

**DECONSTRUCTING THE MYTH OF SELF-GOVERNMENT**

by

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## **Dedication**

**This thesis is dedicated to my mom - Mary, my dad - Gabriel, Daragh, Clodagh, Emily and Brian - who have given me 100% of their support throughout this project and who continue to support me in all my adventures.**

**This thesis is also dedicated to those people who helped me get to the place I am now and to be the person I am today.**

## **Abstract**

This thesis is an examination of self-government as a form of colonial oppression and cultural genocide. To draw this conclusion, literature pertaining to colonialism and self-government is reviewed. Some literature accepts the myth and advocates the incorporation of Aboriginal peoples into the Canadian polity. Other authors articulate the fundamental cultural differences between Native and non-Native cultures (better, ontologies) but fail to adequately explain *how* self-government is oppressive as a result. What is absent from almost all of the literature, though, is a consideration of the relationship between the respective political economies of Native and non-Native cultures. This thesis makes the argument that Western/Aboriginal conflicts are best understood as economic conflicts. Hence, antithetical property forms constitute the basic reason for the fundamentally incompatible notions of Western-imposed Aboriginal self-government and Aboriginal-initiated self-determination. By also examining the respective ontologies, as they emerge out of political economy, this thesis shows *how* self-government, in its current form, will result in the assimilation and deculturation of Aboriginal peoples.

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## Introduction

The historical relationship between the Canadian government and Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> peoples has been one of cultural genocide and dispossession. The policies of the Canadian government have been aimed at the “effective destruction of a people by systematically or systemically destroying, eroding, or undermining the integrity of a culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life.”<sup>2</sup> As a colonial power, the Canadian government has focussed aggressively on the exploitation of the land and resources of Aboriginal peoples existing within its borders. To achieve this goal the federal government has worked continuously to infiltrate and replace traditional values and institutions of Aboriginal society with those of the immigrant society<sup>3</sup>, ones which more

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The term “Aboriginal” will be used interchangeably with “indigenous” and “Native” to represent the original peoples of Turtle Island (currently known as North America). Moreover, the term “Indian” will be used to reflect the colonization of these peoples, vis-à-vis the *Indian Act, 1876*.

2

George E Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 6.

3

The term immigrant-society refers to the society created by the immigrants to this land, currently known as North America, but previously known by most Aboriginal peoples as Turtle Island. As not all citizens of Canada were migrant, rather they were born on this land and into Canadian culture, the term immigrant-society refers particularly to the property form/economy, language base, philosophy and politics, et cetera, typical of Canadian society, all of which is alien to the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

appropriately serve the colonizing agenda.

Effectively since contact, the federal government has managed all facets of Aboriginal people's existence in an effort to control and assimilate them, ultimately transforming them into dependent peoples. In essence, the *Indian Act of 1876* was

...a wide-ranging, intrusive piece of legislation which unilaterally defined the position of Indians and the nature of their relationship with the state. According to the act, Indians were child-like wards who were to be protected from corrupting, outside influences, while at the same time controlled by the government and its designated officials. The act confirmed the mid-19th century government policy of trying to remake Indians into Europeans.<sup>4</sup>

The *Indian Act* provided the federal government with self-appointed "authority" to oppress systematically Aboriginal peoples by imposing a foreign system of government, removing them from the land and placing them on reserves, defining who was and who was not considered an Indian, et cetera. By invading and dominating Aboriginal peoples, their lives, their cultures, their societies, the federal government has worked consistently to eliminate the "Indian problem", with complete disrespect for the people for whom they assumed responsibility. The colonialist agenda has thus aimed specifically at eradicating Aboriginal peoples.

The process of oppression has been pervasive. The critical event in the recent history of federal-Aboriginal relations occurred in 1969 with the introduction of the *White Paper*<sup>5</sup> policy. Aware of the overwhelming dependence of the majority of Aboriginal

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Dave De Brou and Bill Waiser, *Documenting Canada: A History of Modern Canada in Documents* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1992), p. 95.

5

For more information on the *White Paper* see: Canada, *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (Ottawa: Dept. of Supply and Services), 1969.



peoples<sup>6</sup> on the state, the federal government proposed that “Indians be structurally integrated into Canadian society on an individual basis and that the federal tutelage be quickly eliminated.”<sup>7</sup> To this end, the federal government planned to dismantle the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, repeal the *Indian Act* and download the administration of Aboriginal services to the provinces. The intended consequence of these actions would, supposedly, release Aboriginal peoples to participate fully and equally in mainstream Canadian society. The government, in fact, was proposing a policy for the complete absorption of Aboriginal peoples and not their liberation from its constraints. Through the integration of Aboriginal peoples into the immigrant society, assimilation would be achieved more effectively and rapidly. The *White Paper* was viewed by Aboriginals as a means to divest Aboriginal peoples of their lands, their treaty rights, their special status and the federal government’s responsibilities to them. In response, Aboriginal groups organized and expressed their outrage at the terms of the *White Paper* which was seen as “tantamount to committing cultural genocide.”<sup>8</sup> The federal

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“The majority of Aboriginal peoples” refers to those indigenous peoples living, primarily, south of the 60th parallel. Many Aboriginal peoples living in Northern Canada (north of the 60th parallel) remained largely self-sufficient and independent in 1969. Their independence was recognized by the federal government and federal policy, subsequently, worked towards transforming their community independence into dependence upon the state.

7

Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long, “Federal Indian Policy and Indian Self-Government in Canada”, in Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long, eds., *Pathways to Self-Determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 70.

8

*Ibid.*, p. 70. At this point it should be noted that the *Royal Commission on*

government was forced to abandon its effort due to this intense opposition.

In spite of federal goals, Aboriginal peoples remain. In spite of its numerous attempts to incorporate, deculturate and desecrate Aboriginal peoples, the federal government has failed to achieve complete assimilation, and Aboriginal languages, traditions, practices, ideologies and values persist. While the effects of three hundred years of colonialism and oppression have taken their toll on Aboriginal peoples, their resolve to retain their culture<sup>9</sup> remains impressive.

Prior to European invasion, Native peoples practiced and lived an economy which was rooted in a communal property form. Their economy had several distinguishing features. The dominant principle of their economy was that property was held by the clan. Property, however, was not private, nor was it intended for the exclusive use of the clan. Land was considered in terms of traditional territory, clans having hunted and fished on a certain territory for generations. Hence, there was no private “ownership” of the land. Moreover, in the Aboriginal economy there was no wage-labour. No one worked for anyone else in particular, or for themselves alone, but for the community in its entirety. Everyone had an obligation to work for the survival and subsistence of the clan and to contribute their skills and labour to that end. This form of labour ensured that each

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*Aboriginal Peoples* final report has been likened to the *White Paper* for many of these same reasons. This was evident from the Conference held on the report in Montreal, hosted by the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, January 31-February 1, 1997 which the author attended.

9

For the purposes of this work, culture will refer to the political, economic, social and spiritual practices of a people.

member of the community benefitted, and it did not divide the community on any class or hierarchical basis. Finally, there was no state as there were no property relations to defend.

In contrast, the political economy of Western<sup>10</sup> society features private property, wage-labour, class and state. The system of private property permits the ownership of land. Furthermore, private property allows for the exploitation of land by the owner. Private property also makes it possible for a propertied individual to purchase the labour power of property-less individuals. From this basic relationship, class relationships further stratify society hierarchically. Finally, the state defends these property relationships, and it has coercive powers to protect the interests of the propertied class.

Recognizing that the political economies of Aboriginal and Western societies differ, one must also examine their respective ontologies which emerge out of these political economies, for we “make history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not a decisive one.”<sup>11</sup> To understand adequately and appreciate a people and their culture, we must understand how their ontological notions

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<sup>10</sup>

The term “Western” refers to those ideologies, practices, etc., which are associated with the Western world, as originating in Europe. This term is hence used to broadly include the various social, political, economic and religious phenomena emerging out of European society and which are current in Canadian society.

<sup>11</sup>

Friedrich Engels, “Letters on Historical Materialism”, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 761.

accompany their political economy, if only to appreciate fully the form of that economy.<sup>12</sup>

The outlook of Aboriginals emerged out of their economy, formulated by the communal property form. Their political economy was reflected in their relations with other peoples as well as their relations with nature. For instance, the seven generations philosophy of Aboriginal peoples speaks of a need to protect and safeguard nature and the land for the next seven generations of people. Thus, the land is held in stewardship for future generations and is simply being borrowed or utilised temporarily to sustain current life. This condition of Aboriginal life was entrenched, for the Iroquois for example, in the *Great Law of Peace*: “Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people, and have always in view not only the present, but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground - the unborn of the future Nation.”<sup>13</sup> Western ontologies also emerged out of specific economic practices rooted in private property. For instance, under capitalist economic practices there is no sense in protecting the land for future generations, or even for the next generation. Instead, Western ontology, like its economy, reveals an attitude of superiority and greed, of achieving

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As Engels explains: The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure: political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas, also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. *Ibid.*, p. 760.

13

*The Great Law of Peace* (Akwesasne: White Roots of Peace, 1973), wampum no. 28.

maximum profit through the exploitation of people and nature.

To date the literature of colonialism and self-government has focussed primarily on the cultural (or better, ontological) clash between Aboriginal and Western societies. This literature fails to consider the economy in its analyses and descriptions outlining the differences in Native and non-Native societies. While authors like Robert Vachon consciously and clearly articulate the ontological conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies as they are understood, his narrow focus cloaks the underlying cause for conflict, namely fundamental differences in the economy<sup>14</sup>. Ontologies are studied as the self-articulation of a people or culture of their lived experience, and these lived experiences emerge out of political economic practice. Ontology is the highest order understanding of a people's life. It is inseparable, therefore, from economic practice. The argument set forth in this work is that Aboriginal/Western conflicts are best understood as economic conflicts between "communitarian reciprocity economies"<sup>15</sup> with communal modes of production and those economies premised on exchange and private modes of

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For more details, refer to the following works by Robert Vachon: "The Mohawk Nation and Its Communities", *Interculture 113*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1991):1-35. "The Mohawk Dynamics of Peace", *Interculture 118*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1993):3-82. "The Mohawk Nation", *Interculture 121*, vol. 26, no. 4 (1993): 1-49.

<sup>15</sup>

Dominique Temple, "Economicide", *Interculture 98*, vol. 21, no.1 (1988):4.

The term "reciprocity" is a term which this thesis chooses to use in preference of the term "pre-capitalist". While the denotation is similar, the connotation is different as the term "reciprocity" does not define Aboriginal society in terms of, or as against, Western society.

production.<sup>16</sup> Discussion of ontologies is warranted because it is a way of uncoding and deciphering the nature of the differences between Native and immigrant-society, and grounding it in political economy.

Focussing on the nature of colonialism and methods of oppression, Chapter One will analyze the literature of colonialism, considering the consequences of colonialism as articulated by such authors as Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire, and how this relates to the Aboriginal condition, as expressed by authors like Howard Adams. The themes of classic colonialism, internal colonialism, internalized colonialism and neocolonialism will be considered to provide an understanding of the modes of colonialism. Through the evaluation of the psychology of colonialism, one can better appreciate the challenge Aboriginal peoples face in deciphering the real implications of self-government. The Canadian government seeks to impose self-government on Aboriginal peoples, claiming it will reinstate Aboriginal autonomy and return control over their lives. However, the Canadian government is relying on co-opted, neocolonial Aboriginals to ensure its acceptance among the Native communities. As Jorge Noriega explains: “It’s really a perfect system of colonization, convincing the colonized to colonize *each other* in the name of “self-determination” and “liberation.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>

John H. Moore, ed., *The Political Economy of North American Indians* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>17</sup>

Jorge Noriega, “American Indian Education in the United States: Indoctrination for Subordination to Colonialism,” in M. Annette Jaimes, ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), p. 387.

Officially recognizing the “inherent right” of Aboriginal peoples to self-government under section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982, the federal government has, since that time, focussed on the implementation of self-government arrangements with Aboriginal nations across Canada. Prior to any substantial discussion on self-government, though, the federal government has stipulated that Aboriginal nations define the term “self-government”. However, many Aboriginal nations remain unable to provide a definition which is satisfactory to the federal government.

At the root of the impasse over the definition of self-government are the myths encompassing the term. While many Native and non-Native people perceive self-government as a means to “save” and “protect” Aboriginal cultures from imminent absorption, others assert that self-government threatens cultural revitalization and survival. The most obvious mythic future that remains tells of a dispossessed and devastated indigenous people who were miraculously freed from their oppression through the benevolence of the state and the installation of self-governance; a government controlled and exercised by them for their own purposes and benefits. With their own government they were no longer entirely subject to the rules and regulations of the oppressive state and could legislate in a way which more accurately reflected their cultural needs, allowing for language immersion, cultural studies and other similar programming. Likewise, the parent society, relieved to have finally graduated its child from band council to municipal government, would no longer be distracted by a lingering guilt as it had restored self-governance to Aboriginal peoples. As a result, it would no longer be directly responsible for their condition. In this way, the myth of self-government conceals itself and its

colonizing motives in the rhetoric of liberation.

Thus, the second half of Chapter One explores the myth of self-government as it is proclaimed and perpetuated by the vast majority of literature published to date. Most works considered here reinforce the myth as they contemplate the possibilities for Aboriginal self-government within the strict confines of the Canadian state. According to most authors, as well as the Canadian state, the only acceptable avenue for self-government to follow is that of inclusion and accommodation. Hence, this chapter will consider that group of literature which focuses on the means and mechanisms for the actualization of self-government in the context of Western society. This form of literature proves problematic for the majority of Aboriginal peoples and authors whose version of self-government restores them to a nation-to-nation relationship with the immigrant society. To deconstruct the myth of self-government adequately and academically, one must consider **how** it is assimilative, for only then can self-government be appropriately redefined as cultural genocide.

To understand fully how self-government will result in the absorption and deculturation of Aboriginal peoples, it is necessary to respond to the question: how does Native society differ from the immigrant society? To appreciate the fundamental differences which define both Canadian and Aboriginal societies, Chapter Two will examine the political economy and ontology of immigrant/Western society. Since the political economy of Western society is rooted in capitalism, the first half of this chapter will consider the elements of labour, class and state. To elucidate the understanding of Western political economy and how it functions, a discussion on the ontological



justification for private property will be proffered.

Chapter Three will, by comparison, examine the traditional political economy and ontology of Aboriginal peoples, using the Iroquois Confederacy as its prime example. The section relating to political economy will demonstrate how, due to their communal property form, labour, class and state are inappropriate categories with which to understand, properly, the nature of the culture. The Aboriginal economy will be contextualized in the section pertaining to ontology which will express the intimate relation of Aboriginal peoples to nature.

