnational Environmental Law Clinic in Detroit, Michigan. Institutions can function to establish decision-making processes or engage political leverage points that ensure all affected parties can influence policy equally, such as the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition, Tarsands Solutions Network, and EPA's Plan Environmental Justice 2014 and the Sierra Club's environmental justice program. Other institutions function to work with or appeal to the predictable psychological biases and "irrational" tendencies of individuals and groups, such as the United Kingdom's Behavioral Insight Team (the *Nudge Unit*) or the social advertising of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Each of these ideas represents a function, or conception of how institutions should be structured to coordinate various aspects of a society to achieve outcomes. The actual structures derive from number of strategic choices, such as whether to appeal to human emotions instead of tendencies toward irrationality, or whether knowledge synthesis should only include peer-reviewed research, or what metric should be used to equate forest conservation and monetary value. Institutions may also be complex, integrating different functions, such as REDD+, which seeks to achieve equitable decision-making through mandating UNDRIP as forest-carbon markets are being established by different nations. Institutional functions also vary greatly in scale, from county level conservation programs to earth governance systems. The question of what functions and structures are best for achieving environmental outcomes is actively discussed in academic, public, and private spheres. There are plenty of arguments on whether, for example, market mechanisms or social advertising, and so on, are ethically appropriate functions.

Responsibility and Institutional Function

I know of few indigenous environmental movements that fail to discuss ideas about what functions institutions ought to serve. I am drawn to a particular set of themes about institutions and mutual responsibilities. While I am sure that these themes resonate with or even support the claims found in a host of scholarly literatures, from actor-network theory to coupled human and natural systems, I seek to engage with these themes without depending on references to these literatures, many of which are discussed and cited in this volume. For the intellectual landscapes of indigenous environmental movements are often strongly rooted in indigenous people's cultures, intellectual traditions, and insights from their experiences negotiating various forms of colonialism and oppression. Here, I will highlight themes in indigenous environmentalist communications about how the function of institutions should concern mutual *responsibility*, which I hope to suggest is

different than other functions such as creating market mechanisms or synthesizing peer reviewed research. By highlighting, I will hold off on extensive analysis until later. To begin with, though, a few definitions are in order.

Indigenous environmentalists' recent communications share concerns with other groups about their communities suffering exploitation at the hands of nations, corporations, and powerful institutions, such as scientific organizations (Clark 2002; Doolittle 2010; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). Indigenous environmentalists go further and claim that institutions fail when they undermine the conditions that parties such as humans and non-human entities (for example, water) require to carry out the mutual responsibilities they have to one another. Here, mutual responsibilities will be understood as the reciprocal (though not necessarily equal) attitudes and patterns of behavior that are expected by and of various parties by virtue of the different contributory roles each has within a system of relationships (Whyte 2013). Attitudes refer to enduring dispositions such as empathy, sensitivity and trust, among others, that we can expect to express in roles such as a parental guardian, steward of a fishery, or caretaker of the elderly, among others. Patterns of behavior refer to the range of actions we can expect to discharge in such roles; what actions are appropriate can vary depending on the particular circumstances we may encounter. Our roles refer to how we are supposed to contribute to the continuance of the relationships as parties to those relationships. For example, in a parental relationship the parent may have the role as guardian, a fish harvester, as a steward, a young adult, as a caretaker, and so on. In this essay, parties have these roles because they see themselves as having special qualities, traits, and personalities that can interact systematically with those of the other parties toward achieving outcomes such as pollution abatement or community resilience to extreme weather. Responsibilities, then, are types of attitudes and patterns of behavior that facilitate the interactions needed for systems of relationships to be able to underwrite important outcomes. The notion of responsibility is closely tied to notions of interdependence, caring, sharing, reciprocity, and stewardship.

