Northern Lights: Fourth World Nations and the Geopolitical Dance in the Arctic

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Northern Lights: Fourth World Nations and the Geopolitical Dance in the Arctic

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Engaged Diplomacy
Abstract

Over the past decade, the Arctic region has received increased attention from climate scientists, politicians, and transnational corporations. Human-induced climate change is causing glaciers to recede, resulting in new northern sea passages that are highly sought after by businesses and governments alike. Deeply affected by this increased northern exposure are Arctic Fourth World nations – politically and culturally distinct nations encapsulated by states – that have lived in the Arctic for millennia. This paper examines the impacts that expanded northern sea routes are having on Arctic Fourth World nations and the conflict mitigation approaches being used in the region. Research was conducted while working for the Center for World Indigenous Studies, a Fourth World nation research and education organization. Primary data was collected through participant observation during the COP 17 United Nations Convention on Climate Change in December 2011, and from an extensive literature review of Fourth World theory and Arctic geopolitics. Data was analyzed from the perspective of Fourth World theory in the hopes of building upon this critical analysis of geopolitical phenomena.
"Movement will always be a necessary part of life in the Arctic. We do our best to prepare our young people for that reality."

--Inuit Elder

**Introduction**

The Arctic is experiencing severe anthropogenic climatic changes which have led to melting glaciers, a decrease in biodiversity, and the destruction of human nutritional sources, infrastructure, and settlements. In addition, melting ice is giving way to new northern sea passages, resulting in shorter and more profitable shipping lanes for trans-state businesses and governments, yet causing massive disruptions to Arctic ecosystems and the diverse cultures that inhabit them. Arctic Fourth World nations -- distinct political nations encapsulated by Arctic states -- and the bio-culturally diverse regions they
represent are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change and potential new shipping lanes. Yet, given their long histories of cultivating symbiotic relationships with the niches they inhabit, Arctic Fourth World nations demonstrate tremendous capacity to adapt to these changes. Their hypotheses and instrumentation may look and feel different than the Cartesian-based scientific methods the western world places its faith in, but it is precisely this epistemological endowment that necessitates their full and effective participation in mitigating the environmental, social, economic, and political challenges of a warming Arctic region – and beyond.

Within expanded and new northern sea passages, financially powerful states and corporations literally find themselves in uncharted waters. As governments concern themselves with Arctic security measures, and shareholders envision the wealth potential of untapped resources, there is growing concern over the social and ecological repercussions of receding ice, and the danger that comes with navigating expanded waterways. Thus, the empirical knowledge of the region that Arctic Fourth World nations hold is an increasingly important and strategic component of northern geopolitics. A gradual awareness is emerging that all parties involved in the Arctic region are entangled in a complex and challenging web of interdependence. This northern geopolitical tension is increasingly being referred to as the new “cold war” and while there is currently no direct violence in the region, the potential for future conflict is alarming.
Fourth World theory provides a theoretical framework that examines the relationship between Fourth World nations, states and transnational corporations. Ryser, Nietschmann, and Griggs – the preeminent developers of Fourth World theory – use it as an analytical lens through which to test the existence of social phenomena where political and cultural changes are rapidly occurring in Fourth World communities. This emerging theory not only intends to describe social phenomena – it seeks to enact social change by addressing the fundamental imbalance of power that has resulted from the international state system and hyper-capitalism. With regards to the geopolitical dance in the Arctic, Fourth World theory provides an alternative, comprehensive examination of the complexities of international and inter-state relations in the region. It also places great emphasis on the dynamic interplay between humans and place. Using Fourth World Theory, this paper examines the geopolitical and biocultural implications of new northern sea routes on Fourth World nations in the Arctic.

Inquiry Selection

This inquiry selection stems from my personal experience with having been born and raised near the Arctic region of Alaska, my deep concerns over the increasingly narrow, standardized epistemology and practices of globalization,
and from my recent role as research assistant with the Center for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS). Founded in 1984, by Dr. Rudolph C. Ryser of the Cowlitz Nation and Chief George Manuel (1929-1989) of the Shuswap Nation, CWIS serves as a response to calls by Fourth World leaders to create an international documentation center for indigenous peoples. As an independent non-profit research and education organization, CWIS is dedicated to a wider understanding of the social, economic and political realities of indigenous peoples (cwis.org).

My specific role with CWIS was to assist Dr. Ryser in a Fulbright-sponsored research project on indigenous food security and climate change adaption in Western Mexico. It was through this work that I became increasingly curious about Fourth World theory and its practical applications. In addition to three months of fieldwork, I was invited to participate in the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) Adaptations Working Group in December 2011, as part of the two-week long COP (Conference of Parties) 17 Convention on Climate Change in Durban, South Africa. For two weeks, Dr. Ryser and I read, discussed, and edited draft statements that were introduced by representatives from various Fourth World non-governmental organizations present at the meetings in Durban.

In taking part in the Adaptations Working Group and in my ongoing learning sessions with Dr. Ryser, it was brought to my attention that within academia and political discourse a great deal of emphasis is placed upon the
increasingly-marginalized status of Fourth World nations. While such realities undoubtedly characterize many of their circumstances, little attention is given to the unique geopolitical stance that some Fourth World nations are beginning to assert. A global undercurrent of indigenous policy-assertion, networking, organizing, educating, and living autonomy is emerging—especially since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. This resurgence promises to not only transform the social, political, and economic realities of Fourth World nations, it also holds tremendous potential for all of humanity’s ability to respond more collaboratively to increasingly-complex global challenges.

Fourth World geopolitical leadership, however, cannot operate in isolation. Its offerings flourish best when done in cooperation with educational institutions, policy makers, states, and businesses. With its increasing geopolitical, bio cultural, and economic significance, the Arctic Region serves as an important case study for both Fourth World theory and conflict transformation. Key parties in this northern dance include some of the world’s most financially and politically influential states, as well as emerging Fourth World geopolitical leaders. It is this dynamic of northern interest, alliances, and conflict transformation approaches that I am particularly interested in examining. The specific questions addressed are:

*What are the geopolitical and bio-cultural implications of new northern sea routes on Fourth World nations in the Arctic region?*

*Sub-questions:*


1. What key nations and states are engaged in diplomacy in the Arctic?
2. What are the geopolitical and bio-cultural significances of this region?
3. How can Fourth World theory contribute to our understanding of Arctic conflict?
4. What conflict transformation approaches are being used in this region?

Research Methods

This course-linked capstone is the result of an in-depth literature review of Fourth World theory, the geopolitical and bio-cultural implications of new northern sea routes on Arctic Fourth World nations and states, and conflict transformation approaches. In addition, it incorporates participant observations that were made as part of my work with Dr. Rudolph Ryser between October 2011 and February 2012 and, especially, during our virtual participation in the Conference of Parties 17 Convention on Climate Change in Durban, South Africa in December 2011. Given his forty years of serving as an international diplomat between Fourth World nations and states and the fact that he is one of the co-creators of Fourth World theory, much of my literature review is influenced by resources that Dr. Ryser has come to rely upon. The literature review section on the geopolitical and bio-cultural implications of new northern sea routes involved a systematic review of journals, books, websites, on-line articles, and twitter feeds that relate to Arctic geopolitics in the past decade -- which is when the thrust of climate change literature and resulting political and economic implications has been generated. The literature review on conflict transformation approaches utilizes coursework materials from conflict
transformation courses at the SIT Graduate Institute, Fourth World theory
resources, websites, and on-line articles.