Specifically, this thesis will contemplate the connection which exists between the material conditions of life and the world view which arises from those conditions, for they combine to form the constitution of a people and their social relations. A discourse will be provided on the political economy (property form) of both cultures, examining the relationship between their respective political policies and economic practices as they influence social institutions. Subsequently, the ontology or world views of both Western society and Aboriginal peoples will be discussed. Through this form of analysis, this thesis will demonstrate how self-government functions only to serve the interests of the immigrant-society, entrenching a reverence for private property and imposing its sense of superiority upon Aboriginal peoples. Hence, while assimilation of Aboriginal peoples has passed through numerous stages, ironically it reaches the highest stage through “self-government”. While it appears self-government will be adhering to Aboriginal demands in returning land and responsibility to Aboriginal people, self-government is being instituted on the condition that Aboriginal peoples adopt a Western, bourgeois economic

relationship with the land which prohibits them from using it in traditional ways.

Once this thesis expresses the fundamental differences between Native society and the immigrant society, the information provided will help to formulate new understandings of self-government. Self-government will be appropriately understood as a form of cultural genocide. For the colonial process is not a phenomenon unique to the past. Instead, it persists into the present and is currently ongoing through the imposition, via self-government, of Western ideas and notions which are alien to Aboriginal peoples. To conclude, the intent here is to determine if self-government can become a liberational tool for Aboriginal peoples and how, if it is possible, such a relationship can be considered. Furthermore, given the impossibility for Aboriginal peoples to exist within the paradigm of the Canadian state, this author urges the development of a positive literature which examines and advocates the feasibility of establishing a nation-to-nation relationship in accordance with the tradition of the two-row wampum.<sup>18</sup>

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The two-row wampum represented the compact made between Aboriginal and European nations at the time of contact. A wampum belt is a treaty belt. The two-row wampum will be discussed in Chapter four. See: Haudenosaunee, "Two Row Wampum", *Tribune Juive*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1989):4.

## Chapter 1

### Colonialism and Self-Government: Instruments of Oppression

Oppression<sup>19</sup> inhibits self-realization. The process of oppression aims to eradicate the consciousness of a people aware of a previous stage in their existence when they had been able to achieve self-actualization. That a people are, or a person is, being stifled or restrained from pursuing their natural progression of growth constitutes oppression.<sup>20</sup> There are many symptoms, causes, and degrees of oppression. For the purpose of this thesis, the concept of private property, specifically as it was imposed through colonialism, shall be explored as a critical causal factor of oppression.

In the past thirty years a field of literature has developed, evaluating and expressing the oppressive condition, primarily considered through the impact of colonialism upon colonized peoples. Authors who focus on the oppression of colonialism will be considered in the first half of this chapter.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, an analysis of their

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<sup>19</sup>

Sources who identify and examine oppression, from which this thesis developed its definition, include, Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals: the wetiko disease of exploitation, imperialism and terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1992). Also, James C. Dick, *Violence and oppression* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979).

<sup>20</sup>

This thought will be elaborated upon in the discussion of Paulo Freire. See p. 17, in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, because there is an abundance of literature published with respect to colonialism and oppression, not all publications will be considered. A few critical authors in the field have been selected to provide the most definitive ideas and theories on

appreciation, or lack thereof, for the installation of private property as a primary form of oppression will be proffered. The second half of this chapter, elaborating on the colonial agenda of assimilation, will examine the literature on self-government to demonstrate how self-government proposals are intended to further the federal colonial agenda, to perpetuate, enshrine, and entrench the oppression of Aboriginal peoples.

Recently, through the struggle for decolonization, the realities of the colonized consciousness have been uncovered. Frantz Fanon is one author whose work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, explores the psychological effects of colonialism. An anticolonialist, Fanon describes the outrage and anger of victimized and brutalized peoples living the violence of a colonialist regime. He speaks the truth of oppression in an effort to reverse an imposed, violent condition. To achieve liberation, “Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime...”<sup>22</sup> Endeavouring to reveal the nature of colonialism and relate how it effectively subjugates and assimilates colonized peoples, Fanon clearly depicts the reality of internalized oppression and the ways and means it transforms people. He states, “The settler’s world is a hostile world, which spurns the native, but at the same time it is a world of which he is envious. We have seen that the native never ceases to dream of putting himself in the place of the settler - not of

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the oppression of colonialism presented to date. Their works will not be reviewed in their entirety. Instead specific arguments or points essential to the argument of this thesis will be highlighted.

<sup>22</sup>

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 50.

becoming the settler but of substituting himself for the settler.”<sup>23</sup> Fanon explains how colonialism functions to deculturate the colonized and impose its own colonial values upon them, thereby altering them. He articulates a plethora of ideas pertaining to the violence experienced by colonized peoples, self-degradation being one facet of this violence. A revolutionary, championing the liberation of Algeria, Fanon’s work provides for a deeper, general understanding of the oppression burdening Indigenous peoples everywhere.

Despite his great contribution to understanding the psychological effects of colonialism and the quest for decolonization, Fanon fails to establish specifically the economic devastation of colonialism as a reason for the trauma of colonization. Instead, he merely includes the economy in a list of its devastating consequences:

The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Fanon does recognize the overthrow of the traditional economy of the colonized as a component of the violence of colonialism but neither explores nor suggests it as a primary reason for the devastating effects of colonialism. Nor does he argue that the pre-colonial economy must be reclaimed through decolonization. Problematic in Fanon’s work is thus the lack of a discussion on the process of decolonization as a means for the

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<sup>23</sup>

Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., p. 40.

restoration of a former political economy. By failing to address this particular aspect of colonialism, Fanon misses a critical point regarding its violent oppression.

Considering the concept of private property as the most revered of colonial values, Fanon fleetingly refers to the trepidation of the colonized to the imposition of an alien value system, intrinsically linked to private property. He states: "...every time Western values are mentioned they produce in the native a sort of stiffening or muscular lockjaw."<sup>25</sup> In speaking of this fear of resisting Western values, Fanon suggests that the "native" inherently knows that Western values are the source of their oppression and seeks the opportunity to restore those values which more appropriately reflect their culture and their needs. He does not, however, directly refer to decolonization as a catalyst for the restoration of a political economy other than that of the colonizer.

The issue of property form must be considered a primary factor in the oppression of a people. Since the idea of property form is obviously related to the attitudes of people toward the land, Fanon could be credited for his observation on the importance of the land to the oppressed: "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity."<sup>26</sup> The land, according to Fanon, must be considered intimately connected to the honour of people. Considering that the exploitation of the land is the motivation for colonialism, its direct role in the psychology of oppression must not be underestimated.

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<sup>25</sup>

Ibid., p. 43. Western values can be assumed to include capitalism as Fanon discusses the Americans role in international capitalism, p. 79.

<sup>26</sup>

Ibid., p. 44.

Thus, Fanon only briefly alludes to the oppression of colonialism in its entirety. He falls short of identifying property form or the commodification of land, implemented by colonialism, as an underlying factor of oppression.

Following Fanon, Paulo Freire is another leading author who enumerates the forms of oppression experienced by colonized peoples. Though he fails to specify his discussion as one concerning colonialism, his writings relate to the oppressed condition of colonized peoples. Specifically, Freire's work, as the title *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* implies, is a book designed to explore the oppressive condition and the question of how to achieve liberation from that oppression. In this work, he explains how colonialism operates from the premise that the colonized peoples are barbaric and inferior since the colonizers consider themselves to be both superior and civilized. Thus, colonialism dehumanizes the colonized, for the "...struggle (for liberation) is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed."<sup>27</sup> By dehumanizing the indigenous populations, however, the colonizer proceeds to destroy the culture of the colonized and impose its own.

Unfortunately, Freire is so consumed by the dehumanization of the oppressed and their need to develop a pedagogy for their liberation that he overlooks the importance of the economy as both an oppressing as well as a liberating factor. One could argue that he has abandoned any sense of economic oppression. Instead, he focuses exclusively on the

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<sup>27</sup>

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 26.

political, spiritual and social freedom for the oppressed. One could also argue that he has abandoned any sense of economic liberation, having completely internalized and accepted basic economic oppression. Freire's inability to identify the overwhelming importance of property form and access to the land as a dignifying as well as a liberating experience brings one to question the validity of his pedagogy. While Freire focuses on the consequences of colonialism and not the causes, his beliefs and attitudes regarding oppression are a function of an economy. As a result, he cannot propose to change the pedagogy of a people without changing the economy. For instance, he cannot advocate a pedagogy of cooperation or unity when the economy is rooted in private property practices which inhibit collaboration and solidarity. Instead, private ownership promotes division and perpetuates individual oppression.<sup>28</sup> Focussing on the elements of dialogue and leadership, Freire hence does not address the appropriate economic issues which must be addressed in dialogue and through leadership. While one might suggest that it was not Freire's intention to enumerate the elements of oppression, preferring to allow the oppressed to determine the components of their oppression through dialogue, one must assume that by identifying the manifestations of oppression, like dehumanization, that he had already developed some criteria from which he determined the people to be oppressed. This leads one to wonder what factors Freire considered lead to oppression if

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Freire does point out the oppositions inherent in dialogical action (Cooperation, Unity for Liberation, Organization and Cultural Synthesis) versus antialogical action (Conquest, Divide and Rule, Manipulation and Cultural Invasion) but fails, again, to express them as manifestations of antithetical property forms. This point will be clarified, by the author of this thesis, through the discussion of private ownership in Chapter 2 as juxtaposed to the discussion of collective ownership in Chapter 3.



not the destruction of a political economy?

The consequences of colonialism, as outlined by Fanon and Freire, are devastating to a culture, annihilating a people, their language, their political, economic and social structures as well as their spirituality. In Canada, the colonizing government initiated policies which apparently undertook to incorporate Aboriginal peoples into the social structure by training them and teaching them the values and ideals of the immigrant-society. As Jorge Noriega explains, "...the colonizer stresses the universality of his own culture, and reduces the aspirations....experienced by the colonized into individual rather than collective terms."<sup>29</sup> Primarily accomplished through Protestant and Catholic missionaries, Western liberal ideals and capitalist<sup>30</sup> values were injected into Aboriginal societies through means of fear, intimidation and violence. In these ways, the colonizer strove to "civilize" the indigenous peoples of North America.

But the means employed to colonize or convert Native peoples reveal the true barbarism and inhumanity of colonialism. It was not long before colonialism revealed itself to Native peoples as a great lie. In Canada, it was considered a disease, the "wetiko" disease, a Cree word for "cannibal". For a cannibal was "an evil person or spirit who

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Noriega, p. 375.

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*Capitalism* is one form of an exchange economy which is characterized by private property. As the economic system of the immigrant society, it shall be used to identify the system which is trying to usurp and absorb Aboriginal economy. It will be further explored in Chapter Two.

terrorizes other creatures by means of terrible evil acts, including cannibalism.”<sup>31</sup> By the time they became cognizant of the implications of colonialism, unable to defend themselves fully from it, Aboriginal peoples were enveloped in an oppressive regime.

The consequences of being colonized are thus multitudinous. Up to this point, the literature reviewed has dealt primarily with the effects of classic colonialism, internal colonialism and internalised colonialism.<sup>32</sup> J. K. Nyerere proceeds further to develop an analysis of colonialism to express the implications of neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism, he explains, occurs when colonized peoples seek to sustain themselves economically and become, either directly or indirectly, governed by foreign economic interests which hold only marginal interest in the affairs of the colonized.<sup>33</sup> As he explains, “...colonialism implies the inferiority of the colonised; acceptance of it means an automatic limit to self-respect. Further, a people who do not rule themselves have no power to control their own economic progress, or to fight against other inequalities or injustices within their own

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Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals: the wetiko disease of exploitation, imperialism and terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1992), p. 33.

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Classic colonialism is the traditional exploitation of the colony for the benefit of the mother country, commonly referred to as mercantilism. Internalized colonialism occurs when the colonized seek acceptance and identification with the colonizer. Internal colonialism requires the set up of foreign structures within colonized society. In Canada, the *Indian Act* is an instrument of internal colonialism as it established elected band council governments within Native communities, an alien form of government imposed upon them by the colonizer.

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J.K. Nyerere, “The process of liberation”, in Harry Goulbourne, ed., *Politics and State in the Third World* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 252.

community.”<sup>34</sup> Under the guise of political emancipation, economic oppression is imposed and controlled by the dominating colonial elite, who, through their *superiority*, render the oppressed powerless. The transference of economic control to the oppressed constitutes neocolonialism. In this form, oppression is perpetuated through economic exploitation of the people and the land, and is maintained by the oppressed. Through this economic power the colonized achieve a false sense of equality to the colonizer.

Neo-colonialism, Nyerere asserts, is far more devastating and invasive than any other, and, therefore, “the fight against neo-colonialism...is a more difficult process than attaining political independence.”<sup>35</sup> This is attributed to those colonized peoples who associate their own personal interests with those of the economic elite.

They are to be found among the local agents of foreign capitalists, and among the local capitalists who have developed in the shadow of large foreign capitalists, and among the local capitalists who have developed in the shadow of large foreign enterprises. Such people may feel that their wealth and status depend upon the continued dominance of the external economic powers.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, while economic exploitation is a primary form of oppression, unity to overthrow neo-colonialism will be more difficult to achieve due to the personal interests of the colonized to see it continue. In spite of this fact, Nyerere adds that “... it is imperative that the struggle for liberation should continue against colonialism, and against oppression

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Ibid, p. 250.

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Ibid., p. 253.

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Supra

and exploitation within our own lands...<sup>37</sup>

Nyerere, however, does not seek, through liberation from neo-colonialism, to challenge the property form imposed through colonialism. Rather, he urges the colonized to gain control over the economy through the development of a “planned economy, including an Incomes and Wages Policy, as well as control over major investment decisions and imports.”<sup>38</sup> Nyerere thereby expresses his ideas on liberation as the procurement of internal control of Western economic structures. He states: “It must be clear that liberation from neo-colonialism also involves for our poor countries the deliberate rejection of Western standards of consumption both for individuals and for the society. Instead we have to establish, and implement, economic goals more appropriate for our present and our expected level of national wealth - production.”<sup>39</sup> Nyerere’s sense of liberation from neo-colonialism is deficient in that it is not a liberation from colonialism or from the property form installed through colonialism. Instead, he advocates the removal of Western domination of economic life. Yet liberation from the constraints of private property and capitalism must be included in the liberation from colonialism. Thus, Nyerere fails to explain how liberation from neo-colonialism will include the restoration of some form of alternative political economy which better serves the needs of the colonized. He obviously does not consider liberation from neo-colonialism as synonymous with

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37

Ibid., p. 258.

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Ibid., p. 254.

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Supra

liberation from private property.

This marks an important defect in the writings of Nyerere who, by his omission, leaves the reader questioning how he intends to reconcile freedom from exploitation, which he claims to be an essential part of human liberation, with economic control. To elaborate, Nyerere does not adequately connect the idea of exploitation, whether it be the people of their labour power or the land of its resources, with the idea of economic oppression. Instead, he restricts his focus to the procurement of liberation from “colonialism and racialism, against neo-colonialism, and against oppression and exploitation within our own lands...” and, at the same time, advocates control over economic life.<sup>40</sup> This discrepancy leads one to assume that Nyerere seeks only to remove the exploitation and oppression imposed by foreign agents. Though his language indicates a profound desire for liberation, it is contradicted by his argument for economic control. As a result, Nyerere’s deficiency in identifying property form as the key to economic oppression extends to his analysis on personal freedom and, ultimately, liberation.