Consider, to begin with, the Indigenous Peoples Kyoto Declaration written by participants at the 2003 Third World Water Forum. The Declaration challenges institutions such as international agreements to support "Indigenous elders, women and youth to protect water" and to strengthen indigenous peoples' "role as caretakers with rights and responsibilities to defend and ensure the protection, availability and purity of water [in accordance with] traditional laws" (Third World Water Forum 2003). The statement highlights themes related to responsibility including caretaking and respect for different kinds of relations, from elders to youth, as well as indigenous systems of relationships for achieving important environmental outcomes ("traditional laws").

In 2004, a group of 17 indigenous organizations came together during the seventh Conference of the Parties (COP 7) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, and created The Manukan Declaration of the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network. The Declaration seeks to address concerns about the Convention on Biological Diversity as an institution, and claims that the Convention must respect that

We, Indigenous women, continue to affirm our cultures, histories, perspectives on creation and ancestry, our views of life and the world, and

ways of being. These ways of life are essential for the perpetuation, promotion and development of the world's biodiversity. We, Indigenous women, secure the health of our Peoples and our environment. We maintain a reciprocal relationship with Mother Earth because she sustains our lives... Our right to self-determination is fundamental to the freedom to carry out our responsibilities in accordance with our cultural values and our customary laws ... (Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network 2004).

The Declaration argues that institutions such as the Convention on Biodiversity should support indigenous political and cultural self-determination, both of which are tied to systems of relationships. A collective, "Mother Earth," is also assigned a role as "sustaining our lives." Roles and responsibilities are not only for humans.

Other declarations and statements reiterate similar language. The Rural and Indigenous Women's Statement on Climate Change, submitted to the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2009, is critical of the institutions associated with the Kyoto protocol because they are based on markets or trading schemes for emissions, such as the Clean Development Mechanism and Joint-Implementation. The statement criticizes the "market-based" functions of these institutions because they fail to address "exploitation [by] . . . northern countries and transnational corporations in the name of development." The statement also argues that, at the same time, these institutions affect indigenous women's responsibilities because they "undermine rural and Indigenous women's roles and contributions to sustainable livelihoods, ecological health and human security including food sovereignty" (Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development et al. 2009). This sentence is supported by a growing literature that seeks to acknowledge and respect the often invisible contributions of indigenous women as "crucial biodiversity managers, custodians of seeds, keepers of sophisticated water management systems and agricultural technology (Fincke and Oviedo 2009), long term observers and recorders of cyclical environmental change (Glazebrook 2011: 769), protectors of water (McGregor 2012), among many other contributions (Arora-Jonsson 2011; Mandaluyong Declaration 2011; Whyte 2014).

The Mystic Lake Declaration of 2009 takes similar positions. The Declaration integrates the voices of a small gathering of community members, youth and elders, spiritual and traditional leaders, indigenous organizations, and supporters of indigenous peoples, who gathered in the Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Oyate. The Declaration criticizes market-based institutions by claiming:

We are concerned with how international carbon markets set up a framework for dealing with greenhouse gases that secure the property rights of heavy Northern fossil fuel users over the world's carbon-absorbing capacity while creating new opportunities for corporate profit through trade... the largest number of rights is granted (mostly for free) to those who have been most responsible for pollution in the first place.

The statement states, as an alternative,

We choose to work together to fulfill our sacred duties, listening to the teachings of our elders and the voices of our youth, to act wisely to carry out our responsibilities to enhance the health and respect the sacredness of Mother Earth, and to demand Climate Justice now... We hereby declare, affirm, and assert our inalienable rights as well as responsibilities as members of sovereign Native Nations... Mother Earth's health and that of our Indigenous Peoples are intrinsically intertwined... This inseparable relationship must be respected for the sake of our future generations...

This Declaration, as with others, emphasizes the contributions of different roles within a society, from elders to youth, interdependence, and responsibility. Rights and responsibilities are also distinguished. Corntassell, a Cherokee scholar, argues that rights are “political/legal entitlements” that “[deemphasize] the cultural responsibilities and relationships that Indigenous peoples have with their families and the natural world (homelands, plant life, animal life, etc.) that are critical for their well-being and the well-being of future generations . . . (Corntassel 2008: 107–8). Though both are important, rights and responsibilities differ. As an entitlement, a right can secure access to a resource, but it cannot necessarily motivate a responsibility to care for that resource as part of a system of relationships.

