

The Politics and Practices of Indigenous Representation in Global Environmental Governance

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Abstract

Although the literature on global environmental governance is rich with accounts of the growth of non-state actor participation in environmental treaty negotiations, especially related to climate change and biodiversity, scholars' primary focus has been on the engagement of large, international NGOs. There is less attention directed to the extent to which and how indigenous peoples and organizations engage in global environmental governance. Using data collected at three global events through collaborative event ethnography—the 2010 Tenth Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, the World Parks Congress in Sydney in 2014, and the 2015 21st Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris—this paper examines the practices and politics of indigenous representation in global environmental governance. I examine how indigenous peoples and organizations strategically navigate these international policy arenas. The results show that through scalar resistance, translational contestation, and performance, indigenous peoples and organizations are creating opportunities to translate their presence into influence and challenging the hegemony of state-centered representation in global environmental politics.

Background

- Global Indigenous Population:
- 370-550 million (4.5-4.8% of global population)
- 1/3 of world's poor
- Govern 22% of global land area

- 2-3% of delegates in international environmental negotiations
- Speaks at pleasure of negotiation hosts, cannot introduce new proposals

Field Sites of Global Environmental Governance

Convention on Biological Diversity
Tenth Conference of Parties (Nagoya, Japan)
October 2010



6th World Parks Congress (Sydney, Australia)
November 2014

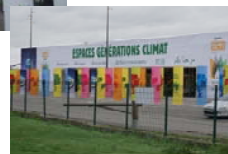


Climate Generations
(open to the public)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
21st Conference of Parties (Paris, France)
December 2015



Blue Zone (delegates only)



Data Snapshot

	CSO COP17	World Parks Congress	UNFCCC COP21
Team members	17	12	7
Event duration	11 days (18-29 October 2010)	8 days (12-19 November 2014)	11 days (30 November – 11 December 2015)
# sessions attended by team members	280 (25 of these attended by two or more team members, resulting in 305 sets of observations)	170+	175+
Analyses	Scale, translation, performance	Scale, translation, performance	Scale, translation, performance
Themes	Participation, markets, science	Justice, human rights, indigenous rights	Indigenous rights, justice
Topics	Climate, access and benefits-sharing, protected areas, sustainable use, marine, cooperation with other agreements, agricultural biodiversity, forests, resource mobilization	REDD+, forests	Forests, biodiversity, climate change
Team organization	Formal team structure	Informal collaboration	Formal team structure
Author's role	Graduate student researcher	Independent investigator	Principal investigator

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Research Questions

- (1) Under what conditions does indigenous representation emerge in global environmental governance?
- (2) How is indigenous representation practiced, constrained, and conditioned in international policy-making arenas?

Collaborative Event Ethnography

- Team-based approach to ethnography for covering mega-events
- Common Analytical Framework
 - Politics of Scale
 - Politics of Translation
 - Politics of Performance
- Teams divided using a matrix with themes and issues (see data snapshot, also Brosius and Campbell 2010, Campbell et al 2014)

Results and Discussion

States, NGOs, and Indigenous Peoples practice representation in different ways. Both states and NGOs use different tactics to *speak of* indigenous peoples that effectively silence and/or exclude them from global environmental governance. States, for example, often speak of indigenous peoples in their state-delineated boundaries to showcase their states cultural diversity while simultaneously denying indigenous peoples their rights and a voice in decision-making processes. NGOs, while helpful in promoting descriptive representation of indigenous peoples by providing training and support for indigenous participation at these events, also silence indigenous peoples. They do this by claiming to speak for indigenous peoples, deploy homogenous indigenous identity, and separate interests from identity. In response to under-, mal-, and mis-representation in global environmental governance, indigenous peoples have steadily increased not only their presence in global environmental governance but are pursuing representation as a strategy to influence these processes through three main avenues:

1. **Scalar Resistance:** resisting the reputational gains states secure through discursive representation of indigenous peoples by holding states accountable through social media, public shaming, and scaling up and relocating indigenous representation to the global scale.
2. **Translational Contestation:** contesting the ways in which NGOs construct, deploy, and make meaning for indigenous peoples by public debate and discursive resistance.
3. **Performance and Performativity:** forming and strengthening collective indigenous identities through performance and performativity to highlight difference. They reorient the language of diplomatic spaces, make their presence known through traditional clothing and thus speak even when silenced, and highlight difference to reflect on indigenous ways of seeing themselves through cultural events and performances.

Although indigenous peoples account for only 2-3% of participants at these events, their presence is significant. Indigenous peoples are challenging the state- and NGO-driven norms of representation that restrict access and silence marginalized voices. Through performance in particular, indigenous peoples are changing the languages of diplomacy, bringing in visual and silent tactics to directly represent themselves and transform their presence into influence.

References (select)

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