IN PURSUIT OF SELF-DETERMINATION:
INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S CHALLENGES TO TRADITIONAL
DIPLOMATIC SPACES

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INTRODUCTION

When addressing a British treaty delegation in the late-1770s, Tsalagi (Cherokee) peace chief Ada gal’kala asked, “Where are your women?” He was speaking to the British exclusion of women in their treaty party; in contrast, Tsalagis always brought delegations comprised of men, women and youth to participate in negotiations. While Indigenous women had been actively engaged in international diplomacies prior to and during first contact with colonial powers, Ada gal’kala’s question becomes even more salient today when examining Indigenous activism within global fora such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and sites of resistance to state authority, such as the continuing Zapatista (EZLN) self-determination movement in Chiapas, Mexico, and the recent Haudenosaunee (Six Nations Confederacy) reclamation of their homelands in Ontario, Canada.

Although women’s rights are now officially codified as human rights (CEDAW 1979), the rights of Indigenous peoples have yet to be formally codified (despite the creation of a UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2000) in the UN system with the failure to ratify the Draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.1 However, due to colonization and on-going imperial influences, both women’s rights and Indigenous rights movements have been problematic spaces for Indigenous women’s participation in treaty making and standard setting in international legal fora. Both rights movements often require Indigenous women to make trade-offs (either as women or as Indigenous peoples) rather than make space for the more fully intersectional frameworks that Indigenous women have been lobbying for.

As Vinding (1998: 12) notes, Indigenous women have been “… underrepresented in Indigenous organizations and are seldom heard in international fora”. 2 Thus, Indigenous women

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1 The Draft Declaration was approved by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2006. As of this writing, the date for the UN General Assembly ratification vote has not yet been determined.

2 The United Nations has not adopted an official definition of Indigenous peoples, but working definitions, such as the one developed by the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1986, offer some generally
have had to create new diplomatic spaces at the global, regional, state, and local levels to pursue simultaneous negotiations for both their individual rights as women and collective rights as members of Indigenous nations. In this article we ask, what are the implications of Indigenous women’s unique location in terms of representing themselves in diplomatic arenas? How have the strategies of both feminist and Indigenous transnational networks in opening up current diplomatic spaces for women’s and Indigenous rights influenced current Indigenous women’s mobilization? How have international institutions, states, and human rights transnational networks responded to the interventions made by Indigenous women?

In addressing these questions, we first assess the notion of diplomacy as applied to Indigenous women’s political activities and strategies. We argue that, based on Indigenous women’s narratives of their own work and positions, Indigenous women engage in a politics of intersectionality in framing their diplomatic engagements. The concept of intersectionality encompasses a feminist theoretical and methodological approach to a non-essentialized identity politics and provides a basis for social justice action (AWID 2004: 1). Intersectional approaches start from the analytical premise that people’s identities, i.e., gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, etc., are not mutually exclusive or additive, but rather multiple, layered, and inter-related and, as such, produce unique and specific experiences that are not easily essentialized (AWID 2004: 1-2). Intersectional approaches take into account how the multi-dimensional nature of identities are derived from and embedded in “... social relations, history, and the operation of structures of power” (AWID 2004: 2). Intersectional approaches go beyond simplistic binary gender-based analysis, which examines only one relationship of power, to highlight how social categories “… gain meaning and power by reinforcing and referencing each other” (CRIAW 2006: 8). Furthermore, “…for Indigenous women, who have long experienced violence and discrimination based on multiple identities, the notion of ‘intersectionality’ is not an arcane academic concept but daily lived reality” (IIWF 2006: 6). Therefore, intersectional analysis is an appropriate tool for understanding how Indigenous women locate themselves as diplomats in their families, clans, communities or nations, host states, and the transnational and international

accepted guidelines for self-identifying Indigenous peoples and nations:

- Self-identification as Indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member;
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies;
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources;
- Distinct social, economic, or political systems;
- Distinct language, culture, and beliefs;
- Form non-dominant groups of society; and,
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2006).

While there is a great deal of discussion over the complexities of defining 370 million Indigenous peoples around the world, ultimately the question of who are Indigenous women is best answered by Indigenous women themselves, rather than imposing a state derived categorization that potentially reproduces colonial constructs of Indigenous women. This is especially important since Indigenous women’s organizations, such as the International Indigenous Women’s Forum, also do not define Indigenous women. Although this may make the use of the term “Indigenous women” seem unwieldy or homogenous, the emphasis on self-identification is congruent with the criteria set forth by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and acknowledges the agency of Indigenous women in determining their own identities, thereby rendering the definition of Indigenous women as fluid and heterogeneous.

For more on who is Indigenous, see Corntassel (2003).

3 The term, host state, is the most grammatically precise and widely used phrase describing those countries containing Indigenous peoples within their borders. However, this term should not be construed to imply a sense of undue state cordiality, especially given the severe treatment that several Indigenous populations have received at the
arenas.