The Fourth World

Nations versus States

The term *nation* is incorrectly used in most political rhetoric. The Unites
States refers to itself as a nation. Canada views itself as a nation. The largest
governing instrument in the world, the United Nations, sees itself as being
comprised of a multitude of nations. In the article *The Fourth World: Nations
Versus States*, however, Bernard Nietschmann describes a nation as a “cultural
territory made up of communities who see themselves as one people on the
basis of common ancestry, history, society, institutions, ideology, and language”
(Nietschmann, 1994). People are born into nations and cannot become
members of another nation simply by moving into (or taking over) a new
territory, adopting a particular kind of dress, or learning a new language.
Nations are self-identifying and act as cultural homelands. Deeply
interconnected with place, they evolve slowly through the dynamic interplay
between humans and a particular environment. “Because no group of people
has ever voluntarily given up its territory, resources, or identity, a nation is the world’s most enduring, persistent, and resistant organization” (Nietschmann, 1994).

The modern state, on the other hand, is a legal creation that emerged as an outgrowth of European kingdoms, overseas colonialism, and the division of large colonial empires into smaller neocolonial pieces (Nietschmann, 1994). A state asserts a centralized political system within international legal boundaries that are recognized by other states. According to Dr. Rudolph Ryser, Chair of the Center for World Indigenous Studies, “a state is an ethos, a concept that humans have rationally created for the purpose of ordering and organizing societies. The five main characteristics of a state, based on the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 are to establish 1) central authority, 2) universal law, 3) internal policing powers, 4) defined boundaries and 5) recognition by other states” (Ryser, 2011). A state uses bureaucracy to establish the role of government and to enforce its particular set of institutions and laws. It usually operates under one lingua franca, one claim over all its resources, often one religion, and is imposed upon preexisting nations (Nietschmann, 1994). Through this process of nation swallowing, states create artificial boundaries that are rarely consistent with the preexisting cultural and geographic fault lines of nations. As a result, the majority of the world’s current conflicts are not actually state-to-state conflicts; rather they are between states and nations within those states (Ryser, 2011). Often deemed as rebels, terrorists, guerillas, and/or enemies
of the “state”, these nations comprise peoples who have distinct cultural and political continuity in a particular environment, yet whose deep connection with place has been repeatedly severed and reconfigured under state and empire systems. When considering this significant distinction between nations and states, a rephrasing of most political speeches, documents, and anthems is warranted (i.e. one state, under God, indivisible, and with justice for all).

**Fourth World Nations**

After the second official World War, the world split into two large geopolitical blocs: the First World—a Western bloc of democratic-industrial states within the United States’ sphere of influence and the Second World—an Eastern bloc of communist-socialist states within the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. The remaining three-quarters of the world’s population, those states that were not specifically aligned with either of these two blocs, were collectively regarded as the Third World (nationononline.org). Deemed as underdeveloped, Third World states were considered to be dependent upon the economic and political support of the more developed states and for several decades these three main categorizations were used to legitimize much of international diplomacy.

The notion of Fourth World nations first came into use in 1974 with the publication of Shuswap Chief George Manuel’s, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*. Prior to writing the book, Manuel had been on a diplomatic trip to
Tanzania where he met with Tanzania’s President Julius Kambarage Nyerere. In discussing Tanzania’s peaceful step towards independence in 1964, and the lessons that indigenous peoples in the North America could potentially learn from their experience, President Nyerere recounted that he traveled from village to village among all the tribes in what was then called Tanganyika: “By meeting with the people directly, I was able to persuade them of how we could achieve independence and freedom” (cwis.org). When Manuel asked President Nyerere if they (the Tanzanians) could now help the Indians in Canada, he responded, “No, I won’t help now, not until you organize your people first --only after the people decide on what they really want can I be of any help” (cwis.org). According to Manuel, “It was an African diplomat who pointed out to me that political independence for colonized peoples was only the Third World: “When native peoples come into their own, on the basis of their own cultures and traditions that will be the Fourth World ” (Manuel, 236).

Manuel came to describe the Fourth World as “Indigenous peoples descended from a country’s aboriginal population and who today are completely or partly deprived of the right to their own territories and its riches” (nationsonline.org). Dr. Richard Griggs, professor of Environmental and Geographical Science at the University of Cape town, agrees with the validity of this definition but asserts that due to limited interpretations of the terms “aboriginal” and “indigenous”, many Fourth World nations in Europe, the Soviet Union, the Middle and Far East -- such as Wales, Catalonia, Bavaria, Palestine,
Kurdistan, and Baluchistan -- are forgotten (Griggs, 1992). Fourth World nations pre-date the modern state system. Therefore, to more comprehensively understand their realities and the dynamics between them and modern states, Dr. Ryser maintains that we must look beyond the perception of Fourth World nations as “brown people that dwell in isolated environments”, otherwise we will never bridge the epistemological and geopolitical gaps that exist between Fourth World nations and the western-dominated system of international states (Ryser, 2011). By excluding the realities of Fourth World nations in places such as Europe—which most political scientists and ethnographers would argue do not exist—Griggs asserts that “so much is lost, for there is much to learn from an examination of the experience of Fourth World nations that are at the core of the European-derived system of states” (Griggs, 1992). A slightly revised version, therefore, of Manuel’s definition of Fourth World nations—one that is more inclusive of peoples from all geographical contexts—has come to refer to “nations that have been forcefully incorporated into states, maintain a distinct political culture, but are internationally unrecognized” (Griggs, 1992).

Fourth World nations are commonly referred to as indigenous peoples. The word indigenous, however, is a political term that has no universally recognized definition in international relations. It is generally accepted as referring to the “original inhabitants” of a particular region. But when expanding the time and space horizons, one can argue that all humans at some point have been or were original to some particular bioregion. Because
their political and economic statuses do not fit neatly into the hierarchically-categorized international system of states, a range of definitions seeking to define the over 6,000 Fourth World Nations worldwide has been used: tribes, forest dwellers, indigenous, aboriginals, first peoples, first nations, and native populations are to name but a few. According to Dr. Griggs, the associations with such terms often suggest “weakness, victimization, and a convenient abstraction for seemingly invisible, intangible, immobile societies. Thus, the geopolitical force internationally unrecognized nations represent is totally unaccounted for” (Griggs, 1992).

While many of these terms have been endogenously-generated as a means of reclaiming a sense of identity, the intention behind examining the collective set of experiences Fourth World nations face -- as distinct nations hemmed in by states -- is to address the unique bio-cultural and geopolitical perspectives, knowledge, and aspirations that many of these nations share. In discussing the misunderstood nature of the Fourth World, Griggs writes, “these are peoples who through both peaceful and military means are challenging the entire state system. Furthermore, not all Fourth World nations are economically underprivileged. Some are the most economically advanced regions in their respective states such as Catalonia in Spain or Württemberg in Germany” (Griggs, 1992). By examining the realities of Fourth World nations that do not fit the traditional profile of indigenous or marginalized peoples – such as those in Europe; many of which have a great deal of political and economic influence –
a more thorough, historical, and meaningful approach to inter-national relations, conflict prevention, and development can occur.

**Fourth World Epistemologies**

One of the greatest diplomatic challenges between Fourth World nations, European-derived states, and transnational corporations Dr. Ryser argues, is that “there has not yet been an appropriate mechanism for defining the collective body of knowledge that Fourth World nations hold, so as to communicate it in a manner that western-based societies will understand and respect” (Ryser, 2011). He sees the need for inter-epistemological communication as being one of the most important components of healthy international cooperation. In an article entitled, *Western science and traditional knowledge: Despite their variations, different forms of knowledge can learn from each other*, Italian scientist Fulvio Mazzocchi supports this notion by writing “our difficulty in approaching the knowledge from indigenous cultures is already reflected in the way in which we describe and name it. No universal definition is available, and many terms are used to establish what indigenous people know. Each of these terms carries different implications, and there is an ensuing discussion about which one is the most appropriate” (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *knowledge* has numerous definitions including, (1) the fact or condition of knowing something with
familiarity gained through experience or association (2) the acquaintance with or understanding of a science, art, or technique and (3) the circumstance or condition of apprehending truth or fact through reasoning (merriam-webster.com). But when you begin to unpack these definitions, they do not speak to the fact that, ultimately, knowledge does suppose judgment. The mind is not passive in knowing—it searches for conditions and causes and, thereby, builds up a science out of the materials it gathers from experience; observation and thought are two essential factors in knowledge (newadvent.org).

