European Conquest and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Paul Keal examines the historical role of international law and political theory in justifying the dispossession of indigenous peoples as part of the expansion of international society. He argues that, paradoxically, law and political theory can now underpin the recovery of indigenous rights. At the heart of contemporary struggles is the core right of self-determination, and Keal argues for recognition of indigenous peoples as ‘peoples’ with the right of self-determination in constitutional and international law, and for adoption of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the General Assembly. He asks whether the theory of international society can accommodate indigenous peoples and considers the political arrangements needed for states to satisfy indigenous claims. The book also questions the moral legitimacy of international society and examines notions of collective guilt and responsibility.

Paul Keal is a Fellow of the Department of International Relations at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University. He is the author of Unspoken Rules and Super Power Dominance (1983), editor of Ethics and Foreign Policy (1992), and with Andrew Mack, co-editor of Security and Arms Control in the North Pacific (1988).
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The moral backwardness of international society

Paul Keal

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The intellectual and personal debts I have accrued over the years extend far beyond the time I have spent researching and writing this book. The idea to write it came to me from reading a passage in the Postscript to the second edition of Andrew Linklater’s *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*. I am very grateful to Andrew, not only for this but his friendship and support over many years. An initial draft of the book was written while I was on study leave in the Department of International Relations at Keele University. The welcoming members of that Department helped make it a very productive time and I thank the University of New South Wales for making it possible for me to be there. After returning from Keele I had the good fortune to meet Jim Tully then visiting Canberra. His suggestions and encouragement have been fundamental. Special thanks must also go to Steve Smith who generously gave me his time and guidance.

At the Australian National University, Greg Fry has been my close friend, intellectual companion and trenchant but always constructive critic for almost longer than either of us probably care to remember. Our colleagues in the Department of International Relations and in other parts of the ANU make it a splendid place to work. I am especially thankful to Chris Reus-Smit, Heather Rae and Pete Van Ness for their friendship and support. Barry Hindess and Tim Rowse from the ANU’s Research School of Social Sciences both generously read an earlier version of the book and made incisive comments and I thank them for doing so. Among the community of Australian international relations scholars outside Canberra I would like to thank Jacinta O’Hagen, Richard Devatak and Richard Shapcott for their good humoured camaraderie and continuing conversation. From outside Australia I have been
Acknowledgements

privileged by the support and friendship given to me by Nick Wheeler, Tim Dunne, Richard Little and Rob Walker.

I am very grateful to the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press for their incisive and helpful comments, which have helped make the book better than it would otherwise have been. I wish to also thank John Haslam at the Press for his patience and advice. In preparing the book for publication I have been cheerfully helped by Mary Lou Hickey and Michelle Burgis. My special thanks go to Robin Ward for compiling the index and to Sheila Kane for her meticulous copy editing.

Ever since beginning university studies I have been engaged in a long conversation about many things with Daniel Connell. His unfailing friendship over the years has been inestimable. So also has been the patience, understanding, love and support given to me by Leonie and my daughters Hannah and Onela. Without them I would not have been able to complete the book.