

**From Indigenous Nationhood to Neoliberal Aboriginal
Economic Development: Charting the Evolution of
Indigenous-Settler Relations in Canada**

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Abstract

While Indigenous people have struggled to overcome the legacy of colonialism in Canada, Settler governments have struggled with their own past, and ongoing role in the colonial project. What to do about the “Indian Problem” is a persistent question that remains unsatisfactorily answered. Early treaties between Indigenous peoples and Settlers invoked the spirit of the Two Row Wampum, and a respect for peaceful co-existence through noninterference. This spirit of noninterference remained constant in Indigenous rhetoric through till the latter half of the twentieth century. Since 1991, however, the discourse of Indigenous-Settler Relations has taken a dramatic shift away from respect for distinctiveness towards the language of neoliberalism. Evidence of this shift in discourse can be found in the reports of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, and the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. Recurring crises in Indigenous-Settler relations have often been followed by years of co-opting processes to the extent that certain Indigenous leaders are now increasingly acting upon and advocating for the neoliberal discourse. This paper is a warning to those who would wittingly or unwittingly choose the path of neoliberalism, forsaking their own unique Indigenous worldviews and values.

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Foreword

By Janel Smith

As the Research Coordinator for the Canadian Social Economy Hub I have had the pleasure of both editing and writing a foreword for this paper entitled - *From Indigenous Nationhood to Neoliberal Aboriginal Economic Development: Charting the Evolution of Indigenous-Settler Relations in Canada* by Cliff Atleo. In this position I have been the lead contributor on several papers produced by the Hub and have had the opportunity to work alongside leading researchers and practitioners involved in advancing the Social Economy across Canada and abroad. This paper was commissioned by the Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships in order to explore potential contributions of the Social Economy to Aboriginal Development. The Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships consist of six regional research centers (British Columbia and Alberta, North, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northern Ontario, Southern Ontario, Québec and Atlantic) and a facilitating Hub located at the University of Victoria.

To date Social Economy researchers and practitioners have sought to address a wide variety of socio-economic issues ranging from poverty reduction, agriculture and affordable housing to alternative economic models including social entrepreneurship, cooperatives and credit unions. There has, however, been noticeable “gaps” in Social Economy discourse, particularly with respect to the intersections of Social Economy, neoliberalism, Aboriginal economic development, and Indigenous worldviews and values, with some notable exceptions. This paper provides a focal point for beginning to think about potential linkages and areas for strategic partnership between the values and worldviews held by Indigenous peoples and those engaged in the Social Economy. It challenges us to critically engage with such questions as where and in what ways can actors in the Social Economy support Indigenous views on community resurgence and to also recognize the potential of the Social Economy to simply “repackage” the very neoliberal policies and practices that those within the Social Economy aim to deconstruct and dismantle.

In the paper Cliff Atleo provides an overview of Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada, thoughtfully mapping out the historical context of this relationship in the latter half of the 20th century that help set the groundwork for the greater acceptance of neoliberalism and the contemporary Aboriginal economic development agenda. The issues raised within this paper are particularly topical given the contemporary challenges we are facing in the 21st century. Cliff Atleo writes: “As the planet struggles with global warming, more and more people are becoming aware and acting on that awareness. As the neoliberal policies of big business invade more and more territory, and more and more people are adversely affected, we see a rise in movements like the Social Economy. Alternatives to neoliberalism exist because Indigenous peoples have lived them” (p. 30). Consideration of these challenges has important implications for the kinds and directions of Social Economy research and practice that are conducted by the Partnerships and others in the future. Failure to adequately comprehend of the interconnectedness between these challenges and the complexities of Indigenous worldviews and contemporary efforts at community revitalization will result in a failure to develop more effective and sustainable policies for all.

Throughout the paper Cliff Atleo provides a strong and sincere warning in his critique of recent shifts in the discourse of Indigenous-Settler relations, calling upon us to continually reflect on where we have come from and the impacts of our past actions on shaping the course we are currently heading. The intent of the paper is to “sound the alarm about the contemporary Aboriginal economic development agenda that many Indigenous leaders are now embracing” in the hope that “a renewed sense of urgency will compel present and future Indigenous people and their allies to revitalize their communities in a manner more consistent with Indigenous principles and worldviews” (p. 4). Ultimately, this is the central challenge that Cliff Atleo puts to us in the paper and it is a challenge that we should take seriously both within and outside of the Partnerships as we move forward in seeking to grow the Social Economy in Canada and in contributing effectively to Aboriginal development.

Introduction

Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada are commonly framed by discussions about the plight and poverty of Indigenous people. Newspapers and government reports are filled with socio-economic indicators telling the statistical story of despair amongst Indigenous peoples. Since confederation, successive Canadian governments have struggled unsuccessfully with how to deal with the “Indian problem.” Treaties, reservations, residential schools, the *Indian Act*, the “White Paper”, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and countless other initiatives have been undertaken by the federal government, usually unilaterally. Amongst Indigenous peoples, debates also rage about how best to revitalize their communities, with some advocating for self-government, others for the legal recognition of Aboriginal rights, many focusing on education, and still others for healing. Recently, however, economic development has come to dominate the discourse of Indigenous community resurgence. I suggest that this has occurred for two primary reasons. The first is because the “Indian problem” continues to be framed in the context of persistent colonial assumptions about Indigenous "primitivism" on the one hand, and Western "progress" on the other. When the plight of Indigenous peoples is framed in this way, no matter how well intentioned the thinker, leader, or government bureaucrat, solutions inherently seek to address “gaps” between the two societies – Indigenous and Settler. Second, traditional Indigenous ways of life, and even their post-contact adaptive ways of life have been so decimated, that Indigenous peoples find themselves in the unenviable position of having to choose between feeding their families, often compromising their principles in the process, and starvation. Further, discussing the problem in terms of gaps implies an agreement on universal norms of community development where none may exist. Consequently, efforts at gap reduction

mark a significant shift away from the voices of the 1960s and 1970s that still called for a respect and recognition of distinct indigenous and Settler societies.

Many of the early treaties negotiated between Indigenous nations - who were still relatively strong, and European Settlers - more concerned about trade than settlement, reflected a spirit of mutual noninterference. Throughout the following Settler occupation and establishment of colonial governments in North America, Indigenous peoples continued to approach Indigenous-Settler relations from the perspective of noninterference. This approach persisted well into the twentieth century, as Vine Deloria, Jr. wrote in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, “What we need is a cultural leave-us-alone agreement, in spirit and in fact.”¹ Such an agreement failed to materialize anywhere in North America, however, and the spirit of the Two-Row Wampum faded in favour of Euroamerican liberal values that continue to dominate Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada. Taiaiake Alfred, in his most recent book, *Wasáse*, writes of Western liberalism and colonialism,

The basic substance of the problem...is the belief in the superiority and universality of Euroamerican culture, especially in the concepts of individual rights as the highest expression of human freedom, representative democracy as being the guarantor of peace and order, and capitalism as the only means to achieve the satisfaction of human material needs.²

These hallmarks of liberalism find their roots in the European Enlightenment era and continue to shape the debates about Indigenous citizenship and community organization. The recent shift towards an economic development agenda is a natural extension of these liberal values and marks a significant and troubling shift away from Indigenous values. While strict and static definitions of what is or is not Indigenous are problematic, particularly ones rooted in Settler

¹ Vine Deloria, Jr. *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 27.

² Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 109. “Kanienkeha” is the Haudenasaunee word more commonly known as “Mohawk.”

imaginings, I do believe that the current agenda of Aboriginal economic development, endorsed by Settlers, and increasingly embraced by certain Aboriginal leaders, is one that threatens many fundamental Indigenous principles and our futures as dignified and distinct people.

This paper documents the shift in discourse of Indigenous-Settler relations, as articulated by Indigenous leaders, scholars, and bureaucrats past and present, highlighting the emergence of neoliberal values as exemplified by the reports of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, and the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. In addition to examining the theoretical foundations for neoliberalism that these reports exemplify, I will also offer a critique of the Aboriginal economic development agenda in Canada and the United States, as put into practice by Indigenous leaders like Clarence Louie of the Osoyoos Indian Band and Ray Halbritter of the Oneida Indian Nation. I will conclude with a brief discussion about alternatives including some potential links with the Social Economy movement. The intent of this paper is not merely to provide a lament, nor is it to vilify Louie and Halbritter or their communities. I do, however, intend to sound the alarm about the contemporary Aboriginal economic development agenda that many Indigenous leaders are now embracing as a solution to the socio-economic, political, cultural and social despair that their communities are experiencing as a result of colonization. I hope that a renewed sense of urgency will compel present and future Indigenous people and their allies to revitalize their communities in a manner more consistent with Indigenous principles and worldviews.

Before proceeding, allow me to clarify what I mean by Indigenous worldviews and values on the one hand, and neoliberal values on the other. In reference to Indigenous conceptions of the physical and spiritual worlds, and their interconnection, Umeek, an Ahousaht

hereditary chief writes, “In the Nuu-chah-nulth language, *heshook-ish tsawalk* means ‘everything is one.’ *Heshook-ish tsawalk* is a Nuu-chah-nulth perspective that is inclusive of all reality, physical and metaphysical.”³ Umeek believes that current environmental crises are the result of failures to observe the laws of balance and harmony, particularly between human and nonhuman.⁴ Traditional Nuu-chah-nulth hereditary chiefs, or *Ha’wilth*, were responsible for the protection of their *Ha’hoolthlii*, or lands, waters, air, resources, people and animals. In this respect, land ownership was more reflective of a responsibility for stewardship rather than the Western conception of private property rights.⁵ The principle of interconnection is common among many Indigenous groups. Brian Burkhart writes of the Cherokee that, “We must never forget the things around us and how we are related to those things.”⁶ Marilyn Verney a Diné woman from New Mexico writes,

Our land is sacred, holy. There is a strong relationship (interdependent relational bond) between land and people. Land is Mother Earth. We came to be from within the womb of Mother Earth. Mother Earth is home for all living beings: human people, animal people, plant people, everything in the universe. Therefore, Mother Earth, as an interdependent sustainer of life, is not to be stripped, taken apart, or desecrated, nor should boundaries of property (ownership) be placed upon her.⁷

Vine Deloria, Jr. also made some important contributions to the understanding of contemporary Indigenous thinking and relations with Settlers. According to Deloria,

Tribal peoples have traditionally been understood by Westerners as the last remnants of a hypothetical earlier stage of cultural evolution, and this so-called “primitive stage” of human development is a necessary preamble to any discussion of human beings and the meaning of their lives. Indeed, the stereotype of primitive peoples anchors the whole edifice of Western social thought. We

³ Umeek (E. Richard Atleo). *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 45.

⁴ *Ibid.* 63.

⁵ *Restoring First Nations to the Land: Lessons from Clayoquot Sound* (Port Alberni: Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and Natural Resources Defense Council, 2001), 5.

⁶ Brian Yazzie Burkhart. “What Coyote and Thales can teach us: An outline of American Indian epistemology” in *American Indian Thought*, ed. Anne Waters (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 16.

⁷ Marilyn Notah Verney. “On Authenticity” in *American Indian Thought*, ed. Anne Waters (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 134.

(Western thinkers) need the primitive so that we can distinguish Western civilization from it and congratulate ourselves on the progress that we have made.⁸

Deloria writes further, “Among the most important differences between tribal peoples’ and Western thinking is the concentration in the West on the solitary individual to the exclusion of the group”⁹ and “great care must be taken to identify tribal societies and Western thinking as being different in their approach to the world but equal in their conclusions about the world.”¹⁰ By “equal” Vine means a mutual respect for distinctiveness between Indigenous and Settler societies.

In contrast, Robert Young describes neoliberalism as the refinement of liberal economic policies, characterized by “structural adjustments,” free trade, privatization, reduced state social spending, increased foreign direct investment, focus on “comparative advantages” (usually cheap labour or cheap resources for export), and debt-servicing, encouraged by Western institutions like the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.¹¹ For the Indigenous Zapatista Movement in Mexico, neoliberalism represents a devaluation of humanity and the loss of dignity and life at the behest of the market. In a neoliberal world, especially for Indigenous people, “There is no place for hope, no place for tomorrow.”¹² Eduardo Galeano, a Uruguayan journalist, historian, and well-respected critic of neoliberalism writes,

After five centuries of business from all of Christianity, one-third of the American forest has been annihilated, a lot of once-fertile land is sterile, and over half of the population eats infrequently. The Indians, victims of the greatest thievery in world history, still suffer the usurpation of their remaining bits of land, and are still condemned to the negation of their *distinct* identity. They are still prohibited from living the traditional way; their right to be themselves is still denied. At first

⁸ Vine Deloria, Jr. “Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples” in *American Indian Thought*, ed. Anne Waters (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 3.

⁹ Ibid. 10.

¹⁰ Ibid. 5.

¹¹ Robert J. C. Young. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 53.

¹² Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos. *Our Word is our Weapon* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 109.

pillage and “othercide” were carried out in the name of God in heaven. Now it is done in the name of the god of Progress.¹³

As we shall see, the idea of “progress” will be a persistent one in the following examination of evolving Indigenous-Settler relations discourse in Canada.