When applied to the polarization that exists between Fourth World knowledge and Cartesian-based science amidst the climate change debate, the following table illustrates their varied knowledge acquisition styles:

**Table 1: Knowledge Acquisition Styles (adapted from naticescience.org)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fourth World Knowledge</th>
<th>Cartesian Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sacred and secular together</td>
<td>primarily secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching through storytelling</td>
<td>Didactic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning by experiencing</td>
<td>learning by formal education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oral or visual</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integrated, based on systems</td>
<td>analytical, based on subsets of the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>model or hypothesis-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>Reductionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective</td>
<td>Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>Positivist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both systems of knowledge have their own culture-perpetuating components: Fourth World knowledge relies upon a complex interplay of experience with changing climatic conditions, intuition about beneficial adaptation strategies, and sharing that knowledge with the next generation through experiential lessons in endeavors such as art, music and/or food preparation. The western-European Cartesian science has sought to formulate and disseminate its findings on climate change realities through processes such as repeated investigation, compartmentalizing data, and academic symposia. For both epistemologies, the process of selecting meaning, assumptions and beliefs out of real data is inextricably linked with culture and the faith that is applied to the instruments that qualify and/or quantify that data. Manuel writes, “Technologies are only the tools through which we carry on our relationships with nature. In the early days of colonization, there was a meeting of technologies -- Indian and European. Yet technology is also the stew pot of the global village. Every technical development from every culture, nation, or race contributes to the feeding of the whole community of man” (Manuel, 1974). The epistemological and technical contributions by Fourth World nations, therefore, should not be dismissed as irrelevant to the fast and furious political and economic landscapes of 21st century globalization. Rather, it is precisely their place-based knowledge and skillset that can help re-contextualize the notion of what it means to originate from and embody characteristics of a particular place, to maintain
cultural continuity, and to have the right to quantify and qualify ones’ own process of knowledge acquisition.

**Fourth World Theory**

Consideration of the situation of Arctic Peoples requires placing them within a theoretical context that provides an explanation for what is otherwise a unique political condition. Fourth World Theory, which focuses on the bio-cultural and geopolitical realities of the over 6000 nations worldwide whose ecological niches are situated within externally imposed state boundaries, saw its genesis at the United Nations Stockholm Environmental Conference in 1972. It was there that American First Nations delegates found they had much more in common with Saami of Finland/Sweden, the Bretons of France, and the Basques of France/Spain than they did with third world delegates. They were all nations encapsulated by states, struggling to achieve some level of self-determination within their homelands (Hipwell, 1997). Through this collective recognition of shared realities, under the leadership of Shuswap Chief George Manuel, Fourth World Theory was born.

In *Industria, the Fourth World, and the Question of Territory*, Dr. William Hipwell, professor of geography at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada writes, “in order to adequately account for the realities of indigenous peoples, one must make reference to Fourth World Theory, as it seeks to enact social change by addressing the fundamental imbalance of power that has been created as
a result of the international state system and hyper-capitalism” (Hipwell, 1997).

The International Relations Theory website explains that “Fourth World analyses, writings, and maps aim to rectify the distorting and obscuring of indigenous nations’ identities, geographies and histories and expose the usually hidden ‘other side’ of invasions and occupations that generate most of the world’s wars, refugees, genocide, human rights violations and environmental destruction” (irtheory.com). By examining the distinction between nations and states, Fourth World Theory provides a geopolitical perspective from which one can paint a “ground-up portrait of the significance and centrality of people in most world issues, problems and solutions” (irtheory.com).

In The Meaning of Nation and State in the Fourth World, Dr. Griggs writes, “The ancient nations from which the patchwork quilt of states was stitched have no internationally recognized sovereignty--but their geopolitical force, through self-determination movements, is challenging the entire state system” (Griggs, 1992). Kathy Seton of Queensland University in Brisbane, Australia expands upon this notion in Fourth World Nations in the Era of Globalization: An Introduction to Contemporary Theorizing Posed by Indigenous Nations:

“The rise of indigenous social movements in world politics, as well as the single international indigenous movement, signifies that international solidarity is a ‘real world’ event. Indigenous nations everywhere are demanding the right to self-determination. They are asserting their sovereignty as distinct and autonomous nations of peoples. Popular stereotypes of indigenous nations as having ‘primitive’, ‘backward’ cultures have helped cover-up and often rationalize the reality of their ongoing marginalization. This process of marginalization has frequently been motivated and legitimized by colonial powers under the banners of modernization, development, and progress.” (Seton, 1999)
Fourth World Theory not only examines the current and historical realities of Fourth World nations, it also holds tremendous potential for the study of all humans. Dr. Ryser argues that one of the greatest challenges humans face is the “conflict between bio-cultural diversity and standardization; a contest between the diverse nature of human beings and the compression by corporations and states to standardize everything” (Ryser, 2011). Nietschmann writes, “if you’re interested in biological diversity, you have to be interested in cultural diversity, because nature is the scaffolding of culture - it’s why people are the way they are” (Nietschmann, 1994). With regards to climate change mitigation, Nietschmann argues that it is imperative to include a diverse set of cultural responses and scientific know-how in order to holistically and effectively develop and implement policies that will secure livelihoods for all people. Technological innovation can help mitigate some of the challenges humans face. But if that innovation comes at the cost of an increasingly narrow list of solutions, humans will learn a painful existential lesson. In order for long-term systemic change to occur, the full and effective political participation of those who have a historically proven track record of sustainability must be implemented (Nietschmann, 1994).

Roberto Vela-Cordova, professor of literature at Texas A & M University, views Fourth World theory as driving a critical wedge into the fundamental organization of capital as it relates to labor, ecology, and property (Vela-
Cordova, 2011). In *Iberian Postcolonialities: A Metahistory of Material Practices*, Vela-Cordova asserts that Fourth World theory contributes a comprehensive analysis of geopolitics, especially regarding the realities of postcolonial societies (Vela-Cordova, 2011). In *The American Empire and the Fourth World*, Anthony J. Hall writes, “the Fourth World is valuable today because it envisages a pluralistic global village without tyranny of a universal and homogeneous state” (Hall, 2003). Fourth World analyses of self-determination movements, economics, and the resulting inequities have the potential to resonate with all people because at the core of human beings is an unrelenting desire to understand how we configure societies, set up governing institutions, and allocate resources. George Manuel suggested that “once the Fourth World enters the historical consciousness of the globe, it arguably beacons the most dramatic history of transculturation ever witnessed” (Vela-Cordova, 2011).

### Arctic Geopolitics

#### Circumpolar Context

There is perhaps no other region in the world where geography, cultures, and epistemologies collide more profoundly than in the Arctic; a circumpolar region located at the northern-most part of the Earth. The name Arctic stems from the Greek word *arktikos*, meaning "near the Bear, northern", with reference to the constellation *Ursa Major*, the "Great Bear", which is prominent in the northern portion of the celestial sphere (etymonline.com). Also seen from the
Arctic region, are the brilliant, dancing “northern lights” (Aurora Borealis) that illuminate dark winter nights. The Arctic is 14.5 million square km (5.5 million square miles)—almost exactly the same size as Antarctica—and consists of the ice-covered Arctic Ocean, treeless permafrost, and tundra. Its boundaries are defined by the northern tree line, an average July temperature of ~10°C (50°F), and the Arctic Circle -- an imaginary line of latitude where the sun never sets on the summer solstice (polardiscovery.whoi.edu). With a tremendous portion of the worlds’ natural resources including oil, natural gas, minerals, fresh water (1/5 of the Earth’s water supply), and fish, the Arctic is increasingly viewed as one of the most important geo-strategic regions in the world.