Howard Adams, Metis writer and activist, not only considers the oppression of colonialism but expresses it in terms of its application to Aboriginal peoples. He too explains the many phases and layers of oppression but describes the suffering by Aboriginal peoples as victims of colonialism. For example, on the topic of neo-colonialism, Adams asserts: “The major base of Indian, Metis and Inuit society today is the petite bourgeois class which continues to stress race and ethnicity...This class system was

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<sup>40</sup>

Ibid., p. 257.

brought into existence by the state during the period of neo-colonialism. Its basic interest lies in preserving the colonial and social and economic structures...". According to Adams, neocolonialism, hence, alienates Aboriginal peoples from a traditional political economy founded upon a communal form of property, held in stewardship for future generations and, thereby, alters their consciousness.<sup>41</sup> Unlike other authors writing on colonialism and oppression, Adams describes specifically the colonizing process as it directly affected and altered traditional Aboriginal societies located within Canadian borders.<sup>42</sup>

Beginning with the devastation of their society, Adams attributes the economic devastation of Aboriginal peoples to the transformation of traditional communal society through the fur trade:

To understand the history, it is necessary to understand the political economy of the fur trade system and politics of colonization with regards to race, class and oppression. Indian communal society was transformed into an economic class of labourers by European fur trading companies...As a result, Indians no longer produced goods for the collective use of their communities...<sup>43</sup>

Adams is thus among the first authors to acknowledge the transformation of traditional Aboriginal society as a result of the introduction of an alien property form. Adams further credits the fur trade for the introduction of the concept of private property to Aboriginal

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<sup>41</sup>

Howard Adams, *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* (Penticton: Theytus Books Ltd., 1995), p. 89.

<sup>42</sup>

Other authors include Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire and J.K. Nyerere.

<sup>43</sup>

Adams, p. 103.

peoples. He explains: "...Indians were forced into the idea of private property. Trade was based on an individual basis; that is, traplines led to private ownership. Trading was directed toward individual units in trapping, which led to the notion of private land areas for the production of furs."<sup>44</sup> Through his analysis, Adams succeeds where others fail as he clearly identifies the subversion of Aboriginal property form as a critical element in the history of Native oppression. Though he does not consider economic oppression as the primary or ultimate source for their oppression, he does connect the introduction of private property, and its intent to undermine and usurp traditional forms of society, with the oppression of Aboriginal peoples.

Through the devastation of their economy, a path was laid allowing Aboriginal peoples to experience all other forms of oppression. A decisive event in Aboriginal history, the fur trade devastated the economy of Aboriginal peoples, leading them into capitalist social relations premised upon the exploitation, commodification, and privatization of land.<sup>45</sup> On the devastation this event caused Aboriginal peoples, Adams states: "A colonized consciousness had perverted our belief systems since the first days of colonial control and was responsible for our material and intellectual poverty. Under rigid colonialism, we had acquired a warped sense of values that were inconsistent with our

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<sup>44</sup>

Ibid., p. 103.

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Anthropologist Eleanor Leacock has also written extensively on this topic. For further reading, refer to: Eleanor Burke Leacock and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, eds., *North American Indians in Historical Perspectives* (New York: Random House, 1971). Also, Eleanor Leacock, "The Montagnais "hunting territory" and the fur trade", *American Anthropological Association*, vol. 56, no. 5 (1954): 1-59.

economic situation and Aboriginality.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus, while many authors demonstrate a clear and concise understanding of oppression, the ways and means in which it alters a people’s consciousness, their humanity, its psychological effects and dehumanizing consequences, most fail to address the critical issue of the instituting of private property as a form of oppression from which all other forms are derived. It has been shown how authors simply examine the many faces and phases of colonialism as linked through the oppression experienced by the colonized. In their endeavours to express the consequences and manifestations of oppression, authors like Fanon and Freire and even Nyerere overlook the overwhelming importance of the economy as a real form of oppression and, more importantly, as a critical element for liberation from oppression. Instead, their focus tends to centre around the cultural implications of colonialism which is an insufficient means for understanding the consequences and causes of colonial oppression. This thesis, through its critical examination of literature in which colonialism is advanced as the basis for the oppressive condition, has demonstrated how the literature overwhelmingly fails to address the crucial issue of the property form. As a result, current literature does not adequately account for the complete devastation of colonialism as the consequence of the destruction of the political, social, spiritual and economic institutions of people, combining to account for the overwhelming and all-consuming nature of colonial oppression.

But colonialism operates behind many masks and has many faces. The ultimate

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Adams, p. 91.



tool of colonialism in Canada has been the *Indian Act* which has defined the relationship between Canada and Aboriginal Peoples, in spite of treaties, since its inception. Today, as the government seeks to repeal the *Indian Act* and relinquish its responsibility to Aboriginal peoples, it advances the idea of self-government. Proposing self-government as a means of transferring or down-loading control over Aboriginal affairs to Aboriginal peoples represents a transfer or down-loading of oppression of Aboriginal peoples, from the federal government to Aboriginal leaders. This chapter will now consider specific self-government proposals to demonstrate how self-government is, as a colonial tool, intended to perpetuate the oppression of Aboriginal peoples and the destruction of Aboriginal institutions. Considering the abundance of literature published with respect to this topic, this thesis will consider three proposals of self-government to reveal how the literature focuses exclusively on the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples into the existing Canadian polity, further entrenching Aboriginal peoples within the immigrant society. The three proposals being considered are municipalization, third order of government and community development. To begin, this paper will briefly consider the position of the current federal government

Claiming to recognize the legitimate aspirations of Aboriginal peoples to govern their own affairs, but more obviously in accordance with the colonial agenda, the federal government has entered into self-government negotiations or arrangements with specific Aboriginal nations and communities. It has published an awesome amount of literature on the topic of self-government, most recently, *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal*

*Peoples*, 1996.<sup>47</sup> While the report of the Commission, being five volumes and over two-thousand pages long, is still being digested by many people, one may, for the time being, rely on the federal policy guide on the Aboriginal Rights to Self-Government to obtain a sense of the government's intentions. According the Liberal Party's Red Book, a list of campaign promises published prior to the 1993 federal election, the party supported the political aspirations of Aboriginal people. Moreover, the Liberal party asserted that it had formally launched a process to implement self-government to build a new relationship with Aboriginal people. In their opinion, "The end result will be negotiated agreements that give Aboriginal peoples the ability to exercise greater control and responsibility over matters that affect their communities".<sup>48</sup> Declaring itself to be flexible, the Liberal party, the federal government of the day, has produced a list of guiding principles on which all self-government arrangements are to be based. Aboriginal self-government negotiations, therefore, are restricted by the following conditions: (1) self-government will be exercised within the Canadian Constitution; (2) federal, provincial, territorial laws must work in harmony; (3) laws of overriding national and provincial importance, such as the *Criminal*

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See Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *People to people, nation to nation: Highlights from the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Dept. Of Supply and Services, 1996).

While the government has an official policy guide, each federal party also has a policy. In fact, the Reform Party has even published its own *Aboriginal Affairs: Task Force Report*, 1995. Again, this paper will not examine each party policy but they can be obtained by contacting each party or retrieving their party platform/web page on the Internet.

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Calgary West Federal Liberal Association, online, Netscape, <http://www.cuug.ab.ca:8001/-jenuths/lpc/talking/950810.html>, 10/2/96, p. 1 of 1.

*Code* will prevail; (4) the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* will apply fully to Aboriginal governments, as it does to all other governments in Canada; (5) in recognition of Canada's fiscal situation, as outlined in the 1995 Budget, all federal funding for self-government will be achieved through a reallocation of existing resources; and (6) the interests of all Canadians, including the municipalities and third parties, will be taken into account as agreements are negotiated.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, the stated objective of the federal government, through this process, is to "enhance the participation of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society, thereby building a stronger Canada."<sup>50</sup>

Assessing the requirements stipulated by the federal government it is obvious that their intention is simply to transfer services to Aboriginal peoples and only those services or administrative functions which do not jeopardize or conflict with any other jurisdiction, authority, or interest exercised by the government or individual Canadians. No form of government, let alone Aboriginal self-government, could possibly be moulded enough to provide adequate responsibility or control to a people which conforms to these rigid guidelines. Moreover, despite its implausibility, self-government instituted within this framework does not serve to alleviate the oppression suffered by Aboriginal peoples. Instead, it functions only to further assimilate and include Aboriginal peoples into the existing polity as the review of the following forms of self-government proposals will reveal. A critical assessment of some of those proposals will now be considered.

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Ibid., p. 1.

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## **Municipalization**

A common thread through all writings on the topic of self-government is the desire to create a new relationship between Canada and Native peoples.<sup>51</sup> Ignoring their existing treaty obligations, the federal government seeks to normalize Aboriginal “nations”<sup>52</sup> and their *Indian Act* band governments within existing federal and provincial arrangements, under the guise of self-government. This form of self-government allows the federal government to retain ultimate control and authority over Aboriginal peoples. In the book *Aboriginal Self-Determination* Thomas Siddon, former Minister for Indian Affairs and Northern Development, reinforces the ideas held by the federal government. He argues that “the best hope for this relationship lies in legislative change that takes place with a recognition on the part of First Nations that they ‘must respect the laws of this country and the rights of non-native citizens’.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, through various amendments to the

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This basic presupposition is problematic as treaties which originally outlined the federal-Aboriginal relationship do exist already but are simply ignored by the federal government, resulting in this need and desire to formulate a new basis (one obviously more appealing to the federal government) for the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the federal government of Canada.

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“Nations” in this context means bands and band governments. Essentially, bands are being considered as entities for self-government, and not Aboriginal peoples (ie. Maliseet, MicMac, Mohawk, Cree, etc...). The treaties were negotiated with the peoples and not the bands or band governments (ie. Maliseet treaty was negotiated between British government officials and Maliseet peoples, not a reserve band council). Therefore, one of the most insidious things the federal government is doing is treating bands as vehicles for self-government.

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Frank Cassidy, ed., *Aboriginal Self-Determination: Proceedings from a conference held September 30 - October 3, 1990* (Lantzville: Oolichan Books and Halifax: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1991), pp. 11-12.

*Indian Act* the federal government has consistently aimed to down-load authority to band governments<sup>54</sup>, altering the balance of power insignificantly within the Canadian system as opposed to renewing and restoring their former nation-to-nation relationship, or honouring treaty obligations, with Aboriginal peoples.

Building on the idea of Aboriginal peoples as citizens of Canada, a concept reminiscent of the *White Paper*, and more recently the *Neilson Report (1985)* or the *Royal Commission (1996)*, municipal government simply requires the transferral or down-loading of certain, specified services and administrative duties to Aboriginal communities without any significant autonomy. As announced in the *Penner Report*<sup>55</sup>, “While the Department (of Indian Affairs) has continued to refer to this process as ‘strengthening band government on Indian reserves’, Indian witnesses consistently criticized the policy for failing to transfer real control to Indian people.”<sup>56</sup> The underlying motivation for this proposal is obviously inspired by the federal desire to relinquish responsibility for Aboriginal communities to the people living in those communities. In essence, “the federal government’s community based self-government policy... provides for federal legislation

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Specific amendments increasing band government authority occurred in 1880, 1884 and 1951. For details, see Dave De Brou and Bill Waiser, *Documenting Canada: A History of Modern Canada in Documents*, Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1992.

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For the official title of *The Penner Report*, see: Canada. *Indian Self-Government in Canada: Report of the Special Committee* (Ottawa: Dept. Of Supply and Services, 1983).

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*Ibid.*, p. 20.

as a vehicle for making self-government happen.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the “process that the federal government offers as part of its community self-government process may well lead to a model for self-government that can be most closely compared to a municipal one.”<sup>58</sup> Municipalization as local administration is thereby equated with devolution of federal power. This form of self-government is both supportive and conducive to the federal agenda as well as a large part of the sympathetic Canadian public who are hesitant about the self-government process but who are familiar with municipal-style governance.

This strategy for Aboriginal government, despite the facility of its institution and adherence to the federal agenda, does not present itself as a viable means of alleviating oppression or restoring responsibility to Aboriginal peoples. In fact, it appears to do just the opposite. Simply increasing the authority of band government does not constitute self-government. An increase in band authority is tantamount to a perpetuation of hierarchical rule through an alien, imposed institution. Considering that the band governments are ultimately creatures of, and subject to, the authority of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), one could argue that band governments are mere administrative adjuncts of the DIAND.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, by downloading services and yielding responsibility for the administration and application of these

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*Ibid.*, p. 6.

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*Ibid.*, p. 7.

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In the *Penner Report*, witnesses describe “current band governments (as) little more than factotums of federal control.” p. 19.

services to band councils, the federal government is doing nothing more than localizing DIAND. It is simply transferring a federal bureaucracy to the band level. The municipal form of self-government hence reflects a federal desire to relinquish its responsibility to Aboriginal peoples by delegating their band governments more authority - a new version of the federal department and the government of Canada administered by Aboriginal peoples under the guise of self-rule. This does not reflect self-determination; it continues the system of band council government responsible to DIAND, a system in place since the passage of the *Indian Act, 1876*. The underlying assumption of municipalization, that “increased Indian self-government would produce improved economic and social conditions among Indians, thus reducing their cost to the federal government” proves that the federal government is not really trying to renegotiate its relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Rather, they are simply pursuing a proposal which, in the end, will manage to save them dollars.<sup>60</sup>

### **Third Order of Government**

A variation of the idea of municipalization, the creation of a third order of government is also proposed.<sup>61</sup> Less understood as to its viability with regards to transfer

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Menno Boldt, J. Anthony Long and Leroy Little Bear, eds., “Introduction” in *The Quest for Justice: Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 5.

For more information regarding the federal initiatives designed to reduce federal expenditures on Aboriginal peoples, see: Canada, *The Ministerial Task Force on Native Programs: Report* (Ottawa: Dept. Of Supply and Services, 1985), also known as the *Neilson Report, 1985*.

<sup>61</sup>

See *Penner Report*, Recommendation 2.

of authority than municipalization, which would be simple and direct, the formulation of a third order of government would, under first impressions, require a more complex restructuring of the Canadian system. Like the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, authors Frank Cassidy and Robert L. Bish conclude their investigation on self-government by proclaiming: "One approach to Indian government, and perhaps the only approach that will fully meet the aspirations of Indian peoples, would be to accommodate fully recognized Indian government as a third order of government within the Canadian federal system."<sup>62</sup> Claiming to offer Aboriginal peoples the best of both worlds, the idea of a third order of government would restore a form of nation-to-nation relationship while maintaining Aboriginal peoples within the parameters of the Canadian state. Accommodation as well as compromise, primarily on the part of Aboriginal peoples, would thus serve to cement the representation and absorption of Aboriginal peoples within the existing political and economic structures.