In the Rio Earth Summits in 1992 and more recently in 2012, large gatherings of up to 500 indigenous persons took place, resulting in two declarations, the Indigenous People's Earth Charter from the Kari-Oca Conference in 1992, and the Kari-Oca 2 Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples Global Conference on RIO+20 and Mother Earth in 2012. On institutions, the 2012 Declaration invites

civil society to protect and promote [Indigenous] rights and worldviews and respect natural law, our spiritualities and cultures and our values of reciprocity, harmony with nature, solidarity, and collectivity. Caring and sharing, among other values, are crucial in bringing about a more just, equitable and sustainable world. In this context, we call for the inclusion of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development (Kari-Oca 2 Declaration, 2012).

In this declaration, culture is equated with entire systems of relationships that are tied to responsibilities. These values are viewed as part of the fundamental function of institutions.

In the Water Declaration of the Anishinaabek, Mushkegowuk and Onkwehonwe from the 2008 First Nations Water Policy Forum convened by the Chiefs of Ontario, it is stated that these peoples “have a direct relationships with all waters . . . that must be taken care of to ensure that waters provide for humans . . . for all living things . . . forests, land, plants, marine life, air, fish, insects, birds, animals . . .” (Chiefs of Ontario 2008). Water, then, has responsibilities to humans and other forms of life as a party within a system of relationships. McGregor, an Anishinaabe scholar and activist who participated in the events leading to this Declaration, argues for the importance of institutions to facilitate “the life that water supports (plants/medicines, animals, people, birds, etc.) and the life that supports water (e.g., the earth, the rain, the fish). Water has a role and a

responsibility to fulfill, just as people do. We do not have the right to interfere with water's duties to the rest of Creation . . . water itself is considered a living entity with just as much right to live as we have" (McGregor 2009: 37–8).

The declarations and statements of indigenous environmentalists just referenced are not meant to be part of an exhaustive list. Yet, from looking at just these examples, indigenous environmentalists have made a number of arguments connecting the function of institutions to concepts associated with responsibility, such as interdependence, caring, reciprocity, and the roles involved in particular kinds of relationships. In the next section, I will offer my interpretation about what these communications are saying about what function many institutions ought to have. In the fifth section, I will provide specific examples of how institutions can be structured to perform this function.

Institutions as Conveners of Responsibilities

The communications referenced in the previous section are philosophically complex. I will interpret the communications discussed in the previous section as establishing a theoretical framework of the function of environmental governance institutions. The framework differs from the market-based or knowledge synthesis functions described earlier because it is grounded in the connection between institutions and mutual responsibilities. Again, I understand an institution's function to refer to the purpose it should be structured to accomplish for achieving environmental outcomes. The structure, then, is made up of the specific ways in which customs, norms, conventions, social orderings, or decision-making processes are designed, articulated, and arranged strategically to carry out the function.

To begin with, the communications just discussed are adamant that institutions should function to endorse systematic interactions among parties who are seen as having different roles in relation to one another. Institutions must function to acknowledge and elicit these various roles. That is, institutions should be structured to support the different parties in their recognizing and (or) acting as *relatives* of one another. As parties, when we see ourselves or act as relatives, we can exercise our responsibilities (attitudes and patterns of behavior) to other parties as contributions to ensuring that the system of relationships achieves the needed outcomes. More specifically, though, as relatives, our responsibilities must aim to do their part in supporting the conditions needed for each relative to exercise its role. For example, as humans, we may be responsible for being careful with what we do in relation to water (damming, recreational activities, pollution, and so on) because we can affect the conditions required for water to perform its role in serving to provide life for the plants and animals that depend on a certain water quality. Water, in turn, can be seen as having a responsibility to attend to the conditions that plants, animals, and humans require to perform all the responsibilities they may have to one another. So, here, relatives have responsibilities to support the conditions needed for other relatives to practice their roles within a system of relationships that produces important environmental outcomes. My interpretation of the communications in the previous section rests on the idea that institutions function in ways that respect and elicit systems of relationships in which the parties recognize themselves and (or) act as relatives of one another.