Of more immediate consequence, however, is the fact that the Arctic’s climate has warmed dramatically over the past four decades. According to the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum that promotes cooperation, coordination and interaction among Arctic nations and states magnitude of temperature, the increase in the Arctic is twice as large as the global increase. Sea ice, snow cover, glaciers and permafrost are all diminishing due to Arctic warming. Vulnerable ecosystems are under threat, as are traditional hunting, fishing, and herding activities (arctic-council.org). In 2011, the Indigenous Peoples Biocultural Climate Change Assessment (IPCCA) initiative met in the community of Sevettijärvi, located in northeast Finland. The following is an excerpt from a Declaration that IPCCA members shared regarding their personal experiences with climate change in the Arctic:
“Locally, we see our calendars shifting, ecosystems and species disappearing, food shortages, cultural disruption and destruction of livelihoods. For example, on Skolt Sámi lands, waters don’t freeze in the same way anymore, and in the autumn, instead of proper snow cover, ice rain falls on the ground, impacting reindeer food cycles. In the Republic of Sakha-Yakutia, Siberia, Russia, in the lands of the Chukchi reindeer herders, the permafrost is melting, having major implications for global climate change and weather systems as millions of tons of greenhouse gases which are currently trapped in the permafrost will release additional emissions into the atmosphere.” (snowchange.org)

Changes in the arctic climate affect climates in the rest of the world because many of the world’s climate processes (wind and water currents) are driven by the difference in temperature between the Arctic and hotter parts of the world (arcticpeoples.org). Ultimately, the effects of Arctic climate change will have profound local, regional and global implications.

**Arctic Fourth World Nations**

People have inhabited the Arctic for over twenty thousand years. Currently, there are approximately 4 million people living in the Arctic; of those roughly 500,000 are Fourth World peoples. These nations comprise varying percentages of the Arctic population; ranging from about 80% in Greenland, 50% in Canada, 20% in Alaska, 15% in Arctic Norway, to 3-4% in Arctic Russia (athropolis.com). The majority of the Arctic inhabitants – mostly of European descent – came to the area as populations expanded elsewhere, access and communications were improved, and natural resources were exploited. Piers Vitebsky, head of Anthropology and Russian Northern Studies at the Scott Polar
Research Institute at the University of Cambridge emphasizes, however, that it would be a “mistake to divide the history of the Arctic simply into two periods, before and after the arrival of the Europeans. The Europeans came gradually and have affected different areas in different ways at different periods. The traditions of the peoples themselves, as well as the findings of archaeologists, show that the populations which are now called indigenous had already migrated extensively themselves during the previous few thousand years” (thearctic.is). In the following passage, he describes the complex and often overlooked historical migration patterns that characterize the Arctic region:

“Some Inuits migrated eastward towards Greenland from Canada over 1,000 years ago, not long before the Vikings reached there from Europe. The Vikings brought with them a culture based on farming. Their society persisted for nearly 500 years but probably died out due to a combination of climate change, subsistence failure and lack of culture contact. The Arctic hunters did adapt to the colder climate and became the ancestors of the modern Greenlandic population. In the Asian North, the largest northern people are the Sakha, who number 382,000. They speak a language related to Turkish and migrated from central Asia into the Lena valley only in the middle ages. When they arrived, they found the valley already occupied by the Eveny who were also not originally residents of the North and had earlier migrated from northern China.” (thearctic.is)

Figure 1(below) illustrates this historical migration pattern of Arctic Fourth World nations, according to language families:

Figure 1: Circumpolar Region (from ansipra.npolar.no/image/Arctic03a.jpg)
What this map demonstrates is the overlapping nature of human migration patterns. Based on Vietbsky’s description of migrating populations in the Arctic region, one might argue that no particular culture – or Arctic Fourth World nation – can assert bio-cultural claims to specific lands, ice, and waterways. To this, Vietbsky would argue that there is an important difference between more recent immigrants and Fourth World nations. Newer immigrants do not for the most part depend on the land for their living, but come as representatives of a global industrial culture that continues to feed them by via external supplies.
“For humans to thrive on this landscape as the indigenous peoples have done requires extraordinary adaptation. This adaptation is not just a physical one to the changing climate; it is also a cultural adaptation, which has evolved over thousands of years; their culture is based on a particular view of how nature works in this environment, and how humans fit into it” (thearctic.is).

Examples of this adaptive, symbiotic, and historical relationship between Fourth World nations and place can be found in numerous tangible manifestations throughout the Arctic. According to Vietbsky, Fourth World nations such as the Inuit and Aleut in Alaska, the Métis in Canada, and the Saami in Sweden and Norway all utilize animal skins as locally-sourced materials that can be spread out and are used for clothing and footwear, as well as for the coverings of tents and boats (thearctic.is). They have all developed some kind of ski, sledge, toboggan or snowshoe, and many have domesticated dogs or reindeer and trained them to carry baggage or pull sledges. They’ve worked out ways of controlling animals that would otherwise roam across the landscape out of their reach: traps, corrals, bows and arrows, and weirs and nets for fish (thearctic.is). In addition to these similarities, however, Arctic Fourth World nations continue to adapt to the unique specifications of their particular surroundings, as well as to their interaction with immigrant populations.

Arctic States
Arctic Fourth World nations share geopolitical borders with the northern territories of eight Arctic states: Canada, Russia, Denmark (Greenland and Faroe Islands), the United States, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland. The following map illustrates the percentages of population that Fourth World nations (noted as indigenous) comprise in the Arctic states:

Figure 2: Arctic Population Distribution (Hugo Ahlenius, UNEP/GRID-Arendal, from grida.no)

Through Fourth World analysis, what the above map also indicates is mainstream political and cultural misperceptions of the terms, indigenous, nation, and state.
Drawing upon Nietschmann’s definition of a nation – a cultural territory made up of communities who see themselves as one people on the basis of common ancestry, history, society, institutions, ideology, and language – the map’s graphics warrant reconfiguration, so as to illustrate a more historical and comprehensive depiction of Arctic nations.

Nietschmann describes Iceland, for example, as one of the few nation-states in the world. It is a political entity where a majority of the population views itself as a single people, with a common identity, a common territory, and a government that is internationally recognized (Nietschmann, 1994). Dating back to 930 A.D., the ruling chiefs of Iceland had already established a republican constitution and an assembly called the Althingi -- the oldest parliament in the world (state.gov). Iceland remained independent until 1262, when it was colonized first by Norway and then by Denmark. In the early 19th century, national consciousness was revived, the Althingi (which had been abolished) was reestablished, and Denmark granted Iceland limited home rule in 1874. After a series of enhanced self-determination configurations during the early 1900’s, Iceland formally became an independent republic on June 17, 1944 (state.gov).

Defining Iceland (which is noted on the above map as consisting of 0% indigenous population) as an indigenous nation, however, is not necessarily something that most academics, diplomats, or perhaps even Icelanders would consider, given the stereotypical racial associations the word indigenous
conjures up. While its original inhabitants were of Norse origin, Iceland’s history of shared cultural continuity spanning more than a thousand years, centuries of colonization, and a subsistence-based fishing economy has a great deal in common with the histories of Arctic Fourth World nations such as the Inuit of Greenland. Fourth World analysts would argue, therefore, that the traditional dichotomies between “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” peoples in the Arctic (and beyond) do not provide a comprehensive analysis of past, present, or future geopolitical dynamics.