1969- 2008: From Indigenous Nationhood to Aboriginal Economic Development

Nineteen sixty nine was an important year in Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada. After what George Manuel referred to as a “decade of consultation,” the Liberal government under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chrétien released “The White Paper.”¹⁴ Consistent with Trudeau’s liberal vision of a just society, The White Paper was an attempt to solve the “Indian Problem” by eliminating Indians as a distinct group of Canadian society. It called for the eradication of Indian reservations and special Indian status, and promoted the integration of Indigenous people within mainstream Canadian society. In many ways, this mirrored the policies of the “termination era” in the United States.¹⁵ Dale Turner writes that it was a “calculated attempt by the federal government to ‘get out of the Indian business’ ...by unilaterally legislating the Indians into extinction.”¹⁶ Harold Cardinal wrote in *The Unjust Society*, a passionate and polemical response to the White Paper, that the government plans were “entirely unacceptable” and that they amounted to “total assimilation of the Indian” and “cultural genocide.”¹⁷ Most Indigenous groups favoured the idea of getting the government out of their lives, but what Trudeau and Chrétien proposed was considered too drastic and insensitive, especially after years of government-imposed dependence had weakened most

¹³ Eduardo Galeano. *We Say No:Chronicles 1963-1991*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 303. *Emphasis in original.*

¹⁴ George Manuel and Michael Posluns. *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills: Collier-Macmillan, 1974), 157-168.

¹⁵ Sandy Grande. *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 43.

¹⁶ Dale Turner. *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 12.

¹⁷ Harold Cardinal. *The Unjust Society* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1999), 107.

Indigenous communities. The Canadian government vision for Indigenous people was one of assimilation, rooted in the liberal belief in progress and modernization. Manuel wrote, “The traditional argument for the assimilation of Indian peoples has always begun with the belief that the way of life that European man called, ‘progress’ was not only good but inevitable for all mankind.”¹⁸

The collective outrage in response to the White Paper turned into unprecedented pan-Indigenous unity and a renaissance of Indigenous rights articulation in Canada. The National Indian Brotherhood, now known as the Assembly of First Nations, was formed in Ottawa as well as the Union of BC Indian Chiefs in British Columbia.¹⁹ George Manuel was an influential leader in both organizations and along with co-author Michael Posluns, he published *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* in 1974. In the Foreword section of the book, Vine Deloria, Jr. wrote, “George Manuel may be Canada’s greatest prophet and to refuse to consider his words of advice may be the ultimate folly of our times.”²⁰ Manuel situated the challenges facing Indigenous people in Canada as a struggle to maintain distinct Indigenous identities in the face of the overwhelming pressure to assimilate. Manuel wrote of the Indigenous reality in his lifetime,

However precarious our existence may have been in the 1920’s, we still maintained our traditional means of livelihood, our language – the key to any culture – and our decision-making processes, the essence of governments. We had dignity and self-respect.²¹

Despite more than three hundred years of Settler occupation, Indigenous people maintained the desire to remain distinct and co-exist peacefully with the newcomers with dignity and mutual respect. Manuel refers to the Two Row Wampum Belt meant to symbolize an agreement of

¹⁸ George Manuel and Michael Posluns. *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills: Collier-Macmillan, 1974), 252.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 178.

²⁰ *Ibid.* xii

²¹ *Ibid.* 1.

noninterference and peaceful co-existence between Haudenasaunee and early Dutch Settlers.

Manuel wrote,

It is only through the mutual acknowledgement of the other's reality that it is possible to travel on parallel courses and avoid collision. It is the emergence of this kind of mutual acknowledgement that I would understand to be the only standard of positive change and integration.²²

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Manuel, Cardinal, Deloria and others would continue to call for Indigenous community resurgence in the spirit of noninterference, however, as the struggle increasingly took place at the negotiation tables and in the court rooms, an important shift would manifest. The White Paper policy was ultimately withdrawn, but upon doing so, "Chrétien explained that if the Indians were not ready for his policy, he would wait until they were."²³ In the mean time, engagement with colonial bureaucratic and legal processes would begin to alter the discourse of Indigenous-Settler relations in several critical ways.

Despite early twentieth century federal laws that restricted Indigenous people from gathering in large groups, organizing, and hiring lawyers to advance their claims, the history of Aboriginal law in Canada is long and tumultuous. The Nisga'a of British Columbia brought their claims before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England in 1913.²⁴ The Nisga'a would continue to lead the way in the political and legal realms, and in 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on a claim brought forward by Nisga'a leader, Frank Calder. Although Calder lost on a technicality, that of failing to ask the government permission to sue, most legal scholars

²² Ibid. 8.

²³ Ibid. 169.

²⁴ Paul Tennant. *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 86-92. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council was Canada's highest court at the time. The Supreme Court of Canada, although in existence since 1875, did not fulfill the role of Canada's highest legal authority until 1949.

regard the ruling as crucial in the development of Aboriginal law.²⁵ Mr. Justice Wilfred Judson wrote,

I think that it is clear that Indian title in British Columbia cannot owe its origin to the Proclamation of 1763. The fact is that when the settlers came, the Indians were there, organized in societies and occupying the land as their forefathers had done for centuries. This is what Indian title means.²⁶

After the ruling, Prime Minister Trudeau commented, “You have more legal rights than I thought you had.”²⁷ Since 1973, the Supreme Court has continued to hear Aboriginal rights and title cases, notably among them, *Sparrow*, *Gladstone*, *Marshall*, *Vad der Peet*, *Haida*, *Taku River Tlingit*, and perhaps most famous of them all, *Delgamuukw*.

Delgamuukw is important because there has been considerable debate as to whether it has helped or hindered the claims of Indigenous people. Many regard it as a milestone, reaffirming the existence of Aboriginal title, while critics suggest that the legal recognition of Aboriginal title in Canada is narrow and weak. This is because, in addition to affirming Aboriginal title, the Court also confirmed and legitimated Crown title, with the former described as a “burden” on the latter. Karilyn Toovey writes, “The 1997 *Delgamuukw* decision was and continues to be devastating in terms of establishing any kind of Indigenous rights within the Canadian judiciary.”²⁸ Toovey believes that the constraints inherent in the Canadian legal system, with its English Common Law foundations, inhibit any meaningful recognition of Indigenous rights and responsibilities. Additionally, the Crown retained the right of infringement in *Delgamuukw*. Mr. Justice Antonio Lamer wrote in his judgment,

²⁵ George Manuel and Michael Posluns. *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills: Collier-Macmillan, 1974), 225.

²⁶ Paul Tennant. *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 221.

²⁷ George Manuel and Michael Posluns. *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills: Collier-Macmillan, 1974), 225.

²⁸ K. Toovey. “Decolonizing or Recolonizing: Indigenous Peoples and the Law in Canada” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2005), 39.

In my opinion, the development of agriculture, forestry, mining, and hydroelectric power, the general economic development of the interior of British Columbia, protection of the environment or endangered species, the building of infrastructure and the settlement of foreign populations to support those aims, are the kinds of objectives that are consistent with this purpose and, in principle, can justify the infringement of aboriginal title.²⁹

In giving such a broad scope for justifiable infringement, the Crown remains practically unfettered in its jurisdiction over indigenous lands and resources, making any recognition of Indigenous rights or jurisdiction virtually moot. The Supreme Court has also been reluctant to identify specific areas of Aboriginal title, expressing that the details are best worked out through the political process of negotiations. On this front, advocacy in the political realm remained active and contributed to the favourable, albeit complicated rulings of the Supreme Court. What began, as small, isolated disputes over hunting or fishing rights would often be drawn into long bureaucratic, legal, and political processes spanning decades.