Hypothetically, the organization of a third order of government would fall most comfortably on the shoulders of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), who many assume to be representative of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Similar to an official federal party, the AFN is an umbrella organization, comprised of *Indian Act* chiefs, which attempts to unite all Aboriginal communities within the country. By offering a single platform and a universal, pan-Indian<sup>63</sup> agenda, the AFN would provide a single voice for Aboriginal

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Cassidy, p. 163.

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The term "pan-Indian" refers to the application or understanding of Indians as one, homogeneous body as opposed to individual indigenous peoples (ie. Maliseet, Micmac,



peoples at the federal level, making a third order of government plausible and allowing the federal government to interact with one organization as opposed to numerous communities. This possibility remains problematic, however, as many Aboriginal persons do not regard the AFN as a legitimate forum for representation. Many feel that the AFN lacks connection to, and a mandate from, many Aboriginal peoples and communities. Consequently, the third order of government will possibly compromise Aboriginal peoples by reducing them to just another interest within the Canadian paradigm, perpetuating their oppression within the existing colonial regime.

Exploring the limits of self-government, Bish and Cassidy assert that delegated powers must be both recognized and protected by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. They draw the conclusion that “while some advances might be achieved without further constitutional change, only the constitutional recognition and accommodation of the aboriginal right to self-government within the Canadian federal system can provide the basis for arrangements that benefit both Indian and non-Indian peoples in Canada.”<sup>64</sup> Their sense of self-government reflects that of the federal government and those who advance proposals of municipalization, differing only in that they prefer constitutional entrenchment to legislative ratification as a means of institutionally sanctioning Aboriginal self-government. But constitutional entrenchment again reiterates the notion of Aboriginal peoples as

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Mohawk, etc...). See Menno Boldt, *Surviving as Indians: the challenge of self-government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

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Frank Cassidy and Robert L. Bish, eds., *Indian Government: Its Meaning in Practice* (Lantzville: Oolichan Books and Halifax: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1989), p. xii.

citizens of Canada, enshrining their rights in the constitution of Canada.<sup>65</sup> This does not serve to restore the original nation-to-nation treaty relationship, nor does it translate into self-determination.<sup>66</sup> It does not allow for Aboriginal peoples to be sovereign. Instead, constitutional entrenchment of self-government is simply another colonial tactic designed to incorporate Aboriginal peoples officially into the Canadian state by making it a part of the supreme law of Canada.

### **Community Development**

Regardless of whether or not self-government is realized through legislation or constitutional entrenchment, municipalization or a third order of government, John Hylton asserts: "It is more likely that government support will be based on the realization that self-government represents the adoption of a community development approach to the problems experienced by Aboriginal communities."<sup>67</sup> Largely perceived as a means to

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Sidney Pobihushchy elaborates on the problematic in constitutional entrenchment: "If the right to Indian self-government is entrenched within the Canadian constitution, then the possibility exists that at some time in the future, very much against the wishes of aboriginal peoples, the constitution may be amended to remove the right. One must question the adequacy of the recommendation (of the Penner report) to deal with the problem (of self-government)." See *A perspective on the Indian Nations in Canada*, a paper prepared by the class of 1983-84 on "The Politics of Indian Affairs in Canada" by Sidney Pobihushchy, 1984, p. 8.

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"Self-determination is the right and the ability of a people or a group of peoples to choose their own destiny without external compulsion. It is the right to be sovereign, to be a supreme authority within a particular geographic territory." Cassidy, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup>

John H. Hylton, ed., *Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada: Current Trends and Issues* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 1994), p. 255.

remedy the overwhelming social crises plaguing most Aboriginal communities, self-government is intended to be a solution to the social problems arising out of oppression. Aboriginal peoples seek to ease their oppression by regaining control over their communities through self-government and rid themselves of their social ills. But through community development proposals, Aboriginal peoples are being coerced to exchange their need to heal their communities and control their own destinies for the continued destruction of those communities

Important to the idea of development is the idea of dependence<sup>68</sup>. As seen throughout the world, development implies the transformation of an “underdeveloped” nation into one which more readily reflects Western society. Originally this transformation was undertaken through “technical assistance” but has been primarily accomplished through financial investment. Development intends that “formerly colonized countries...industrialize, using capital-intensive technologies that in time would produce a ‘take off’.”<sup>69</sup> Despite any achievement of political independence, dependency theory

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Development is often a racist experience. To understand how development is linked to dependence, refer to dependency theory in which global capitalism operates to *under-develop* the Third World. Specific references include: Andre Gunder Frank, *On capitalist underdevelopment* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1975). Andre Gunder Frank, *Dependent accumulation and underdevelopment* (N.Y.: Monthly Review Press, 1979). Wolfgang Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary: a guide to knowledge as power* (London; Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey; Zed Books, 1992). Walter Rodney, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1981). Robert E. Gamer, *The developing nations: a comparative perspective* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1976). Margaret Snyder, *Transforming Development: Women, Poverty and Politics* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995).

<sup>69</sup>

Hylton, p. 13.

asserts that these nations would remain economically bound to, and thus dependent upon, trade channels and systems set up during the colonial era. In essence, a foreign, generally Western, nation finances the development of a country which creates a state of dependence. Community development is thus a potential means for the perpetuation of Aboriginal dependence upon the state.

Some communities, like that of Kahnawake, consider self-government as community development through social and political reform, not as a means of restoring a traditional Iroquois economy. Author Gerald Alfred, a Mohawk from Kahnawake, writes extensively on the issue of self-government of the Mohawk peoples and their efforts to revitalize their political practices, language, nationalism, spirituality and identity. On the issue of the economy, Alfred explains how the community recognizes the “limitations placed on their freedom of action by external economic control.”<sup>70</sup> Thus their community is entrenched in a paradox of seeking political control while maintaining economic dependency. However, one must query as to how much self-government can exist, in the Mohawk community, when its economic system is based on Western values, let alone controlled by outside interests.

In Kahnawake, for instance, “most Mohawks view federal transfer payments as a legitimate means of economic self-sufficiency, whether conceived of as transition support

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Gerald Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 96.

or as a permanent element of their fiscal plan.”<sup>71</sup> Since the selling of land, especially in view of recent events on the reserve<sup>72</sup>, has been deemed an inappropriate means for generating revenue, they turn to government and successful examples of tribal economies in the United States to find some means for economic survival. Though the idea of collective enterprises has been broached, it does not appeal to a large part of the community which is now rooted in the world of private property and personal gain. Most prefer, for now, to continue living in accordance with Western economic practices.

Considering their list of options, there are many contradictions and inconsistencies underlying this community’s desire for self-government. Instead of recognizing the subversion of traditional Iroquois political economy through colonialism, Alfred, in his brief contemplation of Western/non-Native economic practices ponders “a return to traditions or further integration into the economy and institutional framework of the Euro-American states” and obviously chooses the latter.<sup>73</sup> From his presentation, one may conclude that the community of Kahnawake has accepted and internalized the private property economy imposed through colonialism. They have selectively retraditionalized their community to focus on the restoration of membership, language and the Longhouse,

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*Ibid.*, p. 96.

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Specifically, I refer to the Oka Crisis of 1990 in which the village of Kahnawake was involved. See Ronald Cross and Hélène Sévigny, *Lasagna* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1994). Also, Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera, *People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company (Canada) Limited, 1991).

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Alfred, p. 4.

ignoring the economy.

Other communities have rebuked self-government proposals as community development proposals are intrinsically linked to a federal desire to appropriate more land held by Native communities - through the relinquishing of Aboriginal title to the land in exchange for the installation of a federal corporation or service on that land. For example, during the 1970's the federal government proposed to build a pipeline in the MacKenzie Valley in the Northwest Territories. At this time, the Dene desire for self-government was aroused as a means of protecting themselves and their land from federal encroachment. In essence, the Dene argued that the pipeline, despite its promise to create jobs, threatened, not only the land, but traditional Dene life. With powers of self-government the Dene could direct their society towards a future which was consistent with traditional life. Specifically, the Dene argued that they would not develop an economic base which was predicated on the needs or wants of Canadian society, particularly that located south of the sixtieth parallel. Instead, they asserted that their purpose was "to bring an end to such colonialism and to re-establish a process and experience of development for the Dene Nation as a whole."<sup>74</sup> Economic development, therefore, was to be devised, controlled and implemented by the community, for its own purposes.

Clearly, we must develop our own economy, rather than depending on externally initiated development. Such an economy would not only encourage continued renewable resource activities, such as hunting, fishing, and trapping, but would include community-scale activities designed to meet our needs in a more self-reliant fashion. True Dene development will entail political control, an adequate

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Eleanor Leacock and Richard Lee, eds., *Politics and history in band societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 353.

resource base, and continuity with our past. It will be based on our own experience and values. In accordance with our emphasis on sharing, Dene development will not permit a few to gain at the expense of the whole community.<sup>75</sup>

In accordance with traditional, communal economic practices, the Dene intended to gain responsibility for their community. While many debate the viability of self-government as a means of realizing Aboriginal aspirations, similar to those expressed by the Dene, Eleanor Leacock concludes that “self-determination would be the key which would enable the Dene to create in their homeland a modern economy and polity which is based on the strengthening of their traditional institutions and values.”<sup>76</sup>

In sum, the community development plan of the federal government inspired the Dene people, affected by the pipeline, to demand a form of government which would be directed by them, to allow them to be responsible for themselves and their community. In essence, the Dene, unlike the Mohawks, were intent on maintaining their traditional economy. This is largely due to the fact that the Dene of this region were largely isolated, until the 1970's, and had a community which was still entrenched in, and had access to, a traditional economy. The exception to the rule, instances of economic development more accurately reflect the experience of the Mohawks of Kahnawake.<sup>77</sup> Due to years of

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<sup>75</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp. 353-354.

<sup>76</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>77</sup>

Other examples include the Sechelt self-government agreement or the James Bay Cree and Naskapi agreements. See, Frank Cassidy and Robert L. Bish, eds., *Indian Government: Its Meaning in Practice* (Lantzville: Oolichan Books and Halifax: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1989), pp 135-155.

colonization, and through the disappearance of resources, economic development most often implies economic dependence on the immigrant society. Self-government generally means the ability to strike businesses which will, supposedly, eradicate poverty and provide solutions to social problems in Aboriginal communities. Kahnawake is just one, but it is definitely not the only, example where economic development means aligning private ownership with self-government in Aboriginal communities.

The latter half of chapter one has reviewed self-government proposals which reiterate the argument that self-government is intended to perpetuate Aboriginal dependence upon the Canadian state and, more specifically, the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples within the Canadian state. Despite the overwhelming awareness of federal goals, many authors still focus on the ways and means to accommodate and incorporate self-government, as was demonstrated in this literature review. Few, like authors Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long, appear able to recognize a fundamental incompatibility between federal economic practices and traditional Aboriginal customs. As they explain,

If Indians want their government to act independently, then they must reduce their current state of economic dependence on the federal government...the Indian culture (the complex of institutions, values, and way of doing things) in its present configuration is not conducive to capitalistic notions of economic development.<sup>78</sup>

In essence, for self-government to be effective and meaningful it must include an alleviation of economic dependence which is the ultimate means of federal control over Aboriginal peoples. Seeking self-government through fiscal arrangements or through

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Little Bear, Boldt and Long, pp. xix-xx.



federal funding, therefore, necessarily negates the purpose of self-determination. The motivation to be self-governing, autonomous and sovereign will be inhibited by the very nature of aforementioned self-government arrangements in a way which meaningfully alters the oppression of Aboriginal peoples. For we must remember that “Canadian Indian policy called for elimination of all vestiges of indigenous political (and economical) institutions”, to allow for the consolidation of alien property forms and political institutions.<sup>79</sup> And today the federal government understands “very well that self-government implies certain essential requisites, such as an adequate land base and economic self-sufficiency.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the problem of self-government is cloaked in the rhetoric of liberation despite its function as a tool of oppression and assimilation. The problem with most of the literature published to date regarding self-government is that most authors do not address the subversion of Aboriginal property form as a form of oppression, nor do they consider its restoration a necessary component of self-determination. Self-government, under current proposal terms, is more than just a transfer of power, it is a transfer and solidification of a foreign political economy. What is also true of most literature pertaining to self-government is the idea of inclusion and incorporation - the accommodation for Aboriginal peoples within the existing polity, the bestowal and

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Ibid., p. xi.

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Ibid., p. xvii

endowment of powers to Aboriginal peoples for their benefit, but within the strict confines of the Canadian infrastructure, and on its terms.

The myth of self-government lies in the fact that it is generally regarded as a *gift* of the oppressor, a relinquishing of control by the colonizer. Any acceptance of this *gift*, however, would simply represent another definitive step towards Aboriginal deculturation and absorption. For, as Fanon argues, “The native must realize that colonialism never gives anything away for nothing. Whatever the native may gain through political or armed struggle is not the result of the kindness or good will of the settler...”<sup>81</sup> Self-government is thus being offered in exchange for the continuing absorption of Aboriginal peoples into the Canadian economy; for self-government, as the literature reveals, is nothing more than a municipal style of government requiring only the transfer of services to Aboriginal peoples for their administration to Aboriginal peoples, or a third order of government, or a policy of community development.<sup>82</sup>

To thwart the separation and independence of Aboriginal peoples from Canadian society, the federal government has conceded to self-government arrangements within Canada. In addition, it has created federal programs which will, supposedly, maintain Aboriginal culture (ie. language programs, Native studies, Native art, etc.), again, *within* the confines of the Canadian state - in schools, in prisons, in communities. These

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<sup>81</sup>

Fanon, p. 142.

<sup>82</sup>

According to most Native peoples, the form of self-government desired is more accurately referred to as self-determination. According to Patricia Monture-Angus, the term “self-determination” does not translate in Iroquois - but their meaning of the term is “to be responsible”. Presentation at the UNB law school, January 17, 1997.

“concessions are no more than sops; they have no bearing on the essential questions; and from the native’s point of view, we may lay down that a concession has nothing to do with the essentials if it does not affect the real nature of the colonial regime.”<sup>83</sup> Hence, self-government is a myth. It does not offer to alter the status quo. Instead, it aims to perpetuate it. It is a colonial tactic intended to transfer the continuance of Aboriginal oppression over to Aboriginal peoples through the solidification of non-Native institutions and values in Aboriginal communities. Self-government does not, in any way, signify a restructuring of Canadian-Aboriginal relations.