For Indigenous women, these locations, i.e., families, communities, host states, and international fora, are not approached as separate, mutually exclusive spaces but rather as interlocking entities in which local issues are connected to global ones and vice-versa. This framing can be thought of as multi-layered citizenship “… in which one’s citizenship in collectivities in the different layers – local, ethnic, national, state, cross- or trans-state, and supra-state – is affected and often at least partly constructed by the relationships and positioning of each layer in a specific historical context” (Yuval-Davis 1999: 122). As Yuval-Davis suggests, the multi-layer model of citizenship presents a challenge to western understandings of citizenship that equate citizenship (and, by definition, diplomatic activity) solely with the state, and allows for analysis that is gendered and non-western-centric (1999: 118).

Multi-layered citizenship is not necessarily hierarchical in the sense of traditional International Relations understandings of levels of analysis. Rather, the layers are relational, overlapping, intersecting, and contextual, allowing for an understanding of acts of citizenship that are simultaneous across and within various layers rather than isolated acts within a hierarchy of levels of governance that are construed as mutually exclusive. For example, Yuval-Davis (1999: 122-123) includes the concept of “intimate citizenship” which problematizes and politicizes the profoundly feminized domestic or private sphere as part of her construction of multi-layered citizenship. This frames citizenship, which in the Western tradition is usually thought of as only a public act, as inextricable from private life. This move allows for the analysis of the gendered body as a site of “… multi-layered rules and regulations” (Yuval-Davis 1999: 123), which is particularly important to Indigenous women’s struggles against violence as well as the protection of their ancestral homelands. It also provides a conceptual space for the inclusion of Indigenous women’s spirituality and informal leadership responsibilities deemed to be outside of the public sphere, which are often marginalized or ignored when utilizing Western citizenship frameworks. By adopting a multi-layered citizenship framework, spirituality and politics become interconnected and Indigenous women’s multiple and intersecting roles and responsibilities as family members, clan mothers, leaders, etc. become an integral part of an examination of diplomatic strategies.

By building on the theoretical aspects of intersectionality and multi-layered citizenship by analyzing Indigenous women’s activism through a series of case studies that demonstrate the multiple and linked levels of Indigenous women’s diplomatic activities, we show how the diplomatic activities of Indigenous women reveal the limitations of traditional definitions of state-based diplomacy, as well as a purely collective rights understanding of Indigenous self-determination. We analyze the EZLN uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, Indigenous women’s participation in regional and global fora, and Indigenous women’s responses to the issues of violence and land rights in Canada to highlight how Indigenous women have enacted intersectionality as a diplomatic strategy to represent themselves on their own terms.4

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4 Some of the analysis will draw upon the authors’ observations of and experience with working in these fora. Both authors attended the 2004 UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples (Special Theme: “Indigenous Women”). Corntassel also attended the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples in 2003 and represented the Cherokee Nation at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva during the 1999 and 2000 meetings. Parisi attended the Indigenous women’s caucus meetings at the Beijing +5 meetings in 2000. We acknowledge our privilege in attending these fora and our ability to write about these issues, but do not purport to speak on behalf of Indigenous women.
INDIGENOUS DIPLOMACIES

Although traditional (Realist) understandings of diplomacy in the field of International Relations have focused on the ability of sovereign states to negotiate solutions with one another in order to maintain peaceful relations and to avoid militarized conflict and/or war, Indigenous nations practiced diplomacy long before first contact with colonial powers by sending delegations to global destinations in order to foster new alliances of peace and friendship.\(^5\) Since Indigenous nations often identify as self-determining political entities, the realist understanding of diplomacy does not fully capture the complex nature of Indigenous interactions that occur both within their communities and in external relations between other Indigenous nations, states, and international organizations. For example, Indigenous nations regard their strategic interactions and formalized relationships with colonial host states as foreign policy, rather than as domestic policy, since many “… see themselves as citizens in the communities of the stateless societies which existed in these countries” prior to colonization (Yuval-Davis 1999: 126).

For Tsalagis (Cherokee Nation), as with other Indigenous nations on Turtle Island (North America), political diplomacy goes hand in hand with spiritual integrity (Deloria and DeMallie 1999; Martinez 1999; Williams 1997). For example, prior to any treaty negotiations or ceremonies, male and female Ani-Kutanis\(^6\) spiritually prepared themselves and the community – they were entrusted to renew their spiritual relationships so that spiritual and political compacts would be kept. This is best exemplified by the Tsalagi principle of Wi-gaduwaga, which roughly translates into “… I will always be up above in all things that influence me in life; in the uppermost; for us to follow or emulate”.\(^7\) Wi-gaduwaga, which carries meaning far beyond the scope of diplomatic exchanges, describes spiritual commitments that supersede all political relations. Other Indigenous nations have similar philosophies and practices regarding diplomacy, further demonstrating that the process of renewing spiritual and political relationships is often more important than the negotiated outcome. According to Oren Lyons (1984: 5), Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation, “… Spirituality is the highest form of politics, and our spirituality is directly involved in government”.