Court decisions were bolstered as well, after decades of political petitioning by Indigenous organizations, by the inclusion of section 35 in the Constitution Act of 1982, which recognized “existing and Aboriginal treaty rights.”³⁰ Another driving force that has shaped Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada has been the small land and rights disputes that have erupted into physical confrontations, attracting international media attention and public scrutiny. Although there have been dozens of highly publicized conflicts between indigenous peoples and the state, including Burnt Church, Gustafson Lake, and the tragedy at Ipperwash, none have captured the attention of the world as much as the Oka crisis of 1990.

A long-standing dispute between Francophone Settlers and Kaniienkeha communities erupted again when the town of Oka proposed to expand a golf course on land considered sacred

²⁹ *Supra* note 40 at 165.

³⁰ Tony Penikett. *Reconciliation: First Nations Treaty Making in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2006), 92.

by the Kanienkeha people of Kanesatake.³¹ After months of peaceful protest and failed negotiations, the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) unsuccessfully attempted to enforce a court injunction calling for the removal of the road blockades. On the morning of July 11, 1990, after launching tear gas, police attacked the barricades and an intense exchange of gunfire between the SQ and the Mohawk Warriors resulted in the death of corporal Marcel Lemay. More than 1,000 police officers were called in to support the siege before being replaced by more than 2,600 Canadian soldiers. The Mohawk Warriors never numbered more than 30, and thus enhanced the David and Goliath imagery of the conflict on the world stage.³² In addition to the blockading of the Mercier Bridge in Montréal by fellow Kanienkeha members of Kahnawake, sympathy blockades and protests sprang up across the country.

Constitutional talks, courtroom battles, and now civil unrest – including the domestic use of the Canadian military - all reminded the country and its politicians that unresolved issues with Canada’s Indigenous people were not going away. The political will that was generated by the collective crises compelled two key initiatives in 1991 – The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and an expansion of the federal Comprehensive Claims process that resulted in the development of the BC Treaty Process.³³ Clearly, the stakes had risen and Indigenous people became hopeful that just resolutions to their centuries-old claims were just around the corner.

The shift in discourse and actions taken by several Indigenous communities did not occur in isolation but is reflective of the co-opting bureaucratic processes that followed crises like Oka. In an attempt to identify the underlying liberal basis of this significant shift, I have chosen to examine the reports issued by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Harvard Project

³¹ “Kanienkeha” is the Haudenasaunee word for the term more commonly known as “Mohawk”

³² Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera. *People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka* (Toronto: McArthur & Company, 1991), 294-299.

³³ Tony Penikett. *Reconciliation: First Nations Treaty Making in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2006), 5.

on American Indian Economic Development, and the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. I will then offer a critique based upon the language used in all three projects, which I believe characterizes an implicit acceptance of the neoliberal dogma inherent in the current trend of Aboriginal economic development.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) “was born in a time of ferment.”³⁴ Appointed in 1991, the Commission sought to reconcile Indigenous rights within Canada in the wake of tremendous legal confusion, political upheaval, and civil unrest. By the time the Commission issued its final report in 1996, Canadian Indigenous-Settler relations had endured the failed Meech Lake Accord (1987), the Oka Crisis (1990), the failed Charlottetown Accord (1992), the death of Dudley George at Ipperwash (1995), and a shootout at Gustafson Lake (1996).³⁵ Tired of conflict and anxious for a renewed relationship based on respect, recognition, “justice, change, inclusiveness, cultural diversity and enlightened self-interest,” Indigenous and Settler commissioners held public hearings and solicited research for nearly three years.³⁶ Dale Turner believes that despite the best efforts of the commissioners, presenters, and researchers, RCAP was doomed to fail. Turner writes,

For many Aboriginal peoples, the commission did not reconcile indigenous ways of knowing the world – expressed during the public hearings and much of the commission’s research program – with contemporary Aboriginal legal and political practices in Canada. This is because indigenous forms of knowledge and the discourse of contemporary Aboriginal rights are at odds with respect to how they situate Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society. I am not suggesting that the commission did not try to reconcile these two seemingly disparate voices; I am

³⁴ *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Volume 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing, 1996), 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.* xxiii

saying they *could not* do so because of the very nature of the commission as a Canadian political institution.³⁷

Turner summarizes the challenges faced by the commission, and Indigenous-Settler relations in general, writing simply, “Many Canadians see the commission’s recommendations as unreasonable and untenable in practice; many Aboriginal peoples think the commission’s vision does not go far enough.”³⁸

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the specific language used in the final report, particularly as it pertains to the issue of Aboriginal economic development. This viewpoint sees Aboriginal economic development not only as an indication of divergence between Indigenous-Settler state worldviews, but also illustrates how this use of language sets the stage for a domination of neoliberal values in the subsequent discourse of Indigenous community resurgence. Ironically, the RCAP report acknowledges some of the very problems I wish to highlight in its opening pages stating, “Canadians should reflect too on how we moved from place to place to make way for ‘progress’, ‘development’, and ‘settlement’, and how we took their children from them and tried to make them over in our image.”³⁹ While the report acknowledges the potential problems of contrasting terms like “progress” and “development” with popular images of Indigenous people as backward, traditional, and stuck in the past, much of the report accepts the neoliberal language as inevitable in contemporary Canadian society. RCAP tries to envision the best of both worlds:

Volume 2 addresses various means by which Aboriginal economies can be put on a stable footing though mixed economies that rely in part on *traditional* modes of

³⁷ Dale Turner. *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 72. *Emphasis in original.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* 78.

³⁹ *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Volume 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing, 1996), 2-3.

harvesting renewable resources and through fuller engagement of Aboriginal *individuals* and institutions in *wage* and *market* economies.⁴⁰

The RCAP *Highlights From the Report* website is also full of words and phrases such as, “thrive as individuals”, “modern wage work”, “compete”, “capital”, “modern commercial enterprises”, and “labour force.”⁴¹ It states “Recent progress in economic development gives rise to hope for a brighter future. But the challenge of turning pockets of progress into a broad transformation of economic life for Aboriginal people remains immense.” The Report also maintains, “They (Indigenous people) must be helped to develop the personnel and the regional and national institutions they need to invest in and manage businesses in specific sectors - resource extraction industries, agriculture, communications, tourism, and so on.” In stating the above RCAP suggests that part of the solution is in educating and training Indigenous youth to achieve, “proficiency in the skills valued by contemporary society.”⁴²

To be absolutely clear, I am in favour of Indigenous community resurgence that allows for the growth of healthy Indigenous families in a manner that is sustainable and self-sufficient. What alarms me is the use of language that casts Indigenous values as “traditional” and therefore relegated to the past, and the future of Indigenous communities cast as nothing more than an incidental collective of competitive individuals working in the “modern wage economy.” While I am suggesting that much of the language used in the RCAP report implies an acceptance of neoliberal ideology, I am aware that the commissioners struggled with the challenge of reconciling two (Indigenous and Settler) “seemingly disparate voices,” as Turner reminds us.⁴³ South of the border, many scholars and community leaders also sought to embrace the path of

⁴⁰ Ibid. 4. *Emphasis added.*

⁴¹ *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Restructuring the Relationship.* Accessed August 10, 2008. <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/rpt/rel_e.html>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Dale Turner. *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 72.

economic development as a means towards Indigenous community revitalization. The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development provides one such example.