While some people are able to identify self-government as both problematic and oppressive many still do not understand why it is oppressive, or how its imposition on Aboriginal peoples is tantamount to cultural genocide. Most obvious is the fact that the self-government arrangement proposals intend to continue the current, imposed band council government relationship with the federal government. In this way, traditional forms of government, based on consensus and community, will continue to be undermined and overlooked. Less evident is the fact that self-government intends to make it possible for Aboriginal peoples to buy and sell land - whether it be reserve land or land which is obtained through a settlement (ie. comprehensive or specific land claims). Even without settling or selling land, self-government implements an individualized property relationship between the Canadian state and Aboriginal people. For example, Aboriginal people are awarded welfare or university tuition on an individual basis. Individual Aboriginal people

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Fanon, p. 142.

are responsible for personal debt and taxes. On reserves, the government builds houses which the band awards to individuals or individual families. With a limited number of houses available, people are forced to compete for housing. In this way, the government usurps traditional indigenous practices and structures. For example, it does not build the longhouses which traditionally housed the Iroquois. Thus, it is not simply the fact that Western economic practices are contrary to Aboriginal economic practices. The relationship of Aboriginal peoples to the state is individualized and, as a result, Aboriginal peoples are entrenched in competition, and antagonisms are reinforced. Self-government aims to perpetuate this particular, non-Aboriginal economic relationship between the federal or provincial governments and individual Native peoples. Accordingly, self-government proposals are designed to eradicate Aboriginal culture and practices and impose an alien form in their place.

To elucidate, one must consider the property form as it is manifest through the political economy of a society, and the ontology which is derived therefrom. To this end, chapter two will examine the political economy and ontology of Western/immigrant society. Chapter three will balance the discussion by reviewing the political economy and ontology of traditional Aboriginal society. The intention behind this undertaking is, bluntly, to show that “the oppression and violence perpetrated on Indians is directly linked to the capitalist system.”<sup>84</sup> The differences in Native and immigrant society are

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Gail Kellough, “From Colonialism to Economic Imperialism: The Experience of the Canadian Indian,” in John Harp and John Hotley, eds., *Structured Inequality in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Press, 1980), p. 367.

epitomized by their different notions of land. Hence, a dialogue on “economy and polity are matched by culture, which includes the dominant ethics, the norms that regulate social life, the identification of individuals and their relations to society.”<sup>85</sup> All of these factors will be presented and considered to develop the final argument and concluding remarks of this thesis.

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Branko Horvat, *The Political Economy of Socialism* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1982), p.509.

## Chapter 2

### Western Political Economy and Ontology

#### Political Economy<sup>86</sup>

To understand the political economy and ontology of Western society one must recognize the property form as private. The ability of a sole individual to own productive property is the primary characteristic of private property. To own property privately, land for instance, means that it can be bought or sold, exploited or manipulated, all subject to the desire of the owner. No one except the owner of the property is able to decide how that property shall be utilized. For example, all of the natural resources of property or land can be extracted, without concern for their regeneration, until the property is no longer productive and rendered “worthless”. All decisions concerning property are hence at the mercy of the individual owner of the property. The owner thus has no obligation to anyone or anything else, and it is their right, as the owner, to make use of the property as they choose.

A property owner is generally interested in making use of the property in a way which results in an accumulation of wealth, translating into the ability to acquire more

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This thesis uses Marxist analysis. A bourgeois analysis would make the same arguments only in a less direct way. That is, even though Marxist and bourgeois analysis differ, they agree on the same critical elements (ex. capitalism includes private ownership and wage labour, the state expends property, et cetera). It is the opinion of this author that Marxist analytical terms are more precise and have been chosen for that reason.

property. As the ownership of land is linked to some form of material wealth, to accumulate wealth is the general objective of owning property. In most cases, an owner is unable to extract the wealth from the property alone. The property owner is thus required to purchase the labour power of property-less individuals to work for the owner, for “*private property* is first considered only in its objective aspect - but nevertheless with labour as its essence.”<sup>87</sup> In Western society, private property thus transforms basic labour into a new social and contractual relationship. In fact, “The production of life, both of one’s own in labour and of fresh procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other hand as a social relationship.”<sup>88</sup>

Capitalism is the form of private property in Western society. Specifically, it is a social relationship between capitalists, the owners of property, and wage labourers, those who work for the capitalists. There is a materialistic connection linking people, “which is determined by their needs and their mode of production.”<sup>89</sup> Therefore, people are divided into one of two positions in Western society, those who hire labourers and own the means of production, or those who sell their labour power to purchase and satisfy needs.<sup>90</sup> In

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<sup>87</sup>

Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1978), p. 82.

<sup>88</sup>

Karl Marx, “The German Ideology”, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1978), p. 157.

<sup>89</sup>

Supra

<sup>90</sup>

Marx elaborates on this point in “The German Ideology”, p. 156.

Western society these two groups experience work in fundamentally different ways. A condition for the fruition of this relationship, however, is the public/private division within society. A brief examination of this relationship will now be proffered, before examining the condition of wage-labour.

With the privatization of property, the institution of marriage was transformed. Women were stripped of all their rights and were made property of their husbands. Women were subservient to a social system dominated by men, the only persons able to own property. Engels elaborating upon this idea explains: “The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male.”<sup>91</sup> Engels observes that, like any other “progression” with the advancement of one group comes the repression of another.<sup>92</sup> Making this connection, monogamous marriage was redefined as an economic relationship, one designed to protect private property and the male’s accumulation of wealth. Marriage, in this way, was a social relationship which was shaped by economic relations. In essence it promoted the value of productive labour, being the labour performed by the man/husband and delegitimized the “unproductive” labour of the woman/wife.<sup>93</sup>

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Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of Family, Private Property and State”, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1978), p. 739.

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Supra

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Briefly, while Marx explains that “all labour, is speaking physiologically, an



The public realm was exclusive to those who participated in productive labour. As a result of their subjugation in marriage, women were restricted to the private realm, forced to serve their husband and their family. Engels exposes this social division and isolation of women, premised upon the economic domination of men, as a consequence of the privatization of property. As he explains, women were excluded from public production and, as a result, were unable to earn anything.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, if a woman did choose to enter the public sphere she was accused of neglecting her family duties which continued to be her primary responsibility. Society did not consider the woman or family an economically lucrative industry, save for the wage labourers it produced. As a consequence, Engels concludes: “The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman; and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules.”<sup>95</sup> Thus the enslavement of women, and, by extension the family, constituted the primary victims of the new public/private distinction emerging from the public preoccupation with private property and wage-labour.

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expenditure of labour-power”. Only that labour which can be exchanged for a wage, however, is considered productive labour. Labour that cannot be so exchanged is, conversely, unproductive labour. Women’s work being characterized by reproduction and care of the home, is generally considered unproductive as it does not produce commodities or accumulate wealth for its owner. The exception to this rule exists only when women contract out their work to another and a wage is exchanged, therefore reassigning a productive value to this form of work. See, Karl Marx, “Capital, Volume One”, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1978), p. 312.

<sup>94</sup>

Engels, “The Origin of Family, Private Property and State”, p. 744.

<sup>95</sup>

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Specifically, Eleanor Leacock attributes the transformation of the family and public/private distinction to the introduction of a new form of economy, private property. She explains how the "...notion of a somehow separate "women's role" hides the reality of the family as an economic unit, an institution as crucial for the continued exploitation of working men as it is for the oppression of women."<sup>96</sup> As private property emerged through the introduction of the fur trade<sup>97</sup>, the family was transformed, from a collective means of survival to a fundamental economic unit, a necessary component for private ownership. Leacock explains how,

the economic basis for the multi-family groups that lived collectively as winter units and that had links with parallel groups which could be activated in times of need, had been fundamentally undercut by the fur trade. The beaver and other furbearers had been transformed from animals that were immediately consumed, the meat eaten, and the fur used, to commodities, goods to be kept, individually "owned" until exchanged for goods..."<sup>98</sup>

The fur trade altered the function of the family as collective unit predicated on survival and subsistence. Instead, private ownership of furs and goods individualized families. As a result, women and children became directly dependent upon a single, individual man, whereas previously they had been part of a community in which all individuals were equally dependent on one another, as well as the collective, for survival. In this way,

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<sup>96</sup>

Eleanor Leacock, "Class, Commodity, and the Status of Women", in Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, ed., *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1975), p. 601.

<sup>97</sup>

Specifically, the author refers to the fur trade as the basis for the introduction of private property to North America.

<sup>98</sup>

Leacock, p. 608.

private property, “the introduction of wage labour for men, and the trade of basic commodities, speeded up processes whereby tribal collectives were breaking up into individual family units, in which women and children were becoming economically dependent on single men.”<sup>99</sup> Leacock explains how this process “was aided by the formal allocation to men of whatever public authority and legal right ownership was allowed in colonial situations, by missionary teachings and by the persistence of Europeans in dealing with men as the holders of all formal authority.”<sup>100</sup> As a result, the family too became a victim of the public/private sphere, being subject to the property/public power allotted to men. Social relations which emerged from property ownership reconfigured the family structure and function in society. Women and the family were oppressed in the newly created private realm.

Returning to the issue of wage-labour, private property creates a relationship wherein the property-owner *buys* the labour power of individuals who, likewise, *sell* their labour power, as a commodity.<sup>101</sup> The labourer sells their labour power to allow them to purchase the necessities of life.

The labourer receives means of subsistence in exchange for his labour-power; but the capitalist receives, in exchange for his means of subsistence, labour, the productive activity of the worker, the creative force by which the worker not only replaces what he consumes, but also gives to the accumulated labour a greater

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<sup>99</sup>

Ibid., p. 605.

<sup>100</sup>

Supra

<sup>101</sup>

Karl Marx, “Wage Labour and Capital”, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 204.

value than it previously possessed. The worker gets from the capitalist a portion of the existing means of subsistence. For what purpose do these means of subsistence serve him? For immediate consumption.<sup>102</sup>

Sacrificing a portion of life in exchange for a wage allows the labourer to purchase basic staples and few luxuries which are enjoyed once life begins, which is only after work ends. As Marx explains, “life begins for him where this activity ceases, at table, in the public house, in bed. The twelve hours’ labour, on the other hand, has no meaning for him as weaving, spinning, drilling, etc., but as *earnings*, which bring him to the table, to the public house, into bed.”<sup>103</sup> Earnings are reflective of a wage which is determined by the price of labour. This price is likewise determined by the cost of production which “*is the cost required for maintaining the worker as a worker and of developing him into a worker.*”<sup>104</sup> This basic cost constitutes the minimum wage. Hence, the labourer is unable to secure any real gain from their labour as it is a means of temporary survival as opposed to resulting in an accumulation of wealth.

In essence, the labourer must sell labour power to subsist whereas the capitalist accumulates wealth through the exploitation of the worker. To elaborate, “...the specific property relations of capitalism (which) *compel* each individual capitalist to maximize the expansion of exchange value through the exploitation of labour. The economy becomes a

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102

T.B. Bottomore, trans., *Karl Marx: Selected writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1956), p. 148.

103

Marx, “Wage Labour and Capital”, p. 205.

104

Ibid., p. 206.

compulsive mechanism, in terms of which men fulfil their purely private ends.”<sup>105</sup> As a result, the capitalist is generally unconcerned with the condition of the wage labourer. Instead, they are preoccupied with the cost and rates of productivity. The capitalist achieves their ends through the exploitation of the wage-labourer, using wage-labour as a tool for the accumulation of capital and not for the simple acquisition of material goods required for subsistence. Simply, the “key to the nature and functioning of capitalism lies (...) in the specific property relations of the system”<sup>106</sup>; being private.

As a result of the specific property relations of capitalism the worker is subordinated to the production process, to the production of commodities.<sup>107</sup> In essence, production is expressly commodity production. To elaborate, the “product of labour is labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material”, hence the worker is estranged as a result of “the worker’s *relationship to the products of his labour*.”<sup>108</sup> Labour is thus alienating because the commodities produced by the labourer do not belong to the labourer, nor is the labourer able to benefit directly from their labour, save the meagre wage earned. Consequently, “labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*”, a person being a product to be bought

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105

Ibid., p. 9.

106

M.C. Howard and J.E. King, *The political economy of Marx*, (Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1980), p. 15.

107

Ibid., p. 9.

108

Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”, pp. 71 and 73.

and sold, in exchange for money.<sup>109</sup> Labour in this context is not natural. Rather it is forced or coerced through social and external compulsion. Moreover, estrangement results from the fact that labour alienates humans from themselves. As Marx explains, “estranged labour estranges the *species* from the man”.<sup>110</sup>

The division of labour divides the task at hand into numerous specific tasks, in the interest of production. In essence, the “division of labour implies from the outset the division of the *conditions* of labour, of tools and materials...the splitting-up of accumulated capital among different owners, and thus, also the division of capital between capital and labour...”<sup>111</sup> The worker is alienated from their labour as the “totality of productive forces, which have, as it were, taken on a material form and are for the individual no longer the forces of the individuals but of private property.”<sup>112</sup> Therefore, the division of labour and private property are identical expressions, “in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity”, in the same way that class is bound up in the private mode of production.<sup>113</sup>

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109

Ibid., p. 71.

110

Ibid., p. 75.

111

Marx, “The German Ideology”, p. 190.

112

Ibid., p. 190.

113

Ibid., p. 160.

Capitalism further alienates people through “the specific relations of production which determine the manner in which social labour is organized...”<sup>114</sup> Specifically, private ownership divides society hierarchically into classes, the most basic division being that between the owners and the workers. As Marx explains, “the existence of a class which possesses nothing but the ability to work is a necessary presupposition of capital.”<sup>115</sup> Hence, the relations of production are, likewise, class relations of production.<sup>116</sup> A mode of production being a simple, basic structure for social relations is, through private property, defined by class and refers to the workers relationship to production. For instance, the property-less individuals constitute the *workers*.<sup>117</sup> Their class is determined by their job. With few exceptions, class remains the basis for social relationships, economic relations determining the class. As class stratifies society, inequalities are made manifest and are perpetuated. As Marx explains, classes are

...already determined by the division of labour, which in every such mass of men separate out, and of which one dominates all others. It follows from this that all struggles within the State, the struggle between democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy, the struggle for franchise, etc. etc., are merely the illusory forms in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out amongst one another...<sup>118</sup>

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114

Ibid., p. 9.

115

Bottomore, p. 148.

116

Howard and King, pp. 6-7.

117

Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”, p. 70.

118

Marx, “The German Ideology”, pp. 160-161.

Accordingly, with private property there exists class conflict and a state. But the state does not reconcile class conflict. Instead, “the existence of the state proves that class antagonisms *cannot* be reconciled.”<sup>119</sup>

The state operates as the “organization of the possessing class for its protection from the non-possessing class”.<sup>120</sup> An institution bound up in the cleavages of society, the state was instituted as a moderator of the conflicts intrinsic in a class-based society. To be more precise, “the state is an organ of class *rule*, an organ for the *oppression* of one class by another; it is the creation of “order”, which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between the classes.”<sup>121</sup> Hence the origin of the state emerges from within society, a product of a specific form of property relations.

Unique to the state, however, is a sense of neutrality which is perceived by those who consider the state as a power standing above class conflict. As Engels explains,

...that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in sterile struggle, a power seemingly standing above society became necessary for the purpose of moderating the conflict, of keeping it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society, but

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119

Vladimir Lenin, “The State and Revolution”, in *Lenin: Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 266.

120

Engels, “The Origin of Family, Private Property and State”, p. 754.