The nation-restoring phenomenon of Iceland is relevant to Arctic Fourth World nations such as the Inuit of Greenland and Nunavut (Northern Canada), who are on their own path towards enhanced political and economic self-determination. Within the boundaries of the eight Arctic states, a multitude of political subunits with varying geopolitical arrangements are being formed. The following table outlines Arctic lands and notes their official designation within the international state-system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Designation</th>
<th>National Affiliation</th>
<th>Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleutian Islands</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Alaskan Archipelago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkhangelsk Oblast</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Federal subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Arctic Archipelago</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Canadian Archipelago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diomede Island (Big)</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diomede Island (Little)</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnmark</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franz Josef Land</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Federal subject archipelago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenland</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Autonomous country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chart demonstrates both the complexity and creativity of geopolitical arrangements in the Arctic region. Contrary to most articles and publications on the region, the actors in this northern dance are not only the eight official Arctic states and non-littoral states engaged in diplomatic and economic negotiations, there are autonomous countries, provinces, territories, counties, islands, and federal subjects—all with a specific set of interests, natural resource endowments, levels of self-determination, financial realities, and political creativity.

**Historical Conflict in the Arctic**
Most international relations analysts claim that the Arctic region has not, historically, experienced the brutal territorial conquest and competition that other lands and continents have. Instead, as Natalie Mychajlyszyn of the Canadian Parliament's International Affairs, Trade and Finance Division maintains,

“The Arctic has been featured in inter-state relations as a corollary to extra-regional issues. This peripheral status was exemplified during the Cold War -- the roughly 40-year period defined by intense distrust between the United States and its allies in the West and the Soviet Union and its allies in the East. Unlike other parts of the world, which served as proxies in the Cold War struggle, the Arctic played an auxiliary role as a region that afforded the shortest route through which increasingly advanced defense technologies could maneuver.” (Mychajlyszyn, 2008)

When viewed through the lens of Arctic Fourth World nations, however, this same time frame (the Cold War) involved much more than “extra-regional” economic and political positioning. Mary Simon, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, a nonprofit organization in Canada, illustrates this alternate geopolitical reality: “The last Cold War saw our homeland dotted from coast to coast with Distant Early Warning Sites to ensure that no country came over the North Pole and caught North America militarily unaware. When that Cold War ended those systems were scaled back, and our homeland was left dotted with the debris: abandoned military buildings and equipment; rusting oil drums; and, toxic waste sites” (arcticsecurity.org). Pijamini, an Inuit elder, describes the experiences of his peoples during the Cold War:

“The Inuit were duped in the 1950s into settling the country's two most northern communities, Grise Fiord and Resolute, by a government desperate for "human flagpoles" in a vast wilderness coveted by the U.S. and Soviet Union. The Inuit felt herded like animals. They were issued
numbers stamped onto leather ID tags with the words ‘Eskimo Identification Canada’ surrounding the British crown. A ship brought them -- along with some clothes, a few basic belongings, and sled dogs -- to the brink of starvation in a barren land more than 2,000 kilometers from home. It was a traumatic journey through stormy seas that made even the sled dogs on deck vomit.” (thestar.com)

Since the 1800’s, nations in the Arctic have been subjected to direct and structural forms of violence through the exploitative practices of fur traders, the whaling industry, mining companies, tourism, and oil executives with blatant disregard for their culture, belief systems, and resources. To claim that the Arctic region has not suffered the visceral effects of war is to myopically scrutinize violence and to deny the collective experience of Fourth World nations that have been demoralized, contaminated, and manipulated as part of competing inter-state and inter-corporate interests.

**Contemporary Conflict in the Arctic**

Climate models project that summer sea ice in the Arctic will retreat further and further away from most Arctic landmasses, opening new shipping routes and extending the navigation season in the Northern sea passages by up to four months (grida.no). Previously frozen areas in the Arctic may become seasonally or permanently navigable, increasing the prospects for marine transport through the Arctic and providing greater access to Arctic resources (grida.no). Despite growing global concern over the detrimental effects of warming temperatures in the Arctic on one hand, inter-state and inter-
corporate parties see tremendous military and economic potential in these new shipping lanes; making this expanding Northwest passage one of the world’s next prime latitudinal trading routes. Once northern trading routes are made more accessible, tourist cruises and passenger vessels are sure to follow (grida.no).

Margaret Blunden, Emeritus Professor of the University of Westminster, London, who researches geopolitics in the Arctic says the Northern Sea Route (NSR) across the top of Russia - one of the two main contested passages - is not a single, clearly defined route. Rather, it constitutes a number of alternative passages between Novaya Zemlya (an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean, north of Russia and in the extreme northeast of Europe) and the Bering Strait (a sea strait between the easternmost point of the Asian continent and the westernmost point of the North American continent). The NSR’s are likely to become operational before the less-open North-West Passage through the Canadian archipelago, since the ice there is receding more quickly (Blunden, 2012). Increased marine transit in this region is not only dependent upon melting ice; technological innovations in ice-capable shipping will be necessary -- encouraged both by the physical limitations of the Suez Canal for increasingly large vessels and by the increasingly dangerous southern sea routes that are vulnerable to acts of piracy (Blunden, 2012). Yet, NSR’s also bring forth issues of security. In the article, Channeling Arctic Indigenous Peoples’ Knowledge Into an Arctic Region Security Architecture, Olin Strander, Arctic Military Strategist for
the Arctic Institute and Alison Weisburger, Analyst and North American Arctic/Outreach Coordinator for the Arctic Institute, assert that “those who live below the Arctic Circle are generally ill-equipped to operate and survive in the Arctic without leveraging expertise of Arctic indigenous peoples” (thearcticinstitute.org).

States with obvious vested interests in these new northern seaways are the eight Arctic states – each with its own set of continuously shifting political, defense, and economic priorities. Increasingly, however, the economic and geopolitical significance of the Arctic is attracting the interest of non-littoral states as well. Blunden writes,

“With the world’s maritime transport system at the forefront of globalization, the emergence of a new sea lane would have global consequences. The major trading powers of Europe and Asia, particularly Germany and China, are preparing their strategies and capabilities in anticipation of the possible opening of one such new sea lane, the Northern Sea Route (NSR), to regular commercial transit. Although the obstacles are formidable, current trends in the melting of the sea ice on the Arctic Ocean, the projected increase in commercial maritime traffic to 2018, and piracy and potential political instability along the existing route through the Suez Canal are all prompting the major players to hedge their bets.” (Blunden, 2012)

It appears that an Arctic monopoly game is taking shape, as states cozy up to one another. China, for example, in its quest to help feed its voracious appetite
for raw materials, has begun collaborating with the Russians. In November 2010, the China National Petroleum Corporation signed a strategic agreement with Sovcomflot (a Russian shipping company) according to which the companies will coordinate their efforts in utilization of the NSR (spacedaily.com). In its bid for observer status in the Arctic Council, China was initially snubbed by Norway due to its diplomatic row over the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo. But in early February 2012, out of a willingness to engage in dialogue over their “mutual interests” in the region, Norway’s Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere told parliament that Norway would support China’s admission: “The areas and the potential for cooperation between our two countries are significant. Norway has supported and still supports China’s ambition to become a permanent observer on the Arctic Council” (spacedaily.com).