The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development

The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development led by Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt, deals primarily with Indigenous peoples in the United States, but it has proven influential amongst politicians and bureaucrats in Canada as well. Based out of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, the project involved substantial research on the issue of economic development but it also attempted to connect the success of American Indian economic development to tribal sovereignty and community governance. In the conclusion of their paper, *Sovereignty and Nation-Building: The Development Challenge in Indian Country*, Cornell and Kalt write, “Economic development on Indian reservations is first and foremost a political problem. At the heart of it lie sovereignty and the governing institutions through which sovereignty can be effectively exercised.”⁴⁴ Cornell and Kalt are primarily concerned with why some Indigenous nations are economically successful while others are not. Despite a great variance in the human and natural resources available to different tribes, these are not considered key determining factors for success. According to Cornell and Kalt, more important are matters of jurisdiction, “de-facto sovereignty” and stable institutions.⁴⁵ With regard to sensitivity towards Indigenous principles and worldviews, on the matter of governance, Cornell and Kalt believe that there needs to be a “cultural match.” They write,

Cultural “match” refers to the match between governing institutions and the prevailing ideas in the community about how authority should be organized and exercised. Such prevailing notions are part of the culture of a tribe or of any

⁴⁴ Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt. *Sovereignty and Nation-Building: The Development Challenge in Indian Country*. 32. Accessed July 5, 2008. < http://www.hks.harvard.edu/hpaied/pubs/pub_120.htm>

⁴⁵ Ibid. 10-20.

cohesive society. Governing institutions “match” a society’s culture when governing authority is exercised when, where, and by whom the society’s norms – often unspoken and informal – regard as legitimate.⁴⁶

They write further, “A ‘nation-building’ approach to development doesn’t say, ‘let’s start a business.’ Instead, it says, ‘let’s build an environment that encourages investors to invest, that helps businesses last, and that allows investments to flourish and pay off.’”⁴⁷ From this perspective, a cultural match between an Indigenous nation’s values and its governing institutions is somewhat incidental to the priority of providing stable institutions that encourage capital investment for the purposes of economic development.

Cornell and Kalt use language like, “exploit,” “market,” “major player,” “productive,” “outperforming,” “stability,” “efficient,” and “competitive.”⁴⁸ These are the words of a competitive, neoliberal economic world. In their paper, *Reloading the Dice: Improving the Chances for Economic Development on American Indian Reservations*, Cornell and Kalt also give us, “gamble,” “market opportunity,” “efficiency,” and “productivity.”⁴⁹ At first glance, one might not see anything wrong with this language, but contrasted with Indigenous conceptions of co-operation, sharing, reciprocity, balance, harmony, co-existence, interconnection, and respect, and one can see a divergence worth noting. The fact that this neoliberal language has permeated the discourse of Indigenous community development as normative modes for governance and business organization is testament to its hegemonic status.

The Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples

⁴⁶ Ibid. 19.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 1-35.

⁴⁹ Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt. *Reloading the Dice: Improving the Chances for Economic Development on American Indian Reservations*. 1-51. Accessed August 14, 2008.

<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/hpaied/pubs/pub_120.htm>

Of all three reports, none so explicitly uses the language of neoliberalism and implicitly suggests the Aboriginal acceptance of these values as the final report of the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, issued March 2007, titled, *Sharing Canada's Prosperity – A Hand up, Not a Hand Out*. From the preface, the report states, “Despite considerable efforts by successive governments to improve the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal people, many continue to lag behind the rest of the Canadian population when measured against nearly every social and economic indicator.”⁵⁰ Here again, we see the framing of the problem in terms of socio-economic gaps that must be overcome, shifting the focus of community resurgence away from a respect for Indigenous ontologies and towards a neoliberal development framework. The report suggests that Indigenous people have and can succeed “on their own terms”⁵¹ but also remarks,

Where the seeds of economic action have taken root, they have blossomed. Guided by visionary leaders, these communities made the leap to the modern industrial economy, often in a single generation. These remarkable successes... have changed the future of communities and contributed to the economic well-being of entire regions.⁵²

By stating that successful Indigenous communities have “made the leap to the modern industrial economy” the Senate report implicates the virtue, or at least the inevitability, of Western forms of economic organization – namely, capitalism. At the same time it suggests that “traditional” forms of Indigenous economics are backward and no longer relevant.

In terms of specific language, the Senate report offers, “success,” “unproductive,” “take advantage” (of economic opportunities), “market forces,” “modernize,” “progress,” “exploit,” “inefficiencies,” “realistic,” “economic integration,” “education gap,” “catching up,” and an

⁵⁰ *Sharing Canada's Prosperity – A Hand up, Not a Hand Out*. p. vii. Accessed July 7, 2008. <<http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/abor-e/rep-e/rep06-e.pdf>>

⁵¹ Ibid. ix.

⁵² Ibid. vii.

emphasis on the “individual.”⁵³ In addition to pointing out seemingly negative attributes such as “unproductive” and “inefficient” – anointing the virtues of productivity and efficiency - the Senate emphasizes the need to be “realistic” and “take advantage” and “exploit” opportunities and resources. The imperative for Indigenous people to do these things is highlighted by the “education gap” and the need to “catch up” to mainstream Canadian society. In discussing the “spectrum” of economic development definitions, the Senate writes,

Regardless of how one defines economic development, what is clear is that for too long Aboriginal people in Canada have been largely excluded from sharing in this country’s economic success. As a result, many have fallen behind the Canadian population in nearly all areas of socio-economic well-being.⁵⁴

This comment by the Senate highlights the growing distance between the Indigenous voices of the 1960s and 1970s and today. Where as Indigenous leaders of previous generations spoke of community resurgence on predominantly Indigenous terms, more and more of today’s leaders are embracing the principles of neoliberalism. The Committee heard substantial testimony from Indigenous community leaders as well as other interested parties. Chief Roland Willson of the West Moberly First Nation in northeastern British Columbia stated before the committee, “We allow business to be business. We try to keep politics out of business. Politics is the quickest way to wreck anything.”⁵⁵ While a sober inspection reveals that business is never absent of politics and that Adam Smith’s “invisible hand of the market” is only a façade, Chief Willson’s comments indicate a growing acceptance of neoliberal political and economic institutional arrangements. And perhaps on the most sober note of all, the Senate report states, “the Committee heard evidence that there is a cultural shift towards integration taking place in many

⁵³ Ibid. vii – 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 9.