The Realist assumption that state-centred diplomacy is unitary and representative of its citizens is also problematic for Indigenous peoples who challenge the legitimacy of host states, especially if the Indigenous nation in question traverses state borders, such as the Tohono O’odham (United States-Mexico) and the Kanien’kehaka (Mohawks) (Canada-United States). The emphasis on state centred and driven diplomacy also complicates matters at the international, institutionalized level, i.e., the United Nations, among others, in which states hostile to Indigenous peoples’ interests (despite the UN Draft Declaration) are expected to protect their state sovereignty while at the same time to negotiate Indigenous challenges to it. This tension is clearly exemplified by the Canadian government’s recent (June 2006) vote on the Human Rights Council against bringing the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to a ratification vote by the UN General Assembly later that year. To the dismay of many Indigenous nations and human rights groups in Canada, the Canadian government claimed that parts of the Draft Declaration contravened Canadian law and that it should be renegotiated, despite the fact that the Draft Declaration has taken more than twenty years to develop and

\(^5\) For more historical details on these diplomatic missions see Viola (1995).
\(^6\) Not directly translatable into English but the meaning approximates being “part of the ancient Tsalagi priesthood” (Conley 2005: 14).
\(^7\) Telephone interview, 5 March 2003, with Benny Smith (Cherokee Nation) is Elder and Director of Counseling Services at Haskell Indian Nations University, Kansas, USA.
Canada has been directly involved in the revision process all along.

The aforementioned examples of how Indigenous peoples have positioned themselves in the diplomatic arena reveal some of the limitations of a narrowly defined understanding of diplomacy as primarily a state-based activity. Indigenous women have sought to complicate this picture even further by challenging not only the state driven model of diplomacy but also Indigenous nation centred depictions of diplomatic activity and treaty making. They have done this through enacting a politics of intersectionality, which demands that their multiple locations as women and as Indigenous peoples must be made visible, and by linking the local to the global and the private to the public, thereby challenging the artificial boundaries of these political and personal spaces.

**INTERSECTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AS DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES**

Although not all Indigenous women may use the formal concept of intersectionality\(^8\) when referring to their work, they are aware of their unique locations in terms of their simultaneous pursuit of individual rights (as women) and collective rights (as Indigenous peoples) and how these identities are inextricable from, and define, one another. In the words of Blanca Chancoso, an Indigenous woman from Ecuador, at the Second Continental Meeting of Indigenous women in Mexico, December 1997:

> We, Indigenous women, wish to be recognized as people with rights, not only duties. We need to be seen, within our families and communities, not only as cooks and child-bearers, but as female human beings. This is what we want, not to be seen as second-class people. We need our voices to be heard as the expression of one single thought and one heart in order to strengthen our position as indigenous peoples. [Indigenous women] cannot separate nor feel isolated from the situation lived by indigenous peoples, nor can they detach themselves from their own situation as women within these peoples. (quoted in Palomo 1998: 279-280)

There is no doubt that there are many other intersecting identities, such as class, sexuality, age, ability, spirituality, religion, geographic location, motherhood, etc. that are applicable to Indigenous women’s lives.\(^9\) Yet, for the purposes of this discussion, the above quote not only succinctly illustrates a core intersectional identity that guides many Indigenous women’s diplomatic activities but also frames their diplomatic activities in a rights discourse that is easily identifiable in a number of examples.

A few International Relations scholars have noted how marginalized/invisible Indigenous peoples are in the global diplomatic arena (Beier 2007; Shaw 2002; Wilmer 1993). As Beier (2007) notes, Indigenous diplomacies have not been fully articulated by scholars in the field. For example, Epp’s (2001: 301) definition of Indigenous diplomacies as Indigenous practices is too sweeping, since it begs the question of whose practices, and on whose behalf? As Rao (1995) argues, political positioning or activity done in the name of culture or a cultural group is not value or power free. It matters whose voice is heard – especially in the context of Indigenous diplomacies since Indigenous cultural and political practices have not been immune to the effects of on-going colonialism. Indigenous women have been quick to recognize the limitations of a Western definition of diplomacy that is purely understood as a state based activity as well as

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\(^8\) Nor may they explicitly subscribe to feminism, which is often perceived as a Western construct. See Tohe (2000) for a thoughtful discussion of this issue.

\(^9\) See, for example, the essays in IWGIA (2004); Zea (1999); Vinding (1998).
notions of Indigenous diplomacy that recognize only the activities of the official representatives of nations, who are, more often than not, male. In summing up the position of Indigenous women in Latin America, Alderete et al. (1994: 9-10) argue, “… the invasion of non-Indian values has drastically changed the relationship between men and women and the role that women play in the communities and nations … from now on, we will work on the continental level, in a coordinated manner, and we will actively participate in local, national and international meetings.”