\*It is important to note that the concept of the state as existent to protect private property is not exclusive to Marxist analysis, nor is it a novel concept. Locke also raises this point. Moreover, it could also be asserted that the American Constitution sanctions private property, no taxation without representation, as expressed in the Federalist Papers, #10.

121

Lenin, pp. 266-267.



placing itself above it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state.<sup>122</sup>

But what is this power that the state holds and which makes it appear to be above society? Engels explains the powers of the state as being public power and ability to tax. Specifically, public power, defined “as special bodies of armed men having prisons, etc., at their command”, functions to regulate any hostilities which threaten the preeminence of the established, propertied class.<sup>123</sup> As the demand for coercive state power increases, taxation, generally claimed to be needed for the administration of social programs or to support the state army is imposed. In this way, the state is also able to foster a false sense of balance amongst classes, which in turn creates the illusion that it is above society. Despite the appearance of being above society, however, the state is simply a political instrument for the propertied class. To elucidate,

...Because the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but because it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class...<sup>124</sup>

Thus, the state is not a power above society. It is an instrument for the oppression of the property-less class.

The politics of the class society further serve to perpetuate class oppression.

Specifically, a democratic republic serves the omnipotence of “wealth” and property in

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<sup>122</sup>

Engels, “The Origin of Family, Private Property and State”, p. 752.

<sup>123</sup>

Lenin, p. 268.

<sup>124</sup>

Ibid., p. 270.

Western society, a “democratic republic (providing) the best possible political shell for capitalism”.<sup>125</sup> While the propertied class may exercise its power indirectly, it wields its power in many ways. For instance, power is exercised through the “direct corruption of officials” as well as through the alliance of the government and the economic forces of society.<sup>126</sup> Democratic practices provide the tools which allow the propertied class to rule. For example, universal suffrage is a manipulative tool of bourgeois rule, being “the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state.”<sup>127</sup> Universal suffrage does not threaten the bourgeois class as it is incapable of revealing the will of the working class or of securing this realisation.<sup>128</sup> Instead, it grants the working class a false voice which does not alter class conflict, for the property class are those that continue to rule. Simply, the “exploiting classes need political rule to maintain exploitation, ie., in the selfish interests of an insignificant minority against the vast majority of people” and this power is granted and is effectively maintained in a democratic republic.<sup>129</sup>

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125

Ibid., p. 271.

126

Supra

127

Supra

128

Ibid., p. 272.

129

Ibid., p. 279.

## **Conclusion**

The power that controls social and economic life in Western society is the power of capital, the private property of the capitalist.<sup>130</sup> Through the privatization of the modes of production, wage-labour and the state function to serve the propertied class who, in turn, oppress and exploit the working class. Facilitating the hegemony of the bourgeois class is false consciousness “which is not simply false; it is also a rationalization in universalist terms of the class’s particular interest - a statement of a particular interest which is thus projected as a universal interest.”<sup>131</sup> Thus the interests of the propertied class are universalized to represent those of all people. The capitalist depends upon socially constructed myths to ally the wage-labourer with capitalist goals, which is the exploitation of the labourer as well as nature for the accumulation of capital. This lack of consciousness is reflected in the ontology of Western society which congeals the aims and justifies the actions of both the property-owner and the property-less worker. This chapter will now consider the ontological precepts of Western society which translate political economy.

## **Ontology**

As Sidney Pobihushchy explains, “The world view of the immigrant European society, or ‘Western civilization,’ is basically characterized by the separation of (humans) from their environment, and the placing of (humans) at the centre of the world of

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<sup>130</sup>

Howard and King, pp. 12-13.

<sup>131</sup>

Ibid., pp. 11-12.

'being'."<sup>132</sup> In the West, humans both separate and alienate themselves from the natural world by placing themselves at the centre, not only of the world, of the universe. As the centre of the universe, humans claim to be "lord" of all creation. In that capacity, humans have dominion over the earth. Hence, the human vocation is that of mastering their individual destiny and that of others, of defining their role in life and that of everyone else, of creating order and controlling the world.<sup>133</sup> Thus humans stress their independence, their individuality, in relation to all things. As a result, humans are the masters of their destiny. To facilitate that destiny, humans have gained access to all of the goods of the earth which enable them to fulfill that destiny. Through this egocentricity, however, humans have separated themselves from their environment, a necessary condition for its domination.

King explains how "With the development of capitalism...the crucial breakthrough in man's struggle to dominate nature has occurred."<sup>134</sup> Exploitation is intimately linked to private property and the destruction of the natural world, resources and life, all of which are utilized to generate material wealth in Western, capitalist society. The relationship of capitalism to nature is an extension of the relationship of humans to nature. As Horkheimer explains, "Domination of nature involves domination of man."<sup>135</sup> Critical to

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132

Pobihushchy, p. 23.

133

*Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

134

Howard and King, p. 14.

135

Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1992), p. 93.

human domination of nature was its subjugation to the human hierarchy. Pobihushchy explains how the “natural world, at a lower ‘level’ of being, was not of great consequence, and could be exploited to serve the higher purposes of (humans)...since nature was ordered according to a hierarchy of value....”<sup>136</sup> To legitimize the domination of nature, humans must feel superior to it, allowing them to exploit nature without experiencing overwhelming guilt. By reducing nature into “mere material, mere stuff to be dominated, without any other purpose than that of this very domination” its exploitation is rationalized.<sup>137</sup>

To exploit nature for profit requires its degradation, its subservience to human needs and wants. The exploitation of nature, however, simply reflects the relationship amongst humans. Not only do people consider themselves superior to nature, they consider themselves superior to other humans. Again, Pobihushchy articulates this thought: “Some were thus held to be inferior to others: slaves in ancient Greece, blacks in the American South, Jews in Nazi Germany, and aboriginals in immigrant-dominated North America.”<sup>138</sup> One must add, because the propertied are held as superior to the property-less, the capitalist exploits the labour power of the individual. As one can purchase the labour of another individual, as one can be superior to another, so too can property be owned. This socially constructed hierarchy legitimizes capitalist needs for

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136

Pobihushchy, p. 24.

137

Horkheimer, p. 97.

138

Ibid., p. 25.

profit which becomes more important than the life of another human being, or even to the life of nature. Hence, the relationship of people to nature in Western society simply reflects human relationships to one another.

Through religion and philosophy, the domination of nature has been justified. For in “traditional theology and metaphysics, the natural was largely conceived as the evil, and the spiritual or supernatural as the good.”<sup>139</sup> Pobihushchy explains how this world view which places humans at its centre “later found its expression in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where, in Genesis, man is commanded to *have dominion over the earth.*”<sup>140</sup> In fact, immigrant society religions reinforce the notion that humans are ultimately superior due to their capacity to think and choose. Despite the faculties of animals, also creatures of nature, humans have, likewise, found ways and reasons to justify their supremacy to them also, allowing humans to own and exploit animal life for private, commercial purposes. As Horkheimer explains, “This mentality of man as the master can be traced back to the first chapters of Genesis. The few precepts in favour of animals that we encounter in the Bible have been interpreted by the most outstanding religious thinkers(...)as pertaining only to the moral education of man, and in no wise to any obligation of man toward other creatures”.<sup>141</sup> For only the soul of humans can be saved,

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Horkheimer, p. 126.

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Pobihushchy, p. 24. Italics represent direct quote from Genesis 1:28.

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Horkheimer, p. 104.

“animals have but the right to suffer.”<sup>142</sup> The role of religion in Western society has thus served to reinforce the primacy of private property and human superiority on Earth, to allow those who live on this planet to continue to own and exploit the natural world, and all of its creatures, guilt-free. Religion hence justifies a world rooted in private property, in which property, not life, matters.

Similarly, religion supports the idea that the development of land was an inevitable part of the destiny of humankind.<sup>143</sup> To develop the land, people first had to lend their labour power to it, giving it a marketable value. The value of the land was therefore determined through the amount of labour lent to the land. As Locke explains,

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person; this nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature has provided and left it in, he has mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.<sup>144</sup>

Private property, according to Locke, and its development are the right of the individual.

Moreover, to develop the land is the duty of property-holders. Land is to be subdued and improved. Locke adds that “he who appropriates land to himself by his labor does not lessen but increase the common stock of mankind for the provisions serving to the support of human life produced by one acre of enclosed and cultivated land are...ten times more

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Supra

143

Kellough, p. 359.

144

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, Thomas P. Peardon, ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1952), p. 17.

than those which are yielded by an acre of land of an equal richness lying waste in common.”<sup>145</sup> Accordingly, Locke requires that land be enclosed and developed.<sup>146</sup> Hence the life of humans is dedicated to the abasement and exploitation of land, justified by the destiny of humans who believe themselves to be Masters of the universe. The value of land, therefore, is created by humans. The exploitation of land is likened to the exploitation of all creatures for the capitalist society. For in this society, humans are not only superior, they are the centre of the universe and all of nature. Specifically, land and its natural resources exist to serve the needs of humans.

The need to pardon human behaviour is a result of the capitalist ethos which is “characterized by a culture of wealth where the natural condition of man has been defined as affluence”, where “having” becomes a condition of “being”.<sup>147</sup> The overwhelming material needs and wants of people in society requires everything to be reduced to an object for their disposal, whether it be natural resources, animal life or fellow human beings. As Gail Kellough explains, “Since everything in the world can be possessed, humanity also becomes a *thing* to be possessed.”<sup>148</sup> Again, the individual is conditioned through the socialization of economic values and private property. As a world of material

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<sup>145</sup>

Ibid., pp. 22-23

<sup>146</sup>

This argument was directed at Aboriginal peoples, to justify the expropriation of their land. See John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, Thomas P. Peardon, ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1952), pp. 16-30.

<sup>147</sup>

Kellough, pp. 367-368.

<sup>148</sup>

Ibid., p. 368.



goods, commodification of all life forms is made acceptable and becomes simply a way of being.

The egocentricity and individuality of humans is epitomized in Western politics, more specifically, in the democratic principle. Democracy reinforces the hierarchy of humans as it allows for a leader, for one to command all others, for one to make the decisions for all people. Democracy further grants these rulers powers which allow them to not only impose their will but their form of “order” on the “inferior” masses. With conflict inherent in competing individual interests, as well as the superiority of some humans above others (race, religion, education, sex, etc...) “politics consists of the use of physical force or of subtler measures such as majority rule to achieve the best ordering” to govern human life.<sup>149</sup> Thus politics imposes order on “chaos”, all emerging out of a need to protect the owners of property. Democracy is fundamentally based on the belief that humans are called to be masters of society, masters of their destiny, masters of one another, and, most importantly, owners of property.

In the culture of wealth, “politics is extrinsic to the individual’s concern, because the individual’s primary pursuit is not public welfare, but his own private well-being”.<sup>150</sup> Hence self-preservation is the focus of people in capitalism as private property fosters competition and conflict. Horkheimer explains how the “bourgeois individual did not necessarily see himself as opposed to the collectivity, but believed or was prevailed upon

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Pobihushchy, p. 25.

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Kellough, p. 368.

to believe himself to be a member of society that could achieve the highest degree of harmony only through the unrestricted competition of individual interests.”<sup>151</sup> To reinforce this concept, the idea of self-preservation is transformed into a metaphysical principle that guarantees the eternal life of the soul.<sup>152</sup> Promising rewards in another life, religion sanctions the exploitation of life in this world. It sanctions private property in exchange for the hard work of the individual. The pursuit of full humanity is seen, therefore, “as subversion and demands for full and equal rights are put down as being the work of extremists” for it discredits the liberalism of social economic practices, exalting capitalism as a system which sacrifices the humanity of the collective for private gain.<sup>153</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The point of ontology is to show that a societal world view is not a free floating phenomenon but reflective of a way in which people live. As Horkheimer explains, “The idea inherent in all idealistic metaphysics - that the world is in some sense a product of the mind - is thus turned into its opposite: the mind is a product of the world, of the processes of nature.”<sup>154</sup> Essentially, people in Western society are conditioned to accept the path of society or the history of the world as it currently exists - one of private property. The natural world has been supplemented by theories which serve to excuse human behaviour.

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151

Horkheimer, p. 139.

152

Ibid., p. 136.

153

Kellough, p. 368.

154

Horkheimer, p. 125.

To assert that the human world is one for the survival of the fittest reaffirms the alleged natural principle of the wild kingdom which is a more appropriate metaphor for the capitalist world. In this way, capitalism subverts truth to serve its agenda and defends its abuse of nature and humans as “completely natural”. As Horkheimer explains, “The very idea of truth has been reduced to the purpose of a useful tool in the control of nature.”<sup>155</sup>

Private ownership of property is the basis for Western society. It is the centre of the political, economic, social and spiritual structures. To support capitalism, Western society must assimilate Aboriginal peoples whose claim to the land threatens its maximum exploitation. Self-government is thereby a means to consolidate the transmission of capitalist values to the colonized peoples to acquire the remainder of the land and to subvert their own sense of political economy and ontology. As Robert Vachon explains,

The fundamental reason why we Westerners are unable to speak seriously about traditional Indigenous “political” culture is that we are so alienated from our own western political nature and culture and hypnotized by our Nation-State ideology and its anthropocentric political anthropology of Man, the Master of the Universe, that we are unable to conceive of “politics” and “government” without some mighty head somewhere to tell us what to do. Our real problem is that we believe that man is called to be master of his destiny, so that somewhere, somehow, there must be one top ultimate master to put some order in the chaotic relations of these little masters. We thus legitimize “might makes right” in some way. But until we discover that we are not ultimately called to autonomy or to be masters of our destinies, we shall never discover and accept our own anthropocentric political nature as organic artisans and synthetic transformers of our destiny, nor shall we be able to accept the *cosmocentric* political nature of Indigenous peoples.<sup>156</sup>

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Ibid., 142.

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Robert Vachon, “The Future of Native Self-Government”, *Native Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter, 1989): 3.

**This paper will now endeavour to express Aboriginal, more specifically Iroquois, political economy and ontology to reveal the differences between Aboriginal and Western societies, to express the differences which prove these two societies to be incompatible due to their respective, but antithetical, property forms.**

## Chapter 3

### Indigenous Political Economy and Ontology

#### Political Economy

To understand Aboriginal political economy it is critical to understand the concept of communal property, the absence of the concept of private ownership of the land. Oren Lyons explains:

We native people did not have the concept of private property in our lexicon, and the principle of private property was pretty much in conflict with our value system. For example, you wouldn't see 'No Hunting', 'No Fishing', or 'No Trespassing' signs in our territories. To a native person such signs would have been equivalent to saying 'No Breathing' because the air is somebody's private property. If you said to the people, 'The Ontario government owns all the air in Ontario, and if you want some, you are going to have to go and see the Bureau of Air', we would all laugh. Well, it made the Indians laugh too when the Europeans said, 'We are going to own the land.' How could anyone *own* the land?<sup>157</sup>

Hence there is no property ownership, for if "we assume that products of the land are the basic 'means of production', we would appear to have arrived at the conclusion that Aboriginal society lacks any form of economic ownership of the means of production."<sup>158</sup>

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Oren Lyons, "Spirituality, Equality, and Natural Law", in Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long, eds., *Pathways to Self-Determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 9.