The indigenous environmental framework I am exploring, then, suggests that institutions must be structured to function as conveners of processes that renew or initiate systems of relationships that form the basis of reciprocal responsibilities among *relatives*. In short, institutions should function to convene *relatives and responsibilities*. Here, convening involves *facilitating* or *orchestrating* and sorts of processes, or protocols, that can help the different parties to see themselves and act as relatives with responsibilities. There are examples of this outside the environmental activism sphere that concern primarily humans, such as the Navajo Peacemaker Court. The process of the Peacemaker Court, an alternative to Western punitive justice, “focuses on establishing communication between the participants by encouraging them to address each other in the process. Each person may bring family members and friends to the court, and their opinions and support are encouraged by the system because all acts, according to Navajo tradition, affect the community” (Wall 2001: 541; Yazzie 1994). The Peacemaker Court brings together a process by which the parties associated with some wrong have to come to see themselves as relatives of each other who are part of a larger system of relationships that serve certain outcomes such as community tranquility and accountability.

Convening, then, is a kind of facilitation for ensuring that parties recognize in themselves and others that they are relatives with mutual responsibilities. A key aspect of this framework is that it is open to a pluralism of different and changing roles of relatives. These roles need not favor one culture’s worldview about animal or plant agency or about whether earth or bodies of water have personalities. Rather, there is an appreciation of the evolving, adaptive and creative qualities of these roles. Some of the unquoted passages of the declarations referred to earlier appreciate the special contributions of scientists, even though the profession and work of the particular kinds of scientists being referenced do not originate in indigenous cultures and have often oppressed. The Mystic Lake Declaration, for example, claims that “Science can urgently work with traditional knowledge keepers to restore the health and well-being of Mother and Grandmother earth.” So there is a need to continue to find ways of seeing parties who may not have typically interacted as relatives.

Convening also involves processes for moving on and ending certain relationships, such as mourning. Wilcox writes that

at the 2009 Conference of the Parties [UNFCCC]... the Tuvalu Delegation publicly shared their grief, sadness, and distress about the destruction of their coastlines and the rapid disappearance of parts of their island due to rising water levels. Ian Fry, one of the lead negotiators for Tuvalu, wept during his public speech, and this emotional outpouring of grief...served to disrupt the conversations momentarily, and to cause discomfort throughout the delegation” (2012).

Indeed, the emotion expressed by the Tuvalu delegation disrupted the COP and mobilized NGOs and others to support stronger responsibilities to address climate justice (Farbotko and McGregor 2010).

Convening relatives and responsibilities is a function of institutions that differs from some of the functions described earlier, such as those based on markets, equity, and appeals to human psychology. Convening involves bringing us to an awareness of the

special qualities we have as relatives. This is different from functions that see humans as irrational choosers, voters, and profit maximizers, and non-humans as inert objects, goods, resources, and flows. Convening casts parties in terms of their contributor potential as sources of action. Again, processes and protocols of convening are not limited to one cosmology's conceptions of contributory potential. Convening also places tremendous importance on culture in several senses. Indigenous cultures are seen ideally as ones in which parties are supposed to *acknowledge* (instead of ignoring or being unaware of) their roles within systems of relationships connecting humans, non-human beings and entities, and collectives. More broadly, indigenous environmentalists see achieving environmental outcomes as requiring no less than bonds across many parties that are as rich and systematic as cultural relationships. Culture, then, is foundational for motivating people to engage in environmentally responsible behavior; this emphasis on culture can be contrasted with the foundations of other functions that posit markets, regulation of people's choices, and democratic structures as tools toward motivating environmentally responsible behavior.