This observation by Alderete et al. links together the issues of colonialism, gender inequality, and resistance. One notable consequence of Western imperialism has been the shift from matriarchal and/or matrilineal or gender equitable to patriarchal and/or patrilineal societies and the subsequent devaluation and invisibilization of Indigenous women’s contributions to public and private life in many Indigenous communities.¹⁰ Thus, the nation as a political and diplomatic representative for Indigenous women vis-à-vis the state, as well as in international fora such as the United Nations, is fraught with difficulties as Indigenous women’s interests are often ignored. In the global Indigenous rights fora, Indigenous women have fought to keep their interests from being subsumed under Indigenous rights rhetoric that does not take seriously the important intersection of indigeneity and gender. Such an approach assumes that Indigenous men and women experience infringements on their rights in the same ways. Put another way, Indigenous women have mobilized to ensure that the Indigenous male experience is not read as the only Indigenous experience at all levels of governance.

For example, the political mobilization of Zapatista women within Mayan communities in Chiapas, Mexico resulted in the ten Revolutionary Laws for Women in 1993, which now help guide the EZLN’s self-determination struggles (Millán 1998). This was a significant achievement, yet most news media outlets failed to even acknowledge the adoption of the Revolutionary Women’s Laws, which were read on the radio and published online as part of the EZLN’s first proclamation on 1 January 1994 (Millán 1998: 74-75). Although there has been debate about how much actual change has occurred in everyday gender relations as a result of these laws (Olivera 2005), the diplomatic process that gave rise to them deserves special attention.

The laws were the result of an effective diplomatic strategy of a long period of community consultation and consensus building within and across Mayan communities (Castillo 2002). This consensus building was achieved through the affirmation that Indigenous women cannot, and should not, separate their lives as women and as Indigenous peoples. The ten Revolutionary Laws reflect the intersections of these identities by insisting, for example, that Indigenous women have the right to choose the number of children they have and who to marry as well as the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle as soldiers and leaders. As Castillo (2002: 386) notes, these women “… questioned their historical exclusion from political spaces and [advanced] a platform advocating democracy from within the private, family space”. Thus, Zapatista women issued a challenge to both government and Indigenous discourses by pointing out their intersecting oppressions as Indigenous peoples within the state, and as women in their own communities, where cultural arguments justifying gender inequality were prominent. As Subcomandante Marcos, leader of the EZLN observed, it was a “… revolution within a

¹⁰ The authors recognize that this statement is an overgeneralization, which masks the vast differences between Indigenous nations, but due to space limitations cannot delve further into this important point. Yet, many Indigenous and post-colonial scholars have also made this point, suggesting that the general idea is applicable to many nations. For more, see Smith (2005) and Loomba (1998).
revolution” (as quoted in Pellarolo 2006). Yet, despite the fact that these viewpoints were also incorporated in the first round of accords (San Andreas) that both the government and the Zapatista leadership signed (thus setting the stage for representation at the global level), and the fact that approximately 30 percent of EZLN members are women, Zapatista women continue to struggle to fully implement the Revolutionary Law for Women within their communities (Millán 1998). The Zapatista women’s experiences are notable in that they have served as an inspiration for Indigenous women around the world and have influenced many Indigenous women’s participation in treaty processes in the state, regional, and global arenas.

An important example of the pressure that Indigenous women have exerted in these regional and global fora is their work in the UN Working Group on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and, since 2002, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Indigenous women have been somewhat successful in raising issues in these fora that speak to their experiences as Indigenous women, thereby reconciling their collective and individual rights. For example, early versions of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN 1993) did not include any gender specific language with regard to violence against Indigenous women. However, Article 22:2 of the most recently adopted version calls on both states and Indigenous communities themselves to protect Indigenous women’s rights: “States shall take measures, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, to ensure that Indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination” (UNHRC 2006).

This is a significant example of Indigenous women’s intersectional identities at work, since it alludes to both violence and discrimination perpetrated by the state as the result of colonization and on-going colonial processes, as well as to violence in their communities. It acknowledges that violence against Indigenous women has taken a specific form and shape (especially domestic violence and sexual abuse) that is not equally applicable or the same as the violence that Indigenous men have experienced in the colonial process. Rather, it names the profoundly gendered private sphere of family and community violence as well, and holds Indigenous communities accountable for their actions. It is also an illustration of the complexities of multi-layered citizenship in that it intersects the private and public spheres with community, state, and systemic practices.

Indigenous women’s intersecting interests were also front and centre at the 3rd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, the special theme of which was Indigenous women. The final report of the session elaborates on the very specific location of Indigenous women with regard to their unique social, political, cultural, and economic locations. For example, the report is critical of the UN Convention Against Racial Discrimination for its lack of attention to the interstices of gender more generally, and lack of attention to Indigenous women specifically. The report also highlights the Western, male bias against Indigenous women’s knowledge systems and implores UN agencies and member states to empower and consult with Indigenous women with regard to program development and implementation in order to ensure their specific needs are met at all levels of governance (ECOSOC 2004).