Aboriginal communities across Canada.”⁵⁶ It would seem that the visions of noninterference, peaceful co-existence, and respect for distinctiveness articulated by Deloria, Manuel, Cardinal, et al, are being abandoned in favour of Aboriginal economic development and greater integration within the mainstream Canadian society.

Dances With Capitalism: The Neoliberal Leadership of Clarence Louie

Among Indigenous leaders, perhaps no one epitomizes the neoliberal economic development agenda more than Clarence Louie, chief of the Osoyoos Indian Band. As an elected chief for more than twenty years, Louie has adopted a no-nonsense business approach to community development. The Osoyoos Indian Band now runs eight businesses, including a winery, golf course and luxury hotel.⁵⁷ According to Louie, “Economic development is how we hunt today. If you call yourself a leader, give all your people a chance at the dignity of a job, equal opportunity and the individual responsibility to earn a living.”⁵⁸ Louie laments the culture of dependence that has been imposed on Indigenous communities stating at a “regional engagement process” about spending priorities held by the New Relationship Trust, “In the 1800’s, the government took away the Natives’ economic development (capabilities) by removing their ability to support themselves. Native people, over the years, have fed into that system.”⁵⁹ While the culture of dependence that Louie speaks of is certainly problematic and directly connected to the Settler eradication of traditional Indigenous ways of life and adaptive

⁵⁶ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁷ Calvin Helin. *Dances with Dependency: Indigenous Success Through Self-Reliance* (Vancouver: Orca Spirit Publishing & Communications, 2006), 233-234.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 235.

⁵⁹ New Relationship Trust website. Accessed August 13, 2008. <<http://www.newrelationshiptrust.ca/about/2006-regional-engagement-process/chief-clarence-louie>>

ways of live, equating dignity with the attainment of a job exemplifies just how far we have come in accepting neoliberal values and practices.

Louie's fiery personality and blunt rhetoric have contributed to his popularity as a public speaker and a darling of right-wing Settler organizations like the Fraser Institute and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Speaking at the University of Saskatchewan on the success of his community's businesses, Louie stated simply, "It's called the economy stupid!" Louie's talks are not without some reference to Indigenous "traditions" as well: "Our ancestors worked for a living." He states further, "Words without action, excuses and blame lead towards more welfare dependency and poverty." Journalist Patricia Robertson writes of one of Louie's talks, "It's time, he proclaimed, for native people to move forward and join the economy."⁶⁰ Louie believes that "there is one and only one priority for spending in First Nations communities: economic development, or, more simply put, wealth generation."⁶¹ Louie is more than aware that his words and actions are interpreted by some as controversial. To his critics he replies, "There is no consensus in Indian Country. Business opportunities do not wait for consensus."⁶²

In conflating an historical Indigenous work ethic with participation in the modern wage economy, Louie is trying to combat what he sees as dependence-induced laziness. This is problematic for several reasons. First, while our ancestors were surely adept at providing for the material needs of their communities in sustainable ways, it is a far cry from actively participating in a modern capitalist economy predicated on the ever-expanding exploitation of Indigenous lands, resources, and people. Second, Louie is buying into the stereotype of the "lazy Indian" by placing the blame solely on a culture of dependence and not critically analyzing the conflicting

⁶⁰ Patricia Robertson. "A new native leadership calls for self-help" *Glove and Mail*. March, 20 2007, F2.

⁶¹ New Relationship Trust website. Accessed August 13, 2008. <<http://www.newrelationshiptrust.ca/about/2006-regional-engagement-process/chief-clarence-louie>>

⁶² Ibid.

Indigenous and Settler values that have previously inhibited Indigenous participation in the mainstream economy. Connected to this is the privileging of the liberal values of individuality and competitiveness. Robertson's assertion that moving to join the economy is a move "forward" and Louie's lament at Indian laziness only further entrench racist stereotypes and universalizing Eurocentric values. South of the border, other Indigenous leaders have also embraced the economic development path towards community empowerment.

The Wartime Leadership of Ray Halbritter

"I just want our people to live in peace and to have a good life," proclaims Ray Halbritter, Nation Representative, and Chief Executive Officer of several businesses owned by the Oneida Indian Nation in central New York State.⁶³ The Oneida Nation is one of the most successful "gaming tribes" in the United States, taking advantage of their unique legal and jurisdictional position to operate casinos on their lands.⁶⁴ Halbritter's views of his leadership style and strategy for community revitalization are rooted in a sense of urgency and war metaphors. In an interview with Taiaiake Alfred, Halbritter commented,

I think that in wartime conditions, a certain leadership is called for, and it's different than leadership in peacetime. Some people think we're in peacetime right now. I don't think we're at peace at all. I think we're in a struggle for our lives. I think we're in a war (but) it's a different kind of war. It's just like the battle to take this land from us: it wasn't done so much on an actual battlefield, it was done in the courts and in the philosophy of both the government and the church.⁶⁵

Many Indigenous peoples did have separate leaders for times of war and peace, and Halbritter believes that despite amicable platitudes, Indigenous peoples are still at war with the Settler

⁶³ Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 217.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 212.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 214.

people and governments that have occupied their territories. Frustrated with what he describes as endless speeches about Haudenasaunee “sovereignty” and little action, Halbritter felt he could no longer tolerate the poverty that his people lived in.⁶⁶ According to Halbritter, “Economic power (is) the basis for political power. You can’t do anything without money – you can’t travel, you can’t even make phone calls...Economic power can’t be denied in my view.”⁶⁷

In the context of this feeling of political impotence and limited economic options, Halbritter’s perspective is easier to understand. It is my opinion that the intellectual framing of the “Indian problem” as one of “gap reduction,” in addition to the physical reality of community poverty, brought about through the destruction of traditional ways of life and sustenance have compelled Indigenous leaders to undertake actions that might have previously been considered gross violations of their Indigenous values and principles. Are they still?

Other Ways Are Possible: Critiques and Alternatives

The dominant political, legal and economic solutions of the last forty years have all been attempts to recognize Indigenous peoples and values within the narrow confines of state institutions and liberal normative values. According to Glen Coulthard, however, “the politics of recognition in its contemporary form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend.”⁶⁸ Coulthard states further,

The dominance of the legal approach to self-determination has, over time, helped to produce a class of Aboriginal “citizens” whose rights and identities have become defined solely in relation to the colonial state and its apparatus. Similarly, strategies that have sought self-determination via mainstream economic development have facilitated the creation of a new elite of Aboriginal capitalists

⁶⁶ Ibid. 215.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 216.