In further articulating the increasing geopolitical complexity in the Arctic region, Blunden provides the following narrative:

“German diplomatic and defense policy has also been brought into play. It’s broadening its military cooperation with the Nordic–Baltic countries, a cooperation which could include joint military maneuvers in the far north. Germany is also nurturing its traditionally close connection with Denmark and its strategically important relations with Norway. The German government is urged by its advisers to emulate the Chinese in cultivating relations with Iceland, whose sea area enjoys a central position in the region where Arctic traffic is projected to grow. Carsten Schymik of the SWP noted in May 2009 that ‘Iceland, due to its strategic location, could become a strategic bridgehead into the increasingly important Arctic region’, and argued that it would be to Germany’s advantage to support Iceland’s application to join the EU. German policy institutes also see Greenland, en route to independence from Denmark, as a strategic bridgehead into the Arctic. Whereas in Iceland the main competitor for influence is China, in Greenland it is the United States, whose diplomats have advised their government to commit itself to ‘shaping Greenland’s
future’ in such a way as to guarantee American interests, taking the unique opportunity presented by the emergence of this independent nation. Therefore, German advisers have urged the EU to actively support Greenland’s legitimate pursuit of independence.” (Blunden, 2012)

In addition to describing the complex geopolitical confluence in the Arctic, the above passage also illustrates that the size of the state -- both politically and geographically – does not bear proportionately on those dynamics: both small and large states are succeeding in asserting their interests. According to Natalie Mychajlyszyn of the Canadian Parliaments’ International Affairs, Trade and Finance Division, “at any given time, the dynamics are highly specific to a particular issue: some play out multilaterally, others bilaterally. Likewise clashes of interests and collaborative initiatives can occur simultaneously, regardless of whether the players are allies or adversaries” (Mychajlyszyn, 2008).

Within this labyrinth of competing state interests -- not to mention the corporations that sponsor much of the negotiating process-- where do the interests of Arctic Fourth World nations lie? Under what circumstances and in what organizational settings are their interests asserted? If Arctic diplomacy is no longer restricted to historical Cold War dichotomies or small states automatically succumbing to the political arm-twisting of larger bully states, is there, perhaps, more room for creative international political maneuvering?

**Engaged Diplomacy**

*The Arctic Council*
Renewed interest in the Arctic region comes at a time when Arctic Fourth World nations are becoming more organized, focused, and assertive with regard to their own political, economic, and cultural self-determination – especially in the aftermath of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007. While Arctic geopolitics has been predominantly characterized by a multitude of individualized state interests, it is also home to the northern-most organizational attempt at more inclusive, multilateral diplomacy. In 1996, the Ottawa Declaration formally established the Arctic Council as an "intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States; with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection, yet excluding matters related to military security (arctic-council.org). The Arctic Council’s official Member States are the eight Arctic states, with Chairmanship rotating every two years. What distinguishes the Arctic Council from other trans-boundary organizing bodies is that it is also comprised of six Fourth World nations’ organizations that hold Permanent Participants status. The Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), Aleut International Association (AIA), Gwich’in Council International (GGI), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), Russian Arctic Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), and the Saami Council (SC) have full consultation rights in connection with the Council’s negotiations and decisions, although they do not – yet -- have
actual voting power (arctic-council.org). While each Permanent Participant brings different perspectives and priorities to the council, they seek to support each other in the council, as well as in meetings of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the global convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (arcticathabaskancouncil.com).

In addition to Member states and Fourth World Permanent Participants, the Arctic Council extends Permanent Observer Status to non-Arctic States, regional and global inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary organizations, and non-governmental organizations that the Council determines can contribute to its work (arctic-council.org). Thus far, six states have been admitted as Permanent Observers: France, Germany, Spain, Poland, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom -- with China, Japan, Korea, India, and the EU currently negotiating for a seat at the table (cbc.ca).

Decisions by the Arctic council are made by consensus and projects undertaken reflect the principle of volunteerism (arcticathabaskancouncil.com). The council operates at three levels: working groups, Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) and Ministers. Ministers of Foreign Affairs meet every two years, SAOs every six months, and working groups as needed. Currently, the council has the following six working groups: Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP); Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP); Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF); Emergency Prevention,
Preparedness and Response (EPPR); Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME); and Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG). Additional task forces have also been established in order to look at institutional issues including amendments to the council’s rules of procedure regarding the admission of observers (arcticathabaskancouncil.com).

To ensure their consultative status, the Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat (IPS) – based in Copenhagen – was established to support Fourth World nations’ organizations. Specifically, the IPS’s work is to ensure that Permanent Participants are sent documents and reports connected to the work of the Arctic Council; help Permanent Participants present their views to the Arctic Council; collect and communicate information about the Arctic Council and its results to the Indigenous Peoples in the various parts of the Arctic; and provide co-ordination for the Indigenous Peoples Organizations to meet with each other and to participate in the Arctic Council Working Group (arcticpeoples.org). The working language of the IPS is English, but communications are in both English and Russian so as to accommodate Russian Fourth World nations.

There is considerable solidarity amongst Arctic Fourth World nations anchored in the Arctic Council. One important example is the fact that they agree that qualified observers should be welcome to attend and participate in meetings of the council -- a decision that Arctic States like Canada and Russia dislike as it threatens their existing power in the region. While it may add to the
complexity of the council’s composition, Arctic Fourth World nations believe that a more diverse observer body could lead to new alliances that may not have otherwise occurred. Rather than the historical east-west blocs that dominated geopolitical diplomacy during the Cold War, a multilateral approach helps to build the connections and relationships needed to ensure that Arctic Fourth World nations’ perspectives are considered in global fora (arcticathabaskancouncil.com).

**Law of the Sea**

Given that the Arctic region is comprised primarily of water and ice, many of the issues raised in the Arctic Council have to do with rules pertaining to rights and responsibilities of nations and states in their use of the Arctic Ocean. Establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources, the Law of the Sea Treaty (LOST) is an attempt to address such disputes. Formally known as the Third United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III), it was adopted in 1982 (although it has yet to be ratified by several states including the United States). Its purpose was to establish a comprehensive set of rules governing the oceans, thereby replacing outdated and inadequate policies that had been set forth by previous U.N. Conventions on the Law of the Sea: UNCLOS I in 1958 and UNCLOS II in 1960 (unlawoftheseatreaty.org).
Negotiated throughout the 1970s, the treaty was heavily influenced by "New International Economic Order" -- principles that called for "fairer" terms of trade and development financing for the so-called under-developed and developing nations (unlawoftheseatreaty.org). The Treaty calls for technology and wealth transfers from developed nations to developing nations, and requires parties to adopt regulations and laws to control pollution of the marine environment -- provisions not well received by politicians and businessmen who advocate for deregulation. In addition to the economic provisions, the treaty also establishes specific jurisdictional limits on the ocean area that countries may claim, including a 12-mile territorial sea limit and a 200-mile exclusive economic zone limit. Some proponents of the treaty believe that the treaty will establish a system of property rights for mineral extraction in deep-sea beds, making the investment in such ventures more attractive (unlawoftheseatreaty.org).

When discerning territorial rights based on international provisions such as the Law of the Sea Treaty, Fourth World nations -- those who actually reside in the contested region and who hold tremendous knowledge about the often treacherous water and ice passages being disputed -- are gradually becoming more involved in the negotiating process. Article 26 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that:

"Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources, which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired;"
Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired; States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.” (ifg.org)

By applying Article 26 to the following map, which depicts Greenland and Nunavut (autonomous Arctic Fourth World nations) as the two main nations with actual territorial continuity in the Arctic Ocean, it can be argued that Arctic Fourth World nations are strategically poised to play an active, voting role in matters that concern Arctic waters.