Indigenous women have intervened in the women’s human rights arena as well. In this context, Indigenous women’s caucuses at the 1995 UN 4th World Conference on Women and the

\[11\] For a recent interview with Subcomandante Marcos in which he further elaborates on the position of Indigenous women in the EZLN, see Bogado (2006).

\[12\] Early versions had as a basic non-discrimination clause, “All the rights and freedoms recognized herein are equally guaranteed male and female Indigenous individuals,” which is retained in the most recent version under Article 44.
follow up conferences (Beijing +5 and Beijing +10) have sought to demonstrate a model of the mutual interaction between individual and collective rights that challenges the women’s human rights discourse emphasis on liberal individualism. One important example of Indigenous women’s diplomacy was at the 1995 Beijing conference where the Indigenous women’s caucus, compromised of 110 Indigenous women representing approximately the same number of organizations from 26 countries, drafted their own Declaration of Indigenous Women in response to the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) that had undergone an extensive preparatory process (Vinding 1998: 316). Although Indigenous women had been involved in the treaty process through regional prep com (Preparatory Committee) meetings, many of their concerns, such as Indigenous self-determination, were not directly translated into the final Platform for Action. In addition, the PFA distorted and essentialized Indigenous women’s identities by depriving them of agency and naturalizing their marginalization, setting them up as “… targets for ‘development’ interventions” (Espinosa 1997: 240).

The Indigenous Women’s Declaration challenged the PFA framing by employing an intersectional analysis that concretely and historically linked the issues of globalization and neo-imperialism, the legacies of colonization, and gender inequality. As such, it shed light on the problem of incorporating Indigenous women into neo-liberal development schemes that threaten the self-determination and cultural integrity of Indigenous peoples and have contributed to the marginalization of Indigenous women, thereby calling into question the naturalization of their marginalization. In addition, as Article 5 of the Indigenous Women’s Declaration illustrates, Indigenous women actively contest their framing as objects, rather than as active subjects:

We, the women of the original peoples of the world have struggled to actively defend our rights to self-determination and to our territories, which have been invaded and colonized by powerful nations and interests. We have been and are continuing to suffer from multiple oppressions; as indigenous peoples, as citizens of colonized and neo-colonial countries, as women, and as members of the poorer classes of society. In spite of this, we continue to use, protect, transmit, and develop our indigenous cosmovision, our science and technologies, our arts and culture, and our indigenous socio-political and economic systems, which are in harmony with the natural laws of Mother Earth. We still retain the ethical and aesthetic values, the knowledge and philosophy, the spirituality, which conserves and nurtures Mother Earth. We are persisting in our struggles for self-determination and for our rights to our territories. This has been shown in our tenacity and capacity to withstand and survive the colonization happening in our lands in the last 500 years. (DIW 2005: 317)

While this description of themselves acknowledged the many challenges that Indigenous women face, it also presented a more far-reaching and complex view of how these challenges are interlocking and mutually sustaining than the PFA does. It also highlighted the spiritual dimensions and obligations of their diplomatic work with regard to maintaining cultural integrity that is in sync with nature; this is a decidedly different positioning from that of the Western essentializing discourse that depicts Indigenous women’s relationship with nature as primarily scientific.

Indigenous women also forcefully asserted their agency and called into question their inclusion in the women’s rights discourse and movement that does not take responsibility for its complicity in perpetuating neo-imperialist practices (DIW 2005: 320-321, Article 16). In their critique of the PFA, Indigenous women made clear the limitations of the women’s rights
discourse that asks them to trade off their rights as Indigenous peoples in order to claim rights as individual women that are predicated on the principle of sex discrimination. Rather, they argued that systemic or structural gender inequality is inextricably linked to other structural systems of inequality, such as racism and capitalism.

THE POLITICS OF DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT: INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN CANADA

As suggested throughout this article, Indigenous women occupy multiple sites of citizenship and intersecting identities that frame their on-going diplomatic engagements at all levels of governance. Indigenous women on Turtle Island and around the world currently engage in diplomatic strategies that demonstrate the complexity of their political and cultural relationships. In this section, we illustrate these practices in the context of Canada through an examination of “… life and land struggles [for which Indigenous women] … have assumed leadership for a way of life focused on health and healing,” emphasizing the need for spiritual and cultural renewal (Jaimes-Guerrero 1997: 215). We acknowledge that there are vast differences among Indigenous nations in Canada and we do not assume homogeneity of cultural practices, experiences or worldviews. However, there are two issues that link all Indigenous communities: violence and land rights. These two issues have been at the forefront of many Indigenous women’s movements and organizations in Canada,¹³ and they are concretely linked to the diplomatic activities of the Canadian state, international organizations, and international treaties.

A recent example of Indigenous women’s diplomacy illustrates the resurgence of Indigenous women’s leadership in Six Nations Confederacy and demonstrates the complex linkages between internal and external community relations. On 28 February 2006, Rotinoshon’non:we (Six Nations Confederacy) clan mothers and warriors reclaimed 40 hectares of their traditional territory in Ontario. The disputed Haldimand Tract, which includes six miles of territory on each side of the Grand River, had been granted to Six Nations peoples by the British Crown (subsequently Government of Canada) in 1784 and Six Nations’ title to this territory had never been relinquished. In order to prevent a housing developer, Henco Industries Ltd, from constructing a new sub-division on their homelands, Six Nations clan mothers and warriors re-occupied their traditional territory along the Grand River.