158

Annette Hamilton, "Descended from the father, belonging to the country: rights to land in the Australian Western Desert", in Eleanor Burke Leacock, ed., *Politics and History in Band Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 86.

\*While this article focuses on Australia, its discussion of Aboriginal relations to land is very general and is applicable to Aboriginal peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Instead the land is shared and is held in stewardship. The land is considered the responsibility of the current generation to be held in trust for future generations. Therefore, the land is borrowed from the future, from the children of the coming generations. Current life must simply take or use what is required for subsistence and leave the land as it was found. No one individual person, clan or nation owns the land as its maintenance is the responsibility of all people. As Morgan explains, “the lands of the Iroquois are still held in common with title being vested in the people...but they have no power to transfer the title to the land to each other, or to strangers.”<sup>159</sup> Thus there is no sense of individual or even collective right to redistribute land to others as it does not belong to anyone or any group in particular.

There has been some debate over the traditional and hereditary ownership of lands for hunting purposes by Aboriginal nations, like the Innu. Leacock has determined that the “hunting-ground system had indeed developed as a result of the fur trade (colonialism), and further, that it did not involve true land ownership”.<sup>160</sup> Leacock further explains that one “could not trap near another’s line (so as not to starve each other by overcrowding any one area), but anyone could hunt game animals, could fish, or could gather woods, berries or birchbark on another’s grounds *as long as these products of the land were for*

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<sup>159</sup>

Henry Lewis Morgan, *League of the Iroquois or Haudenosaunee*, vol. II (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1954), pp. 118-119.

<sup>160</sup>

Eleanor Burke Leacock, *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), p. 19.

*use, and not for sale.*"<sup>161</sup> Thus a person or family in need was never prohibited from obtaining food for subsistence. It was only after contact and the arrival of Europeans that furs, and trap-lines, became privatized. Pre-contact Aboriginal society was therefore void of any sense of private ownership, lands being held in common by the clan or nation. Reflective of this communal property form, labour was likewise performed by and for the collective. To understand how collective labour was possible, it is first important to understand that the form of society was public, all persons being involved in one sphere.

In their "communitarian reciprocity economy"<sup>162</sup>, the "distinction did not exist between a public world or men's work and a private world of women's household service. The large collective household *was* the community, and within it both sexes worked to produce the goods necessary for livelihood."<sup>163</sup> The "public" life of the group was all inclusive, involving both sexes in the decision process regarding production, distribution of goods, relocation of village, learning practices, and other pertinent matters of concern. All decisions were made among mature and respected women and men of the nation or clan. Indeed the participation of women, for example in the major share of labour and decision-making, "did not reduce them to slavery...but accorded them with decision-

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161

*Ibid.*, pp 19-20.

162

Temple, p. 4.

163

Leacock, *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, p. 33.

making powers commensurate with their contribution.”<sup>164</sup> Women were thus recognized and assigned the appropriate responsibility reflective of their contribution to the collective. Specifically, they were revered for their role as mothers, as the givers of life. With Aboriginal society being rooted in the participation of both sexes, women played an equal and important role in all facets of the clan or nation. Referring to the writings of Jesuit Paul LeJeune, Leacock explains how he noticed that “women have great power here” and that “the choice of plans, of undertakings, of journeys, of wintering, lies in nearly every instance in the hands of the housewife...”<sup>165</sup> Women’s contributions therefore exceeded those duties associated with the home, and were extended to the nation, the home of the people. For instance, the family or clan, in some nations like those of the Iroquois Confederacy, was matrilineal and matrilocal, demonstrating the importance of the heritage and descent of children within the mother clan. Given the meaningful and momentous functions of women in Aboriginal society there was no motivation to separate them from the clan, instead they were central. Aboriginal societies were, therefore, void of any public/private distinction. Instead, the collective/public dimension of their society reinforced the collective role and, by extension, labour of the clan. Hence with the collective means of production, the clan was the economic unit of society, the household being the public industry, the care and education of children similarly a public affair.<sup>166</sup>

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164

Ibid., p. 34.

165

Ibid., p. 38.

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Ibid., p. 43.



As a result of the exclusively public nature of Aboriginal society, there was no wage-labour as there were no owners of production. There were no exploiters, nor was anyone or anything exploited. The means of production were at the collective disposal of the clan. The relations of production were likewise collective with “consumption proceeded by direct distribution of the products within the larger or smaller communistic communities...”<sup>167</sup> To elucidate, the fruits of labour, either being the successful hunting for meat or the generous harvest, were equitably distributed amongst the entire community, despite the fact that some may have contributed more in terms of labour. As Daniel Vachon observes, “Within communal property relations(...) *individuals behave not as workers, but as owners...and members of a community who also work*”.<sup>168</sup> Since the modes of production are controlled by the collective, people are not alienated from their labour, nor do they necessarily feel a sense of ownership over their labour. In fact, their contribution to the community and well-being is appreciated; it is that for which they gain respect and prestige. Moreover, labour is not generally considered a burdensome task, mainly since there is no separation of planning of labour from the doing of labour. This is simply a result of the fact that there are no owners of the means of production controlling the labour process. Instead, labour is performed by all clan members for the benefit of everyone. On the culture of the Iroquois, Hazel Hertzberg explains: “Work was personal

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<sup>167</sup>

Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>168</sup>

Daniel A. Vachon, “The Australian Western Desert people”, in Eleanor Burke Leacock, ed., *Politics and History in Band Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 475. Emphasis added.

in the sense that the person carried out a complete process and social in the sense that society mapped out the work that had to be done.”<sup>169</sup> The idea of work as a collective activity reflected the need of the clan to support itself through the activities of one another. As Roger Moore concludes, “Collectivism and mutual help can be summed up as **EVERYONE WORKS FOR EVERYONE**. Work for the good of the community and the concern of each to preserve and increase communal wealth are community mandates. They are summarized in an important standard: Only those who have worked can eat.”<sup>170</sup> Therefore, the labour process is characterized by kindness, sharing, contributing, reciprocity and equality.

The labour process by which goods were produced was unified with the entire community working to sustain itself as a unit. Since the division of labour determines the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labour, the sole division of labour was by sex. Women were the reproducers, the redistributors, the agrarians, the mothers, the wives while the men were the hunters and warriors. Critical to understand Aboriginal division of labour, however, “is that the household was communal and the division of labour between the sexes was reciprocal.”<sup>171</sup> While the women worked hard in the home, the men laboured in their endeavours to

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<sup>169</sup>

Hazel Hertzberg, *The Great Tree and the Longhouse: The Culture of the Iroquois* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1966), p. 66.

<sup>170</sup>

Roger Moore, ed., *The Indigenous Voice: Visions & Realities* (Utrecht: International Books, 1993), p.582.

<sup>171</sup>

Ibid, p. 33.

catch meat or fish for the family and the clan. To be a good provider or a good mother was a strong matter of pride as it was the obligation of the individual to try their best and contribute equally to the family and clan. Therefore, women were not overworked or exploited nor were the men or children or elderly. While women and men divided the work equally, they were not divided beyond their work - for each performed respective tasks and each regarded the other's work or contribution respectively, reiterating the interdependence of the roles of the sexes in society and the mutual benefit and appreciation for that contribution.

In a society based on respect, entrenched in the communal means of production, there was no class division as there were no property-owners and no property-less workers. With communal property form, society was rooted in the family, and premised upon the equality of individuals, regardless of age or sex. With the basic economic structure being collective, society was unified through familial ties. In fact, familial ties were likewise reinforced through the economy, as the "greater family, sometimes made up of very many communities linked in solidarity, constitute(d) a unit which, in turn, reproduce(d) the principle of reciprocity towards other families."<sup>172</sup> Thus, instead of competition there was cooperation. Instead of an exchange economy, there was reciprocity. And, instead of individualism, there were familial relations. To express this idea, Ron Bourgeault is quoted at length.

The hunting-gathering social formations...were egalitarian societies based on the

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Temple, pp. 4-5.

kinship system and communal modes of production. Socially, these formations consisted of small gatherings of families grouped together in bands, which were the basic unit of production governed by the kinship system. In the broad transitional period of communal formations, these hunting-gathering societies had a low level of developed productive forces, and were incapable of producing large economic surpluses. The kinship system as an ideological and social system of cooperation defined the egalitarian social relations of production and exchange, access to resources and tools, and the collective appropriation of surplus production to its use-value. As such, there was not specialized production and exchange of products as commodities on the basis of exchange-value. Moreover, the hunting-gathering formations had no state or permanent collection of individuals as a class which exercised power through the state in order to appropriate economic surplus for themselves.<sup>173</sup>

The communal being the fundamental basis for the structure of Aboriginal society “each individual is directly dependent on the multi-family group as a whole.”<sup>174</sup> The interdependence of Aboriginal peoples is epitomized in the egalitarian nature of society which precluded class as it was rooted in sharing and the dependence on the collective as opposed to any one individual. The social composition of the family and the collective were not conducive to the formation of class as there were no property relations to stratify society. While there were individuals who were greatly respected, being either warchiefs, elders or shamans, for example, respect did not derive from or translate into property or political power.

As there were no property relations to defend, there was no state or state power controlling the lives of the people. There were no institutions to protect the interests of

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Ron G. Bourgeault, “The Struggle for Class and Nation: The Origin of the Metis in Canada and the National Question”, in Ron Bourgeault, Dave Broad, Lorne Brown and Lori Foster, eds., *1492-1992 Five Centuries of Imperialism and Resistance* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 1992), p. 157.

174

*Ibid.*, p. 159.

the few, to dictate the social or legal policy of the people. Instead, Aboriginal peoples were independent and self-ruling, their governance being the expression of the collective, all members having a voice. Their structures were premised on the autonomy of the individual who was subject to the clan or nation. Specifically, the Iroquois confederacy has been attributed with representing a highly unified form of political organization. Created by the legendary peacemaker, Dekanawideh<sup>175</sup> brought not only peace to the warring nations of the Iroquois people, but the *Great Law of Peace* itself. The one hundred and seventeen wampums of the *Great Law of Peace* detailed the terms of the confederacy which consisted of five nations, being the Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Onondonga and Cayuga.<sup>176</sup> The confederacy was composed of independent but related tribes with each nation being self-governing but united through the confederacy.<sup>177</sup> While the central governing structure of the Confederacy had great moral authority over collective national interests, each nation was autonomous. The key to their decision-

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The Peacemaker's name is spelled a variety of ways and is rarely to be uttered in many communities. For the history of the Iroquois Confederacy and the *Great Law of Peace*, see Paul A.W. Wallace, *White Roots of Peace*, Port Washington, New York: I.J. Friedman, 1968.

<sup>176</sup>

The Tuscarora nation was later added to be the sixth nation of the confederacy.

<sup>177</sup>

While some assert that the confederacy emerged out of a need for mutual protection [see Neta C. Crawford, "A security regime among democracies: cooperation among Iroquois nations", *International Organization*, vol. 48, no. 3 (1994): 345-85], authors David Bedford and Thom Workman claim that, "although it is a text about inter-nation(al) relations, it is also a document about living well, and of how the relations between nations form an integral part of living well." See David Bedford and Thom Workman, "The Great Law of Peace: Alternative Inter-Nation(al) Practices and the Iroquoian Confederacy", (Spring, 1996), p.2.

making process was unanimity and consensus within the confederacy, with each nation generally speaking as one voice. As Henry Morgan explains,

Their whole civil policy was averse to the concentration of power in the hands of any single individual, but inclined to the opposite principle of division among a number of equals....The government sat lightly upon the people, who, in effect, were governed but little. It secured to each that the individual independence, which the Hodelosaunee [Iroquois] knew how to prize (...) and which, amid all their political changes, they have continued to preserve.<sup>178</sup>

The confederacy was thus premised on responsibility, not power, and on kinship, not the state.

Being responsible for the way they live, the *Great Law of Peace* outlines the responsibilities of the nations, the clans and the sexes within the confederacy. For instance, specific wampums express the roles of women to advise and choose chiefs, the role of Onondoga nation as firekeepers, the Senecas as the keepers of the western door and so on. It is a set of “laws” or “rules” grounded in the solidarity of the people. These rules were not designed to restrict participation of the people or bestow power on those elected for there was no state. The confederacy did not act as a legislative body intending to regulate individual behaviour. Rather, as Morgan explains, Aboriginal society was a *societas*, a society built on kinship, which was at the base of the confederacy.<sup>179</sup> These rules, therefore, would be more accurately described as guidelines outlining the roles, responsibilities and obligations of each member, and each nation, within the

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<sup>178</sup>

Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The “New World” Through Indian Eyes* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 117.

<sup>179</sup>

Henry Lewis Morgan, *Ancient Society*, Leslie A. White, ed. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 60.

confederacy.<sup>180</sup> As the people were members of their nation first and of the confederacy second the confederacy embraced persons through their nations. Hence, the clan or nation was the primary basis for political participation and interaction, as it was similarly for social, spiritual and economic relationships.

Given the importance of each person and each nation in the confederacy one must acknowledge its inherently democratic nature. As Morgan explains, “The principle of democracy, which was born of the gentes, manifested itself in the retention by the gentiles of the right to elect their sachem and chiefs, in the safeguards thrown around the office to prevent usurpation, and in the check upon the election held by the remaining gentes.”<sup>181</sup> A highly sophisticated polity, democracy in Aboriginal society, like most other things, was rooted in the clan or nation which was epitomized by their democratic organization. Based on consensus as opposed to majority, decisions required the voice and input of each individual and nation. Moreover, it included the participation of each individual at every level. As Hertzberg explains, “The power to name and remove Confederacy Chiefs gave women an important role in Iroquois political life. The power to make decisions as chiefs gave men an important role. Thus the organization of the League (or confederacy) took account of men, women, clan, village, and tribe.”<sup>182</sup> This equalization of participation

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For more detail regarding these rights and responsibilities, refer to: *Great Law of Peace* or Henry Lewis Morgan, *Ancient Society*, chapter two, “The Iroquois Gens”.

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Morgan, *Ancient Society*, p. 69.