Figure 3: Greenland and Nunavut (Hugo Ahlenius, UNEP/GRID-Arendal, from grida.no)
Through such mechanisms as the UNDRIP, Arctic Fourth World nations now have enhanced diplomatic opportunities to assert their rights to waterways, ice, and other resources that their people have depended upon for millennia. According to Jessica Shadian, a Research Fellow at the Barents Institute in Norway, “emerging global governance processes (such as the Convention on Climate Change) delineate power and authority to new non-state actors, thereby pushing traditional international laws aside to make room for new voluntary legal compliance measures, regional legal treaties and local initiatives” (e-ir.info). Shadian writes,

“All of these (emerging global governance practices) reify an emergent reality; the state is only one source of power and legitimacy in world politics. In this new political milieu, governance does not have to come from, or need to be played out within, the international system or by states” (www.e-ir.info). From this perspective, the Arctic Council could, in fact, serve as an exemplar of regional environmental cooperation regarding the regulation of future Arctic oil and gas development. Climate change is driving a new political race to the poles; creating a new political stage for Arctic indigenous peoples; renewing the significance of the UN law of the Sea Treaty; and initiating new regulatory measures regarding fisheries, shipping, and off-shore oil and gas development.” (e-ir.info)

As the power of Arctic states is increasingly challenged, new leadership opportunities for Fourth World nations are beginning to emerge. This more diversified geopolitical cast not only has the political and economic will to assert its self-determination, but also the cultural will to ensure its longevity in the region.
Fourth World Perspectives on Conflict

Global Context

In its analyses of global conflicts, Fourth World Theory places emphasis on the fact that most of the world’s current conflicts are between states and nations – rather than between states. Bernard Nietschmann writes, “The nature of conflicts has changed, yet the means to understand and resolve them have not. With 193 states (as recognized by the United Nations) asserting the right and power to impose sovereignty and allegiance upon more than 6000 nations, conflicts occur that cannot be contained or hidden, nor resolved on a state-to-state basis” (Nietschmann, 1985). As geopolitical boundaries are in a perpetual state of flux, so, too, are the corresponding sources and manifestations of conflict. According to Ryser, the majority of the world’s current wars result from actions taken by First, Second, or Third World states against Fourth World nations (Ryser, 2011). Actions deemed as nation building, economic development, and integration by the state are perceived by Fourth World Nations as attempts to dispossess and covertly annex Fourth World lands and resources (Nietschmann, 1985).

While the rights of Fourth World nations have steadily received more local, regional, and international attention – especially since the adoption of UNDRIP, most of the references are made as side bars; “politically correct” subsections of the main political agenda. To this denigrating reality, Nietschmann writes,
“The Fourth World and the persistence and continuing defense of indigenous nations have remained largely hidden to the outside because of the widespread acceptance of myths that all indigenous peoples are disappearing, their absorption by state systems is inevitable, and they have no sovereignty, territory, or rights except those given to them by states. Anthropologists focus on dying cultures, political scientists chronicle the decline of “tribalism,” and human rights organizations admonish governments for abuses and reductions of tribal minorities. These all reinforce the dominant idea that indigenous peoples are on the way out. However, if one crosses to the other side of the frontier, the perspectives are vastly amplified: regionally and worldwide indigenous peoples are actively engaged in political, military, legal and economic solutions to defend and promote their interests. Increasingly, the Fourth World is emerging as a new force in international politics because in the common defense of their nations, many indigenous peoples do not accept being mere subjects of international law and state sovereignty and trusteeship bureaucracies. Instead, they are organizing and exerting their own participation and policies as sovereign peoples and nations.” (Nietschmann 1985)

A critical component of this Fourth World resurgence is bio-cultural diversity, and its often-neglected relevance to geopolitical strength. “Cultural and biological diversities are the building blocks of life. Where there is a concentration of nation-peoples, there is typically a concentration of species, genes and ecosystems; indeed the vast majority of the world’s 6,000 nations are centers of surviving biological diversity and ecological variety” (Nietschmann, 1994). Based on historic and mutually reinforcing relationships that Fourth World nations have with their respective ecological niches, they have evolved bio-cultural rhythms that are specifically adapted to sustaining environments and conserving biological diversity – “Fourth World Environments” (Nietschmann, 1994).
As long-term stewards of the land - yet denied international recognition by states - Fourth World nations are subject to what conflict transformation professor Tatsushi Arai deems eco-structural violence; which represents the “collective karma that binds nature and humanity through cycles of mutually destructive interactions” (Arai, 2011). This form of violence results from the fact that:

“The world’s states are internationally recognized governments that begin without environments or resources; it is the preexisting nations that have the land, freshwater, fertile soils, forests, minerals, fisheries and wildlife. As such, most states exist only by the invasion and takeover (called nation-building, political integration, or economic development of unconsenting nations environments and resources). Following an ideology of centrifugal expansion to fuel unchecked growth, many states commonly use environmental and resource-destroying methods and often military force to extract the biological wealth and suppress the culture of nations.” (Nietschmann, 1994)

The history and geography of state expansionism has resulted in two disparate environments in the world. The first of these environments, according to Nietschmann, is the state environment, which is dominated by state cultures and is usually characterized by “large and dense numbers, environmentally unsustainable centrifugal economies, biological impoverishment and, most often, razed landscapes” (Nietschmann, 1994). Nation environments, on the other hand, are “historically populated by nation peoples and characterized by ecologically adapted, centripetal cultures and economies, surviving biological richness and variegated, healthy landscapes” (Nietschmann, 1994). These two
very different manifestations of the bio-cultural interplay between humans and a particular environment speak to the heart of the conflict in the Arctic Region.

**Arctic Context**

From the perspective of Fourth World theory, melding the seemingly disparate pieces of the Arctic puzzle together, so as to discern any practical, preventative diplomatic measures, requires first and foremost a willingness to question the established international state system, the supposed benefits of hyper capitalism, and what it means to be culturally bound to a particular place. Cartesian and neoclassical-based ideologies have been overstated in the Arctic; scientists scramble to quantify the occurrence of human-induced climate change, while states and corporations vie for legal claims to its resources. Less-respected epistemologies are those of Arctic Fourth World nations.

According to interviews with Inuit community members, conducted by the Inuit Circumpolar Council in 2008, the potential for greater use of the Arctic by newcomers raises great concern. “While they have resolved to adapt to the changed climate and thinning ice as best they can – and show considerable confidence they will succeed – they are less sure about what increased shipping may mean for their future; newcomers to the region are reminded that the Inuit have lived in the Arctic for thousands of years and they intend to live there for thousands more” (inuitcircumpolar.com). Inuit settlements are primarily located
on seacoasts and their livelihoods are inextricably linked with water and ice-ways. As one Inuit hunter explains,

“Whether thickly frozen or open for the summer, the sea is our primary means of transportation. The usually ice-covered sea is our highway, the only physical connection between many of our communities and the only way we can access many of the animals we depend on for food. As subsistence hunters, we Inuit follow the animals as far as needed in each season, according to the overall conditions of that particular year. While Inuit do use the sea ice for general transportation in addition to hunting, we are practical people who harvest as close to our communities as possible. The fact that we often travel long distances as part of the hunt means our people from Chukotka to Greenland need free movement over the land and sea in order to continue our subsistence-based way of life.”
(inuitcircumpolar.com)

Many Inuit hunters are reporting changes in the locations and times that their traditional animals can be found. This is why they are very concerned that sea ice routes remain passable for hunters as well as the migratory game they follow, and that the entire Arctic environment be kept free from contamination – both in the areas they use now and in those they may need to hunt in the future:

“As a people who have lived in harmony with our ecosystem for thousands of years, we Inuit have a very different concept of sustainability. For us, an action that can continue for ten or twenty, or even fifty years before its damaging effects are seen does not qualify as sustainable. A way of doing things, a way of living and behaving, must be done in such a way that it could continue for hundreds and thousands of years without harming the natural way of things in order for it to meet the Inuit standard of sustainability. If something were to happen to our fragile Arctic ecosystem, our way of life would be lost and we as a people would be lost. Therefore, any activity in the Arctic, whether it is resource extraction, tourism, or military-related, must be undertaken according to the Inuit definition of sustainability – it must support the continuation of the Inuit way of life for thousands of years to come.”
(inuitcircumpolar.com)
Arctic Fourth World Nations are deeply vested in remaining in their homelands - long after new shipping lanes have been opened and oil and mineral reserves have been exploited. This cultural tenacity should not be underestimated.