The roots of the Haudenosaunee re-occupation began in October 2005 when Six Nations’ spokeswoman for the hereditary chiefs, Janie Jamieson, organized a potluck in order to commemorate the 221st anniversary of the Six Nations’ Haldimand Tract (Walkom 2006). As part of the commemoration, Jamieson held a two-day protest (along with the potluck supper) at the site of the proposed sub-division, and the event was widely attended by community members. The potluck supper was an interesting diplomatic strategy to pursue within the community, since cooking is often thought of as a domestic activity and the responsibility primarily of women. Thus, an activity typically thought of as belonging to the private sphere helped shape the public sphere diplomatic response. After publicizing the illegality of the proposed sub-division for several months, Jamieson and her allies received permission from the hereditary chiefs to occupy the site indefinitely, and they re-occupied the territory on 28 February 2006 (Walkom 2006).

From the very beginning of the struggle, Rotinoshon’non:we clan mothers established themselves as the legitimate representatives of the Six Nations peoples and the true title holders of their homelands because, as Janie Jamieson explains, “… In our teachings, all forms of life come from the women. All responsibilities towards life come from the women” (Edwards 2006).

¹³ These two issues are also featured prominently in the 1995 Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women.
After pointing out that the elected Six Nations Council of Grand River, set up under Canada’s 1876 Indian Act, did not represent the Rotinosh'on:we people, the clan mothers, along with hereditary chiefs, took the leadership role as the legitimate protectors and representatives of Six Nations territory people by meeting directly with federal negotiators. In fact, on 27 March 2006, the clan mothers and hereditary chiefs sent the federal negotiator back to Ottawa and demanded that an appropriate Canadian authority, i.e., Attorney-General, Governor-General, be sent to Caledonia in order to engage in authentic diplomatic negotiations.

Behind the barricades, clan mothers also exerted their authority with warriors by lining up in front of them at heated moments in the stand-off in order to quell action against OPP police forces until it was deemed necessary. For example, on March 28, 2006, more than a hundred Indigenous women, including clan mothers, locked their arms in a human chain to prevent police officers from crossing the barricade. As one young Six Nations’ warrior relates in his observations during the occupation, “… I saw clan mothers there [at the barricade] every night. I never saw one Chief there, not once in the entire blockade, I never saw a Chief. But there were clan mothers there sitting with the people, talking with us and supporting us any way they could” (Alfred 2006:24).

Utilizing all diplomatic avenues available to them, Rotinosh'on:we clan mothers, as “Title Holders” of the land, also issued an “Objection to Invasion of Kaianereh’ko:wa Territory by the Foreign Governments of Canada and Ontario” on 20 March 2006. Citing the illegality of Canadian/Ontario governments’ invasion of their traditional territory in Caledonia, clan mothers invoked UN General Assembly resolution 1541, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), Canada’s Constitution Act of 1982, as well as the traditional laws of Rotinosh’on:we, including Two Row Wampum and Wampum 44 (Rotinosh’on:we Clan Mothers 2006). The clan mothers also asserted that the only legitimate forum to discuss the illegal encroachment onto Haudenosaunee territory was “… the traditional Rotinshon’non:we process as set out in the Kaianereh’ko:wa [and that] Canada and Ontario have no authority to make political decisions on behalf of our People” (Rotinosh’on:we Clan Mothers 2006).

The clan mothers’ declaration was presented to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in May 2006, as well as to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Geneva. In response to the clan mothers’ oral intervention at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the attending Canadian delegates abruptly left the room. However, UN officials responded quickly to the clan mothers’ declaration. On 22 May 2006, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples, and Pablo Espinilla, a Human Rights Officer, visited Kanehsatake and Kahnawake communities to document the struggle to retake their original Kaianereh’ko:wa territory. As of this writing, the blockade continues and all forms of Haudenosaunee diplomacy have been utilized at the local and global levels. The ongoing leadership and diplomatic strategies of the Rotinosh’on:we clan mothers demonstrates the complexities of internal and external diplomacies that Indigenous women continue to pursue in order to re-establish their traditional roles as community leaders, both spiritually and politically.

Canada has also come under fire from a number of sources for its poor human rights record with regard to violence against First Nations women (NWAC 2006; AI 2004). Indigenous women have engaged in multiple intersecting acts of diplomacy addressing the issue of violence, drawing on their daily life experiences as the basis for these diplomatic activities. Their engagement with multi-layered strategies means that diplomatic relations pursued at one level of governance can influence and condition other levels of governance. For example, NWAC was
invited by the United Nations to submit their evaluation of Canada’s compliance to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) with regard to Indigenous women. This evaluation process strengthened NWAC’s diplomatic recognition and position beyond the Canadian state and, as a result of this report, they have been able to leverage their agenda onto the global stage. This, in turn, has put external pressure on the Canadian government.