I understand many indigenous environmentalists, then, as positing a framework of institutional function that has aspects such as a theory of agency through the idea of roles and relatives; and a theory of the morality and justice of the appraisal of institutions through the idea that institutions ought to convene mutual responsibilities and systems of relationships modeled on the richness of cultural systems. These aspects of the framework are important for non-indigenous parties to understand because they reflect indigenous expectations of how to respect the political and cultural self-determination enshrined by UNDRIP. Since I am introducing an outline of this framework to readers in this essay, in the next section I will discuss in more detail some of the structures that indigenous environmentalists have designed to convene relatives and responsibilities.

The Mother Earth Water Walk and the Nmé Stewardship Program

In this section, I describe two examples of *Anishinaabe* environmental movements in the Great Lakes basin, the first involves Anishinaabe Grandmothers, the second, the Natural Resources Department of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians. I select these two examples because they arise from different ends of the spectrum of indigenous environmentalism; the first is a direct action, viral movement; the second is an initiative by a US recognized indigenous governmental agency. Both illustrate structures of how to convene relatives and responsibilities.

The Mother Earth Water Walk was initiated by two Anishinaabe Grandmothers along with a group of women and men in response to concerns about water quality outcomes in the Great Lakes due to pollution from industrial facilities such as factories and large farms, as well as activities such as commercial fishing, tourism, and vacationing, and climate change. In terms of the structure of the institution, the walkers, including Grandmother Josephine Mandamin, started walking first around Lake Superior in the Spring of 2003, and then, year after year, around other large lakes. The springtime walks include an Anishinaabe water ceremony, feast, and celebration, and the participating Grandmothers take turns carrying a water vessel and eagle staff.

The structure arises from the Anishinaabe cosmology that understands water as acting as a source and supporter of life, which enables the supported life forms to

contribute to each other in unique ways. Water is considered a relative with responsibilities to life (Chiefs of Ontario 2008). Humans, in turn, have responsibilities to care for and respect water as relatives too; they must especially do things that encourage water's life giving force. Ceremonies are structured to remind people of their connections to water and bodies of water are considered to have their own unique personalities. Anishinaabe women, in particular, have responsibilities to attend to the quality of water, responsibilities to develop and pass on knowledge of water and its stewardship to younger generations. They also have responsibilities to take action to protect water when its quality is compromised (Foushee and Gurneau 2010; Lavalley 2006; McGregor 2012). The Water Walk calls out people of other nations and heritages to focus on and learn about their responsibilities to water, developing new relationships with water as a relative.

The Water Walk has important achievements for supporting greater convening of relatives and responsibilities. The Anishinabek Nation, an indigenous multi-party organization that plays an important role in Canadian politics, created the Women's Water Commission for bringing women's voices into Ontario and Great Lakes water issues. The explicit goal of the commission includes fostering "the traditional role of the Women in caring for water." The Commission seeks to encourage recognition of traditional responsibilities along with the need to include women as part of the decision-making processes (McGregor 2012: 12–13). The Walk has also spread across North America, becoming a regional form of action that includes more people each year, not just Anishinaabek alone (Mother Earth Water Walk 2013; McGregor 2012). The Mother Earth Water Walk is an institution structured to function as a convener of relatives and responsibilities, and facilitates responsibility based attitudes and patterns of behavior toward water.

The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians is located in the Western part of the lower peninsula of what is now called the state of Michigan by most people. The band is Anishinaabe, and the government includes a Natural Resources Department staffed by band members, along with indigenous and non-indigenous persons. The community has a cultural system called *Baamaadziwin*, which translates into "living in a good and respectful way" (Mitchell 2013: 21). Director Jimmie Mitchell describes the *Baamaadziwin* as motivating people to do more than only be "good and just," but "to being servants, devoting ourselves to making a difference in all that has occurred and may still be occurring within our respective communities and environment . . . [which] includes restoring the balance of our shared natural environment and of all inhabitants who are dependent upon a robust ecosystem" (Mitchell 2013: 22). One example is the Nmé (Sturgeon) Stewardship Program, which seeks to restore Nmé populations in the Big Manistee River. Nmé are on the decline from historic overharvesting from newcomers, dams, stocking rivers with other species for tourists and sport fishing, and environmental change. Nmé is an important species for Anishinaabe as it figures as a source of food but also as an integral part of clan identity. An elder, Jay Sam, refers to sturgeon as "The grandfather fish (sturgeon)," and that it would "sacrifice" itself "so the people would have food until the other crops were available." Sturgeon is a clan spirit and leaders would sign their names in treaties with the images of the clan spirits, such as sturgeon (Holtgren 2013: 135).