Conflict transformation is described by Professor Tatsushi Arai as a “sustained process of examining conflict sources and contexts systematically and developing relevant means to redirect its momentum into constructive relationship building and social change” (Arai, 2010). The practical applications of conflict transformation necessitate dialogue, creativity, and patience – and work best when addressed within all layers of society. In the context of the Arctic region, there are several arenas where this is occurring. The Arctic Council – while certainly not perfect -- is one such mechanism, serving as a high-level intergovernmental forum to promote cooperation, coordination, and interaction among Arctic nations and states. Research is another arena where cooperation is occurring. As the realities of climate change become increasingly more alarming, teams of Fourth World scientists and western scientists are using triangulation methods that combine approaches, data sets, and investigations, in order to generate more comprehensive, inclusive and confident analyses (beyondpenguins.ehe.osu.edu).

In the business realm, which is highly influential in the Arctic region, Arctic Fourth World nations are continuously engaged in negotiating and reclaiming their economic viability through entities such as *Doyon, Limited*, an Alaska
Native for-profit corporation. Established under the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), Doyon is the largest private landowner in Alaska, with more than 12.5 million acres allocated to the corporation under ANCSA (doyon.com). Doyon’s mission is to “continually enhance their position as a financially strong Native corporation in order to promote the economic and social well-being of its shareholders (over 18,500 Alaska Natives), to strengthen their Native way of life, and to protect and enhance their land and resources” (doyon.com).

As Arctic geopolitical tensions rise, one proposed conflict transformation model that could shift the power dynamics relates to concerns about safety that are emerging as a result of the new northern sea passages. As a way of incorporating Arctic Fourth World nations’ knowledge into what they describe as Arctic Region Security Architecture, both Olin Strander and Alison Weisburger of the Arctic Institute envision an indigenous circumpolar security force (thearcticinstitute.org). Working from the existing model of Canadian Rangers -- a volunteer safety and security force in northern Canada, made up of predominantly Inuit, Métis, and other Fourth World Nations -- Strander and Weisburger believe the Arctic could be ringed by Arctic Fourth World nations providing forward security and safety:

“\textit{The North Slope Inupaiga could be organized into a Coast Guard auxiliary in support of the Coast Guard’s maritime security and safety missions. A North Slope Coast Guard Auxiliary could then link in with the Canadian Rangers, and the Rangers could link in with the Kalaallit of Greenland. The North Slope Coast Guard Auxiliary could theoretically link in with their}
Serbian Yupik and Aleut relatives, were they to be employed by the Federal Security Bureau’s, Border Guards.” (thearcticinstitute.org)

They argue that this model has the potential to strengthen political and ancestral bonds of Arctic Fourth World nations, while providing forward security for a rapidly changing Arctic. By encouraging Arctic Fourth World nations to take the lead in securing their traditional lands as partners with Arctic state security services, Fourth World nations could have a stake in how security in the region is provided (thearcticinstitute.org).

Fourth World nations’ participation in a circumpolar security force does have the potential for exploitation – as the Inuit story on Cold War outposts illustrated – if not mitigated by enhanced political representation. To ensure that Arctic Fourth World nations’ interests (and lives) are protected, their participation in security measures should be coupled with voting power within the Arctic Council. If they are asked to “put their life on the line”, Arctic Fourth World nations should be given the right to vote on matters that relate to their security, livelihood, and cultural continuity. It may appear as an oversimplification, but the fact is that in the Arctic region, Fourth World nations hold key strategic positions. The sheer size and location of Greenland combined with the autonomous region of Nunavut, alone, constitute a land-and sea-based stronghold by Inuit peoples. When combined with the increasing political and economic strength of Alaska Natives, the collective role of Arctic Fourth World nations is by no means passive, nor irrelevant to the diplomatic negotiations of states.
Dr. Ryser observes that in international diplomacy, there is great creative potential in naming something that did not previously exist, and then asserting its importance (Ryser, 2011). Essentially, the international state system was created in this manner: states agreed upon their own definition, and then developed instruments to perpetuate their political existence. In the same vein, Arctic Fourth World nations, in finding that inter-state models do not serve their needs and interests, have the right and the capacity to develop their own organizational bodies. An Arctic Fourth World Council could perhaps better serve their interests; they define what it means to be a Fourth World governing body and then set about creating the rules, infrastructure, and financial support to reinforce its vision. Partnerships with Fourth World nations from other areas in the world affected by climate change could be forged; and they may even find surprising new member applicants that prefer to engage in a truly international approach to diplomacy. In speaking to this need for more inclusive, effective, and relevant models of governance, George Manuel writes,

“The Fourth World is not, after all, a Final Solution. It is not even a destination. It is the right to travel freely, not only on our road but also in our own vehicles. Unilateral dependence can never be ended by a forced integration. Real integration can only be achieved through a voluntary partnership and a partnership cannot be based on a tenant-landlord relationship. The way to end the condition of unilateral dependence and begin the long march to the FW is through home rule. The demand of Indian people that we be allowed to sit at the table where our lives are being negotiated, where our resources are being carved up like a pie, is not different than the demands being made by non-Indian groups. The way to end the custodian-child relationship for Indian people is not to abolish our status as Indians, but to allow us to take our place at the table with all of the rest of the adults. The imposition of
models on those who did not have a hand in the design has been the problem throughout history.” (Manuel, 1974)

Conclusion

The Arctic Region has not only become the barometer of global climate change, it also holds tremendous potential for creative diplomatic measures between Fourth World nations, states, and transnational corporations. Fourth World theory, with its emphasis on the dynamic interplay between nations and states – especially under the ideological guise of hyper-capitalism -- provides an important lens through which to examine the unfolding geopolitical dance in the Arctic. Whereas most of the political and academic discourse on the economic, political, and bio-cultural significance of new northern sea passages in the Arctic region focuses on Arctic and non-Arctic states’ interests, the steady undercurrent of Arctic Fourth World nations’ organizing is proving to be a political force that can no longer be ignored.

In a region whose geography and climate is shifting at an accelerated pace, the inter-national response, on the part of Fourth World nations -- to both adapt to and mitigate these changes – provides an interesting analysis of the dynamics between nations and states and ultimately, on the bio-cultural and geopolitical trump cards that many Fourth World nations have. While it is undeniable that Arctic Fourth World nations have experienced severe forms of marginalization through political, economic, and ideological exclusion, they do still maintain a cultural continuity that deeply connects them with the Arctic
environment. This resolve to continue living in their respective ecological niches for multiple generations is a critical component of Arctic Fourth World nations’ political will to manifest more equitable models of self-determination. Given their empirical knowledge of the Arctic’s harsh and delicate ecosystems, the full and effective participation of Arctic Fourth World nations is not only a precursor to their own geopolitical assertions, it is imperative for the safety and security of all parties that have vested interests in the region. Nietschmann speaks to these new geopolitical arrangements this way,

“'The Fourth World is trying to stabilize and push back the frontiers imposed by colonialism and expanded by modern states that seed to politically and economically develop their own peoples. Fourth World Nations are creating new situations through the worldwide movement for self-determination, and territorial and political sovereignty. This is leading to new political, military, economic and legal entities that are separate and distinct from traditional East-West, North-South, and left-right alliances and conflicts. Central to their goal of self-determination is the belief that their ability to resist will outlive the invaders ability to oppress.” (Nietschmann, 1994)

Through their participation in the Arctic Council, or other governing bodies that may eventually form, Arctic Fourth World nations can serve as role models for other Fourth World nations seeking to organize around common bio-cultural concerns. This new approach to trans-boundary organizing has the potential to redefine diplomatic rules of engagement. Given that intergovernmental models such as the United Nations have rarely served the needs of Fourth World nations, perhaps creating new regional models like an Arctic Fourth World Council is the
critical next step in asserting the bio-cultural and geopolitical rights of Fourth World nations worldwide.

Resources

    science.org/.


SIT Graduate Institute. Brattleboro, VT.


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