Indigenous women are also pursuing the issue of violence within their own communities. Their fight against violence in their communities is conditioned by their location as part of a wider Indigenous struggle against the Canadian state, which is connected to the global Indigenous rights movement as well as women’s rights movements more generally. As Andrea Smith (2006: 17) notes, Indigenous women operate in a “… framework that understands Indigenous women’s struggles as part of a global movement for liberation”. Thus, Indigenous women fighting against violence in their communities are operating on multiple and intersecting layers of identity and citizenship, thereby simultaneously acting as diplomats on the global level.

The following story, a recent example of Indigenous women’s diplomacies, illustrates the intersections between political and spiritual actions at the familial and community levels. Chiinuuks (Ruth Ogilvie) from Cheklesant/Tla-o-qui-aht, was one of the organizers of the 4-14 May 2006 “Stop the Violence” march which mobilized women, men, and youths to travel to all fifteen Quu’as (Nuu-chah-nulth) communities, and to honour a young woman in each community. Chiinuuks discusses the motivations behind the march:

When I went home recently, I was upset by what I saw – there wasn’t one woman in my community who hadn’t been affected by violence. Our people are in pain and are being pushed out of any political processes. If we were to move forward collectively, we needed to speak about this violence. As former members of the West Coast Warrior Society, we had been dealing with the violence of the state but not violence within our communities. We needed to address how some of our people became oppressors within our own communities.

The 2006 march was a continuation of an earlier march against violence that occurred in 2004 in response to the rape of a young Tla-o-qui-aht woman two weeks after she had been honored in a Quu’as coming of age ceremony. According to Quu’as protocol, young women coming of age are presented with shawls that depict their family histories as part of the Aayts’tuu’tla ceremony, which means “holding women up”. In order to hold young Quu’as women up and take a stand against violence in 2006, fifteen shawls were made by Tla-o-qui-aht fashion designer Denise Williams to represent all fifteen Quu’as nations. During the 2006 “Stop the Violence” march, a young woman from each of the fifteen communities was presented with a shawl and honoured by her family and community. As Chiinuuks explains:

As far as community involvement, we wanted them to choose which women would participate … All women in our communities are to be held up. Traditionally, a shawl would be made for a particular woman to be held up and her family history would be depicted on the back of the shawl. We would then

14 While the marchers received some logistical support from other groups, such as phone calling cards and water taxis, they tried to be as self-reliant as possible. The names of the fifteen Quu’as communities are: Pacheedaht, Huu-ay-aht, Uchucklesaht, Hupacasath, Tseshaht, Kyuquot/Chakesaht, Ehattesaht/Nuchatlaht, Mowachahaht/Muchalaht, Hesquiahht, Ahousaht, Toquaht, Ucluelet, Tla-o-qui-aht, Esowista, and Opitsaht.

15 Personal interview, 30 June 2006. For an extended published interview with Chiinuuks and a male participant in the march, see Coulthard (2007: 29-31).
literally hold each of these women up – reminding these women that they also had responsibility to do this for other women in the future. It is all about accountability for all involved.\textsuperscript{16}

The 2006 and 2004 marches received very little media coverage, but these were significant events as part of an Indigenous women’s political movement to break the silence on the issue of violence, and retake their places within Quu’as communities. Although the march may seem like a purely grassroots community event, it is embedded in a larger set of diplomatic relations, commensurate with Indigenous women’s multi-layered citizenship. There are several critical points to be made here. First, as Andrea Smith (2005: 137) argues, “…sexual violence has served as a tool of colonialism and white supremacy; the struggle for sovereignty and the struggle against sexual violence cannot be separated”. The march was undertaken as an act of resistance to the colonial processes that resulted in internalized sexism. By promoting the physical and spiritual health and well being of all members of their nations, these nations will be in a better position to challenge the Canadian state to do more about violence against Indigenous women as well as to address other interrelated structural issues such as economic marginalization.

Second, the march was embedded in the larger discourse of Indigenous women’s rights. The use of the shawls, as a form of spiritual diplomacy and as a strategy to unify communities, illustrates the importance of using the specific historical intersections of gender and Quu’as culture to effectively convey the more general demand articulated at the global level “… that Indigenous customary laws and justice systems which are supportive of women victims of violence be recognized. That Indigenous laws, customs, and traditions which are discriminatory to women be eradicated” (DIW 1995: 324, Article 36). Finally, the march exemplifies how Indigenous women are reclaiming leadership and exercising diplomacy based on pre-colonial female roles in their communities.

CONCLUSION
As indicated in our opening paragraph, Indigenous women historically have had an important role to play in Indigenous diplomatic activities. However, due to colonization and ongoing neo-imperial practices, Indigenous women have often been marginalized and invisiblized. In response to these developments, Indigenous women have challenged the traditional diplomatic structures and activities in their communities, host states, and at the international levels in ways consistent with their understandings of their responsibilities as Indigenous women. They have sought and continue to seek self-determination for themselves as women and as Indigenous peoples. As such, their diplomacies are not just political processes in the Western sense. They are also spiritual processes that are inextricable from their lives as Indigenous women. As Sharon Venne explains, “… Our spirituality and our responsibilities define our duties… Our sovereignty is related to our connections to the earth and is inherent” (as quoted in Smith 2006: 17).