⁶⁸ Glen Coulthard. “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the ‘Politics of Recognition’ in Canada,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 3 (2007): 1-29.

whose thirst for profit has come to outweigh their ancestral obligations to the land and to others.⁶⁹

Here we confront the challenge of essentializing Indigenous identity. One, however, cannot ignore the emancipatory rhetoric of Indigenous leaders for generations proclaiming distinctiveness and the right to self-determination in the face of a Settler government that sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples. The purpose of this paper is not to draw definitive lines with regard to Indigenous identity and conduct but to problematize the pronounced shift towards neoliberal values and practices.

For Jeff Corntassel, Indigenous community revitalization is rooted in ongoing connections to the land through cultural practices passed down through the generations.

Corntassel writes,

Without the ability of community members to continuously renew their relationships with the natural world (ie., gathering medicines, hunting, and fishing, basket-making, etc.), indigenous languages, traditional teachings, family structures, and livelihoods of that community are all jeopardized.⁷⁰

Here, Corntassel reminds us that there are Indigenous relationships and practices that are in danger of being relegated to the museum of history, that are still vital to the perpetuation of an Indigenous existence. Taken together, the views of Coulthard and Corntassel suggest that Aboriginal economic development, as currently endorsed by the state and put into practice by people like Clarence Louie and Ray Halbritter, is not consistent with fundamental Indigenous values, despite the token rhetoric to the contrary.

Taiiaki Alfred also provides some thoughtful words on the matters of Indigenous community resurgence and Aboriginal economic development, writing,

⁶⁹ Ibid. 22.

⁷⁰ Jeff Corntassel. "Toward Sustainable Self-Determination: Rethinking the Contemporary Indigenous-Rights Discourse." *Alternatives* 33 (2008), 118.

How you fight determines who you will become when the battle is over, and there is always means-ends consistency at the end of the game...The implication of the economic development approach is integration into the consumer culture of mainstream capitalist society, which is the defeat of the possibility of ways of life associated with Onkwehonwe cultures.⁷¹

Alfred raises the significance of the means-ends justification. In trying not to draw definitive lines, one might think of a spectrum that exists between assimilation and adaptation, where assimilation signifies the breaking of principle, while adaptation might imply the bending of principles. For the purposes of contrasting neoliberal values and Indigenous values, again refer to the simplified summaries in the Introduction of this paper offered by Umeek, Yazzie Burkhart, Motah Verney, and Deloria. Alfred also recognizes the importance of the economic question, however, noting that, "political approaches to making change that do not include a solid plan for economic self-sufficiency on either a personal or collective level are doomed to fail."⁷² Ultimately, however, Alfred believes that the current approach to Aboriginal self-government and economic development encouraged by the Settler state are both ineffective *and* dangerous for Indigenous communities. He writes,

These surface reforms are being offered because they are useless to our survival as Onkwehonwe. This is not a coincidence, nor is it a result of our goals being obsolete. Self-government and economic development are being offered precisely *because* they are useless to us in the struggle to survive as peoples and so are no threat to the Settlers and, specifically, the interests of the people who control the Settler state. This is assimilation's end-game. Today, self-government and economic development signify the defeat of our peoples' struggles just as surely as, to our grandparents, residential schools, land dispossession, and police beatings signified the supposed supremacy of white power and the subjugation and humiliation of the first and real peoples of this land.⁷³

Coulthard, Corntassel, and Alfred all suggest that in the struggle for Indigenous community revitalization, one must be vigilant, as the apparatus of state continually works to co-opt popular

⁷¹ Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2005), 23. "Onkwehonwe" is a Haudenasaunee (Iroquois) word roughly translating into "Indigenous."

⁷² Ibid. 223.

⁷³ Ibid. 37. *Emphasis in original.*

movements in a way that not only renders Indigenous claims inert, but also proves potentially destructive to fundamental Indigenous ways of being.

Offering another helpful understanding of these issues of decolonization and struggles against oppression is African-American feminist theorist, bell hooks. In deconstructing the liberalism of the mainstream feminist movement, hooks writes, “The ideology of ‘competitive, atomistic liberal individualism’ has permeated feminist thought to such an extent that it undermines the potential radicalism of feminist struggle.”⁷⁴ Echoing the writing of Coulthard, hooks comments, “Particularly as regards work, many liberal feminist reforms simply reinforced capitalist, materialist values (illustrating the flexibility of capitalism) without truly liberating women economically.”⁷⁵ And in discussing the implications of a liberal approach, hooks states,

The insistence on a concentrated focus on individualism, on the primacy of self, deemed “liberatory” by women’s liberationists, was not a visionary, radical concept of freedom. It did provide individual solutions for women, however. It was the same idea of independence perpetuated by the imperial patriarchal state, which equates independence with narcissism and lack of concern with triumph over others.⁷⁶

hooks’ observations about the feminist movement also suggest that there is something transformative about liberal solutions that should cause concern for Indigenous peoples as well. Like Coulthard, Cornassel, and Alfred, hooks appreciates the imperial intentions of liberalism and rejects it as an emancipatory tool for oppressed peoples.

So what are the alternatives? The fact that there are few well-known examples of alternatives is a testament to the hegemony of neoliberalism in contemporary times but that does not mean that they do not exist locally and the world over. The Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico continues to inspire, especially as a living critique of neoliberal policies and also as an

⁷⁴ Bell Hooks. *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 8.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 22.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 76.

alternative to traditional socialist vanguard strategies.⁷⁷ Corntassel calls for “sustainable self-determination,” which he describes as,

A process...premised on the notion that evolving indigenous livelihoods, food security, community governance, relationships to homelands and the natural world, and ceremonial life can be practiced today locally and regionally, thus enabling the transmission of these traditions and practices to future generations. Operating at multiple levels, sustainable self-determination seeks to regenerate the implementation of indigenous natural laws on indigenous homelands and expand the scope of an indigenous self-determination process.⁷⁸

In addition to the example of the Zapatistas, Corntassel points to three other examples of sustainable self-determination: The Native Federation of Madre de Dios (FENAMAD) in Peru, the White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP) in Minnesota, and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuador (CONIAE).⁷⁹ Although the primary goal of this paper is not to present an extensive study of economic alternatives, given the prevalence of the neoliberal economic development model in Canada and around the world, it is important to know that they do exist.

It is also worth considering potential links and alliances with non-Indigenous economic movements that are anti-imperial in orientation and belief. Alfred introduces the concept of “anarcho-indigenism” in his book, *Wasáse*, writing, “There are philosophical connections between indigenous and some strains of anarchist thought on the spirit of freedom and the ideals of a good society.”⁸⁰ Additionally, certain elements of the Social Economy may provide a basis for Indigenous-Settler co-operation.

Potential Links and Alliances with The Social Economy

⁷⁷ Tom Hayden. *The Zapatista Reader*, ed. Tom Hayden (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002), 217.

