

Why Talk is Cheap: Voice, land, and the decolonization of democracy

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There is a significant breakdown in democratic process that occurs when Aboriginal peoples are required to justify claims related to their land-based legal and political systems. Well-meaning dialogue frequently leads to the distortion of Indigenous claims and the disparagement of Indigenous claimants within Canadian courts, committees, and negotiating tables. These experiences (a) dissuade some Indigenous peoples from engaging in political dialogue and (b) engender a perverse incentive to advance strategic and often counter-productive claims. Both results of dialogue over land are antithetical to democratic ideals of equality and reciprocity. As a corrective, I discuss a framework – enactive democracy – which prescribes a high level of cultural security for Aboriginal peoples through political and legal autonomy on the land. In the case of Canada, formal institutions which guarantee the capacity to enact practices on the ground are a necessary prerequisite to democratic processes and the fulfillment of democratic ideals.