This analysis has sought to complicate the study of Indigenous diplomacies by using an intersectional framework that highlights the intersecting identities of Indigenous women. Indigenous women use these intersecting identities as the basis of their diplomatic activities, and such an analysis is important in understanding both the wider Indigenous rights movement and the women’s human rights movement. Indigenous women have engaged in a politics of intersectionality that allows them to represent themselves on their own terms by invoking both the global Indigenous and women’s human rights discourses to further their aims. For example,

\textsuperscript{16} Personal interview, 30 June 2006.
this analysis reveals that, for Indigenous women, there can be no true Indigenous self-
determination as long as internalized sexism exists in their communities. Conversely, there can
be no true gender equality for Indigenous women unless the women’s rights movement takes
seriously their struggle for Indigenous self-determination. These positions are critical to
incorporate in Indigenous and women’s diplomacies at all levels of governance. Indigenous
women’s intersectional positioning mirrors what Yuval-Davis (1999: 131) calls “transversal
citizenship politics” in which it is possible to pursue equality across difference by breaking down
perceived homogeneity of specific identity groups in diplomatic spaces, such as Indigenous
peoples and women. Furthermore, transversal citizenship politics also recognizes that there is
much “unfinished knowledge” in these processes (Hill-Collins 1990: 236, as quoted in Yuval-
Davis 1999: 131).

The idea of unfinished knowledge allows for the construction of Indigenous women’s
diplomacies as an evolutionary process. For example, the connections between their diplomatic
activities in both the Indigenous and women’s rights arenas have continued to deepen and inform
one another. Even though there was dissatisfaction with the final Beijing Platform for Action,
many Indigenous women’s groups felt that the prep com experience for Beijing was an
extremely valuable one in that it marked a turning point in transnational activism and networking
of Indigenous women and provided a crucial opportunity to develop skills to push the Indigenous
women’s rights movement to the next level (Zea 1999; Espinosa 1997). This helped to provide a
basis for Indigenous women’s leadership and participation in the regional prep com meetings for
the Third Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Special theme: Indigenous
Women).

In addition, the 1995 Beijing Conference was the first time that a UN women’s
conference recognized Indigenous women’s liberation struggles (Jaimes-Guerrero 1997: 216). As a result of their participation in the Beijing process, Indigenous women have since organized in a more systematic fashion to ensure that their issues stay on multiple political agendas. For example, the International Indigenous Women’s Forum was born out of the Beijing process and it has served as a central mechanism for Indigenous women’s networking for Beijing +5 and Beijing +10. Through this forum, they have issued declarations and resolutions, provided leadership and training workshops, worked on capacity building, and furthered a more integrated vision as Indigenous women. Following a three-day Indigenous Women’s conference in which more than 110 women from 22 countries representing every region of world participated prior to the Beijing +10 meetings (IIWF 2005a), the IIWF issued a declaration for Beijing +10 that was far more specific in its recommendations than the one issued at Beijing. Building on their work at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (especially the report issued after the 3rd Session), it stressed the need for the following:

- the ratification of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- that gender issues should be the central focus of the 2nd United Nations Decade on
  Indigenous Peoples; and,
- that the Millennium Development Goals for gender equality should be approached with
cautions, given Indigenous women’s unique circumstances. (IIWF 2005b)

The Declaration also emphasized that “... indigenous peoples’ rights are indigenous women’s

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18 There are many other examples, such as the Indigenous Women’s Summit of the Americas in 2002 and the 2nd
Asian Indigenous Women’s Conference in 2004, which are relevant to our concluding discussion. However, due to
space limitations we cannot address all of them here.
rights,” reinforcing the inextricable relationship between the two (IIWF 2005b). During the Beijing +10 meetings, they also held two press conferences, one specifically to address violence against Indigenous women. Finally, they were one of the few women’s groups that were able to get a resolution passed at Beijing+10 – a testament to their organization and the deepening of their diplomatic skills at the international level (IIWF 2005c). Overall, the experience reaffirmed the notions of multi-layered citizenship and diplomacy: “The interplay between the conference and the B+10 events also enabled us to bring an Indigenous perspective to B+10 and take away from that process an enhanced gender perspective that will infuse our local work” (IIWF 2005a).

In conclusion, Chief Ada gal’kala’s question, “Where are your women?” posed in the 1700s is being answered by Indigenous women on Turtle Island today. In 1997, Indigenous Tenochtitlan women of Mexico at the Second Continental meeting of Abya Abya, declared “Our presence cannot be denied” (as quoted in Palomo 1998: 284). Nor can the fact that Indigenous women are engaging in new forms of diplomacies to assert self-determination on their own terms be ignored. Because of this, Indigenous women’s diplomacies are redefining what it means to be traditional.
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