⁷⁸ Jeff Corntassel. “Toward Sustainable Self-Determination: Rethinking the Contemporary Indigenous-Rights Discourse.” *Alternatives* 33 (2008), 119.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 120.

⁸⁰ Taiaiake Alfred. *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2005), 45-46.

According to the Canadian Community Economic Development Network National Policy Council, Social Economy Roundtable Consultation Briefing Notes from 2005,

The Social Economy consists of association-based economic initiatives founded on values of service to members of community rather than generating profits, autonomous management (not government or market controlled), democratic decision-making, primacy of persons and work over capital, (and is) based on principles of participation, empowerment. The Social Economy includes: social assets (housing, childcare, etc.), social enterprises including cooperatives, equity and debt capital for community investment, social purpose businesses, community training and skills development, integrated social and economic planning, and capacity building and community empowerment. The social economy is a continuum that goes from the one end of totally voluntary organizations to the other end where the economic activity (social enterprise) blurs the line with the private sector.⁸¹

While the Social Economy may be a challenge to define, this does not preclude potential links with Indigenous views on community resurgence. In fact, the blurred lines are consistent with the fluid, non-hierarchical views of Indigeneity *and* anarchism. This flexibility is critical to any alliance building with Indigenous peoples, weary from centuries of external religious, scientific, liberal, and Marxist-inspired dogmas.

Where Social Economy academics and practitioners may require additional understanding is in the complexity of Indigenous worldviews and contemporary efforts at community revitalization. Social Economy advocates must remain critical of their own potentially oppressive actions given their status as Settlers on Indigenous lands, as well as being mindful of who they choose to cooperate with in Indigenous communities. My contention here is that not all Indigenous “community-based enterprises” exemplify Social Economy values. Many Aboriginal community-based businesses are community-based out of jurisdictional and fiscal necessity, but are run on strictly corporatist values.

⁸¹ “Defining the Social Economy,” *BC Social Economy Roundtable website*. Accessed July 31, 2008. <<http://ucscop.com/definition2>>.

Brett Fairbairn believes that Aboriginal economic development is “part of the social economy if by this we mean it is led by a community-based process that is oriented toward the benefit of the community and its individual members in both economic and social terms.”⁸² Fairbairn is hesitant, however, to hastily suggest that Social Economy models should be applied to Indigenous communities, instead writing that Aboriginal economic development might be understood independently; “resembling and parallel to (Community Economic Development) and co-operative development” models.⁸³ Fairbairn rather astutely observes that, “in societies that have been colonized for generations, the imposition of models or approaches from outside – even supposedly participatory ones – is an extremely sensitive issue.”⁸⁴ The basis for cooperation with non-Indigenous people, be they of a Social Economy persuasion or not, is the respect for, and recognition of, Indigenous territories and jurisdiction. Failure to address these issues will only perpetuate the legacy of neocolonialism that has been carried out for centuries by Settlers in Canada. For Indigenous peoples, economic social justice is preceded by restitution – a giving back of what was stolen.

Granted, these aspirations are long-term, if not considered totally unrealistic by some. Others believe that while long-term efforts must be encouraged, much can be done in the present, not merely as building blocks for a more just society, but in shaping a more just society today. Gayle Broad and Lou Hammond Ketilson have documented some successful links between Indigenous peoples and the co-operative movement, particularly in the north amongst the Inuit. They cite approximately 140 co-operatives in the northern regions of the Arctic that provide a variety of services including, “food, supplies, post offices, cable television, internet, hotels,

⁸² 14. Brett Fairbairn. “A Rose by Any Name: The Thorny Question of Social-Economy Discourse in Canada” (paper presented at the 1st International CIRIEC Research Conference on the Social Economy, Vancouver, BC, Canada, October 22-25, 2007)

⁸³ Ibid. 13-14.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 13.

adventure tourism; marketing of arts and crafts, wild rice, fish products; housing; and financial services.”⁸⁵ These successes can be learned from and built upon. Again, it is important to fully understand that Indigenous community resurgence requires a radical shift in thinking that goes beyond platitudes and attempts to make colonialism nicer. If Indigenous-Settler relations are to become re-imagined on the basis of justice and respect, then Settler society will have to examine the true colonial history and present reality of Canada and be prepared to make amends. There are indications that the Social Economy can play a role in reconfiguring economic relations, but both Social Economy advocates and Indigenous communities must commit to further work, theoretically and in practice.

Conclusion

History teaches us that when things seem darkest, people tend to find new inspiration to forge other ways. This is not merely a comforting cliché, but in my view, a very natural reaction to grave circumstances. As the planet struggles with global warming, more and more people are becoming aware and acting on that awareness. As the neoliberal policies of big business invade more and more territory, and more and more people are adversely affected, we see a rise in movements like the Social Economy. Alternatives to neoliberalism exist because Indigenous peoples have lived them. Many Indigenous peoples continue to live in sustainable, self-determining ways today and they provide inspiration to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples seeking alternatives. The move towards neoliberal economics in Indigenous communities is more clearly understood in the context of the evolving discourse evident in the reports of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, and the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. We

⁸⁵ Gayle Broad and Lou Hammond Ketilson. “Mapping the Social Economy in Indigenous Communities” (paper presented at the 1st International CIRIEC Research Conference on the Social Economy, Vancouver, BC, Canada, October 22-25, 2007)

also see neoliberalism lived in the experiences of leaders like Clarence Louie, Ray Halbritter, and Calvin Helin.

Taiiaki Alfred once reminded me in conversation, “*All* movements get co-opted.” This fact is at once, both depressing and liberatory. We hate to see our best efforts at organizing get consumed by state and capitalist apparatus. Awareness of the cyclical nature of mass movements, however, allows us to plan more carefully. A neoliberal future, as predicted by people like Francis Fukuyama, is not inevitable. This is not to say that vigilance is not required and that we do not have important work to do. In the spirit of Indigenous-Settler discourse shared in this paper and the wisdom of those who have gone before us, I leave you with a stern warning from the late Vine Deloria, Jr. from his book, *Red Earth, White Lies*:

These positive symbols of prosperous buckskin are not the whole story, unfortunately. Nothing is calm beneath the veneer of Indian country, and it may be that we are seeing the final absorption of the original inhabitants in the modern consumer society. The push for education in the last generation has done more to erode the sense of Indian identity than any integration program the government previously attempted. The irony of the situation is that Indians truly believed that by seeking a better life for their children through education, much could be accomplished. College and graduate education, however, have now created a generation of technicians and professionals who also happen to have Indian blood. People want the good life and they are prepared to throw away their past in order to get it.⁸⁶

Are we? Indigenous peoples must remember what the “good life” truly is – rooted in the teachings of our ancestors, set aside the assimilative tools of neoliberalism, and fight for it once again. The reality of contemporary living requires that we have allies in this endeavor. Perhaps we might find some among our anarchist and Social Economy friends.

⁸⁶ Vine Deloria, Jr. *Red Earth, White Lies; Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997), 2.

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