To re-connect Anishinaabe and Nmé, the Department sought to renew Nmé as a relative and encouraging in humans responsible attitudes and patterns of behavior. The Department started a cultural context group made up of a diverse range of tribal members and biologists that would develop goals and objectives for restoration. Biologist Marty Holtgren describes the cultural context group as facilitating “a voice” that “was an amalgamation of cultural, biological, political, and social elements, all being important and often indistinguishable” (135). Holtgren discusses how the goal was to “restore the harmony and connectivity between Nmé and the Anishinaabek and bring them both back to the river . . . Bringing the sturgeon back to the river was an obvious biological element, however, restoring harmony and connectively between sturgeon and people was steeped in the cultural and social realm. Each meeting began with a ceremony, and the conversation was held over a feast” (Holtgren 2013: 136). Ultimately, the Department established a riverside rearing system for protecting young sturgeon before they can be released each fall. The program is based on relationships with government, non-profit, and community partners in the watershed, and the integration of scientific and indigenous knowledges of Nmé.

Every September, a public release ceremony occurs involving a pipe ceremony and feast. Each attendee guides a young sturgeon to its release. Today, the event can garner hundreds of attendees. The new relationships become stronger as the members of the relationships realize their own responsibilities to Nmé. This was evidenced at the last annual and public sturgeon release ceremony, which I attended. Participants, including many children, according to their own ways, are beginning to feel a sense of responsibility to Nmé or sturgeon. Moreover, many commented that they had come to realize that it is people who also depend on Nmé. The fish have the power to reconcile and create new relationships among people. This is a major development in a watershed where settler colonialism strains people’s relationships. Importantly, the participants need not take on the exact Anishinaabe way of thinking and living, but they are embracing a sense of themselves as relatives and a mutual responsibility that respects Nmé as a relative. It is too soon to be certain, but current evidence suggests that the program is headed for success in restoring Nmé populations (Holtgren et al. 2014).

Environmental governance institutions such as the Mother Earth Water Walk and Nmé Stewardship Program are structured to facilitate a convening of relatives and responsibilities. Importantly, both emphasize the roles of relatives in terms of their contributory potential within systems of relationships and are inclusive of culture. They show signs of being successful in their outcomes in terms of improving how people understand interdependence with non-human beings and entities and collectives. They also are set up to succeed in terms of more typical management aims such as clean water or the recovery of sturgeon populations.

Conclusion

There are many reasons why indigenous ideas about institutions as conveners of relatives and reciprocal responsibilities should be at the table in the policy sphere when different functions and structures of institutions are debated, planned and put in motion. They form a key dimension of how indigenous peoples exercise political and cultural self-determination as it is understood in UNDRIP. They also offer important institutional

tools for achieving outcomes such as pollution abatement or forest conservation, and have unique niches in terms of their emphases on culture and responsibility, which are often absent in other frameworks of the function of institutions. In academic circles, indigenous environmentalists should be at the table in conversations about the morality and justice of market-based and other institutions commonly asserted as potential solutions for global earth governance institutions. If indigenous peoples are involved from the beginning, discussions aiming for cross-pollination should continue to occur between indigenous ideas and emerging trends in institutional scholarship such as ecosystem fit (Folke et al. 2007), ecosystem stewardship (Chapin et al. 2010), coupled human–natural systems (Liu et al. 2007) and actor–network theory (Latour 2004), among others.

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