182

Hertzberg, p. 97.

reflects the absence of a central authority or power. As the confederacy was not a central government there was no concentration of power. Instead, authority was vested in the people, the clan and the nation. Power was not vested in the people in the controlling sense of Western society, but in their voices as a people. People were to speak as a collective on behalf of the interests of the collective, all individual issues being submerged in the collective. Despite the term “chief” used to describe the selected speakers of the people, they were not in fact leaders or commanders as the term implies for Western society. Instead, their polity was premised on consensus and the community and these values were reiterated through political practice. To elucidate, Vachon explains,

The communitarian and consensual character of his politics drives him to take up the way of deliberation, negotiation, cooperation and patience rather than that of confrontation, aggressiveness, impatience and of the ‘adversary method’. A forced consensus is no consensus. The communion of a people and of nations cannot be brought about by legislation, coercion, power struggle. His politics are less one of self-defense than one of confidence; what and who surrounds him is less considered as a possible or real enemy as a partner, a friend, a brother, in the same circle of life.<sup>183</sup>

Thus Aboriginal polity, like the society, was not a pyramid but a circle which unified the people. Political practices were hence based on respect, for one another and for nature. While the Iroquois were not a political society, their political organization was inherently linked to the principles of democracy, in which the voice resides in the people. The supremacy of the collective was thusly protected. Indeed, whether it be politically, economically, spiritually or socially, Aboriginal life was conducted around human

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Robert Vachon, “Political Self-determination and Traditional Native Indian Political Culture”, *Monchanin* 64, vol. 12, no. 3 (1979): 45.



connectedness and their harmonious relationships to all living things.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the importance of the collective in Aboriginal society, rooted in communal property form, there was no structural poverty, no poor and needy, as everyone benefitted or everyone suffered, all dependent on the work of the community. Likewise, each member of the nation was free and equal, including women, for there was no exploitation of the earth, no exploitation of labour, no class structure, no power or authoritarian hierarchy. Instead, Aboriginal economy was premised upon the equal contribution and the collective modes of production granted to them by the Creator. To understand appropriately the collective consciousness of Aboriginal economy one must understand the ontology of Aboriginal society which serves as a window to their world. Their ontology expresses their spiritual relationship with the natural world which is transmitted through their relationships with one another, being economic or political. For in their ways, “spiritual consciousness is the highest form of politics” and economics.<sup>184</sup> The spiritual connection to the universe explains the communal property form of their economy. This chapter will now examine Aboriginal, and more specifically Iroquois, ontology.

### **Ontology**

Indigenous ontology reflects the complete interdependence of human social

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relations and human relations to nature. Essentially, this is attributed to the “understanding of ontological sameness between humans and the natural world.”<sup>185</sup> In Aboriginal society, there is no hierarchy of species as everyone and everything share a purpose and a role in the universe. Every living thing has a purpose and a function. Moreover, all living things are spiritual beings, gifts from the Creator. For instance, “A blade of grass is an energy form manifested in matter - grass matter. The spirit of the grass is that unseen force which produces the species of grass, and it is manifest to us in the form of grass.”<sup>186</sup> So, as Bedford and Workman explain, “humans were not assigned a privileged status within the system of life, and their obligation was to respect this order by attuning or adjusting to its rhythms. Living in harmony with the natural order was a critical factor in the moderation of their social and political practices.<sup>187</sup> To achieve and live this harmonious relationship preoccupied Aboriginal society and was manifested through daily activity. To understand this ontological search for harmony, we will examine the concept of work within Aboriginal society.

While work is considered basic to the human condition, Aboriginal peoples do not endeavour to transform their environment through their labour. Rather, they strive to survive, for subsistence, labouring only to that end. How labour is undertaken is best expressed through the understanding of the aforementioned interdependent relations.

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Bedford and Workman, p. 13.

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“Message to the Western World”, *Monchanin* 64, vol.12, no. 3 (1979): 7.

187

Bedford and Workman, p. 13.

Essentially, “Indian moral principles are based on communal well-being through work, which is both obligation and honour of the Indian before the community.”<sup>188</sup> Work was not, however, a simple economic task. As Hertzberg explains, “Work also had religious significance. The celebration of hunting and farming in the great festivals of the Iroquois gave religious meaning to work. Work was thus seen not simply on personal or social terms but as a central part of the religious meaning of life.”<sup>189</sup> Recognizing the gifts of life and the fruits of their labour, the Iroquois celebrated six regular festivals to offer thanksgiving to the Creator. In this way, the labour of the people was a reflection of the natural gifts of the season. To elaborate, the Maple festival was a celebration of the return to the maple waters; the Planting festival asked for the germination of the seed; a Strawberry festival honoured the fruits of the earth; the Greencorn festival observed the ripening of the “three sisters”, being corn, bean and squash; the Harvest festival celebrated the final harvest; and the New Years jubilee was a celebration of renewal.<sup>190</sup> In essence, they acknowledge their labour and the role of the universe in creating these gifts, demonstrating a spiritual connectedness to the universe, and not a sense dominance over the land. The importance of land is not simply for subsistence or for territory but for spirituality.

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Roger Moore, p. 582.

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Hertzberg, p. 67.

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For more details on each of the five festivals, (Maple, Berry, GreenCorn, Harvest and New Year) refer to Henry Lewis Morgan, *League of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois*, vol. I. (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1954), pp. 200-220.

The Aboriginal world-view is thus all-encompassing. According to Robert Vachon, it conceives of the world or universe as an orderly, interdependent, harmonious system. There is a sense of responsibility which consumes them as they play, like any other organism, a vital role in maintaining that harmonious relationship with the natural world, an ideal which also dominates the politics of indigenous peoples. Tom Porter explains: “Whenever one mentions Indian government to me or to the Iroquois people, the number-one thing that we think about, right off the bat, is that the person is talking about the government that the Creator gave to the Indian people...”<sup>191</sup> Therefore, political life is understood as entrenched in spirituality. This too is obvious in the *Great Law of Peace*. Tom Porter explains how, when the women meet to name a chief, that candidate for leadership “has to know those ceremonies because the knowledge of the spiritual values of his nation is the chief’s first mandate from the Creator.”<sup>192</sup> Therefore, the candidate is judged on his participation and attendance at ceremonies over the years. Spirituality is thus the “foundation and the nexus of traditional social and political organization. Through spirituality the natural order of things was revealed and (human’s) proper relationship to nature was established - a relationship of respect and preservation, not exploitation. Spirituality underlies the argument that Indian government has an obligation

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<sup>191</sup>

Tom Porter, “Traditions of the Constitution of the Six Nations” in Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long, eds., *Pathways to Self-Determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 15.

<sup>192</sup>

Porter, p. 20.

to maintain the faith for future generations.”<sup>193</sup> Hence spirituality is not only at the root of the economic attitudes of Aboriginal peoples but also at the heart of both social and political institutions. In contrast with the egocentricity of humans in Western society, their cosmo-centricity is noble, unselfish, and, most importantly, appreciative as the Iroquois repeatedly acknowledge the role of the Creator. The most profound demonstration of their spirituality can be found in the thanksgiving ritual, a ritual which is intrinsic to traditional Iroquois life.

At the beginning of the *Great Law of Peace* can be found the Thanksgiving clause which establishes the idea of giving thanks, in a political setting. The wampum states: “the Onondaga statesmen shall open it (a council) by expressing their gratitude to their cousin statesmen, and greeting them, and they shall make an address and offer thanks...”<sup>194</sup> Thanks is offered to the cosmos. For instance, the law specifies, but is not limited to, giving thanks to the earth, the streams, the lakes, the maize and the fruits, the animals, the winds, the Sun, the moon, and to the Creator. The list is prioritized in relation to the proximity of the element to the earth, to human existence. Key to giving thanks, though, is the idea of respect and responsibility as one acknowledges the sanctity of the work of the Creator. As Loran Thompson explains, “If you are a traditional person aware of your spiritual and political obligations, and you are performing your duties...you are fulfilling

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<sup>193</sup>

Little Bear, Boldt and Long, pp. 3-4.

<sup>194</sup>

*The Great Law of Peace*, wampum no. 7.

the obligations put on your shoulders by your Creator.”<sup>195</sup> By being thankful, the Iroquois are acknowledging the interconnectedness of all things, all relationships. As Thompson summarizes: “I give thanks to the Creator. I don’t ask the sun to come up, for the trees to grow, for the rain to fall. I am just thankful that they are there and doing their job so we can go about our daily lives happily.”<sup>196</sup> In appreciation of the universe, its interdependence is respected, acknowledged and understood. The role or place of people is recognized as linked to the form and function of every other living thing, rocks, plants, waters, skies, and animals alike. Oren Lyons explains:

Recognition and respect for the equality of all elements of life is necessary because it brings us into perspective as human beings. If all life is considered equal, then we are no more or no less than anything else. Therefore, all life must be respected. Whether it is a tree, a deer, a fish, or a bird, it must be respected because it is equal. We believe it is equal because we are a spiritual people. If a tree is standing there, then the Creator must have put it there, and if the Creator has put it there, then you must respect it. If a person is sitting there, obviously the Creator has made this person; therefore, you must respect the person. If we are to put this belief into practice, then we must protect life and all its manifestations.<sup>197</sup>

Therefore, the offer of thanksgiving not only concerns the act of thanksgiving but demonstrates a respect for all gifts of creation. It recognizes that every form of existence has intrinsic value and, as such, one form of life is of no greater value than any other. Moreover, thanksgiving recognizes the human obligation to respect and protect all life of

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<sup>195</sup>

Loran Thompson, “Fighting Back”, in Diane Engelstad and John Bird, eds., *Nation to Nation* (Anansi, Concord: 1992), p. 178.

<sup>196</sup>

Thompson, p. 178.

<sup>197</sup>

Lyons, p. 6.

the universe, to ensure that each gift is utilized and acknowledged for its contribution to the sustenance and balance of life.

According to Bedford and Workman the thanksgiving ritual, which continues to be practised by Iroquois peoples, further serves to temper political behaviour by reiterating and reinforcing the natural sense of harmony in relationships, premised on the balance of give and take. They assert that in “the aboriginal world view, human action in the world takes place within limits that determine what is politically appropriate against what is politically excessive. This moderation is expressed in the *lawgivers* call to reason. The thanksgiving invocation symbolizes and ritualizes the ontological basis for the message of reasoned moderation.”<sup>198</sup> Hence the thanksgiving ritual extends beyond the spiritual realm to mediate political activity in Iroquois society. Thanksgiving not only serves as a spiritual expression of appreciation but also acts as a reminder of the balance of all life in the universe, everything having its place and its function, everything to be used for survival and not in excess. It is a reminder that the people are not independent or isolated from the universe which surrounds them. Therefore, they cannot proclaim dominion over and above other creatures or elements in the universe. Instead, it is their duty to remind others of the privilege of existence within this ontology.

### **Conclusion**

The nature of Aboriginal society, therefore, epitomized in the Thanksgiving ritual, is not to exploit and profit from the land, from creation. Its aim is that people live in

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Bedford and Workman, p. 15.

harmony with one another and the natural world. Their economy and its political structures are embedded in their spirituality. Given this reality, Andrea Bear Nicholas explains how it is

...impossible for an individual to function for long within the western economic system of individualism and profit-making and still maintain essential traditional values of sharing and cooperation. It is impossible to participate in the mindless destruction of our sources of life, and at the same time, espouse a traditional spirituality, which seeks harmony with the essential spirit, sacredness, and connectedness in all of creation.<sup>199</sup>

Hence, the ontologies of Western and Aboriginal societies are inherently irreconcilable as they are centred on two diametrically opposed philosophies which bring these societies into conflict with one another. Bedford and Workman explain how the “necessity of giving thanks to nature, an imperative incomprehensible to modern sensibility, underscores the profundity of the contrasting views of human being in Western and aboriginal understanding.”<sup>200</sup> Essentially, Western political order is based on law created by and for humans, and the economic order is based on the exploitation of people and nature. The social fabric of Iroquois peoples is based on the *Great Law of Peace*, their political, economic and social existence being premised upon their spiritual appreciation and recognition for their place in the universe.<sup>201</sup> As a result of this dichotomy, Western

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Andrea Bear Nicholas, “Citizenship Education and Aboriginal People: The Humanitarian Art of Cultural Genocide.” *Canadian and International Education*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1996): 64.

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Bedford and Workman, p. 4.

201

Patricia Monture-Angus, in her talk at St. Thomas University, February 12, 1997 stated that there was no word for “law” in her language (Mohawk) and therefore a more



society is unable to accommodate the political aspiration of Aboriginal peoples as its essence will necessarily pervert the beauty of the community of Indigenous nations in exchange for the opportunity to exploit them, the land, and the universe. For, when the Great Spirit made the earth, it never intended that the earth should be made merchandise; but willed that all creatures should enjoy it equally.<sup>202</sup>

Having examined Western political economy and ontology in Chapter two and Aboriginal (Iroquois) political economy and ontology in Chapter three this thesis has demonstrated the profundity of their differences. Western society is predicated upon ownership of private property, wage labour, state, social relations and religions, being forms for the expression of private property. To the contrary, Aboriginal society is reflective of its reverence for the principle of communal property form which is epitomized by the spiritual ceremony of Thanksgiving, the reciprocity of labour and the “rules of niceness”. But how does this analysis and discussion serve to explicate the imposition of Western self-government as cultural genocide? This thesis will now turn to offer its concluding remarks in Chapter four wherein this question will finally be answered.

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appropriate name for the *Great Law of Peace* would be the *rules of niceness* which more accurately reflected their meaning and intent.

<sup>202</sup>

Morgan, *The League of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois*, vol I., p. 229.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

**In today's world there are two different, irreconcilable systems: the Indian system, which is collective, communal, human, loving and which respects nature profoundly; and the European-derived system, which is exploitative, individualistic, and egoistic, and which destroys nature.<sup>203</sup>**

These systems are each a result of the specific property form of each society and the social relations which emerge therefrom. For example, in Aboriginal society "People shared food; there was no rich and poor. They made decisions collectively; some people were more influential than others, but there were no powerful chiefs."<sup>204</sup> all because they viewed property as held in common, by all people, equally. This is the exact opposite of Western society. With the property form being private all people are subject to those who own property, and their desire to accumulate more. Cultural imperialism, specifically the hegemonization of Western economic practices, has been achieved through economic devastation of economies whose property form challenges a society constructed on private property. Colonialism has been a primary instrument through which Western society has endeavoured to deculturate Aboriginal peoples by destroying their economy. A King explains, "The process (colonialism), therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production; a process that transforms on the one hand, the

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Roger Moore, p .582.

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Leacock and Lee, p. 4.

social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate producers into wage labourers.”<sup>205</sup> It functions by “transforming all things into commodities, it dissolved all ancient traditional relations, and for inherited customs and historical rights it substituted purchase and sale, “free” contract.”<sup>206</sup> Thus Western society has assaulted Aboriginal economy, to usurp it and make it serve Western economic interests. To this end, “their communal economies were undermined by measures designed to transform land and labour into commodities...”<sup>207</sup>

The purpose and function of colonialism in Canada has been driven by the need to divest Aboriginal peoples of the land for its exploitation and ownership. Critical to this process was the instillation of Western political economy and ontology. To justify the land seizure the immigrant society had to believe that Aboriginal peoples too could be a part of and benefit from private ownership of property, for it could not survive alongside a society whose economy was antithetical to their own. Hence, “The history of white-Indian relations ‘bears witness to our (non-Native) intolerance of different fundamental structures of experience. We seem to need to share a communal meaning to human existence, to give with others a common sense of the world, to maintain (a capitalist) consensus.”<sup>208</sup>

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Howard and King, p. 28.

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Engels, “The Origin of Family, Private Property and State”, p. 748.

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Alice Littlefield, “Native American Education, 1880-1930”, in John Moore, ed., *The Political Economy of North American Indians* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 45.

208

Kellough, p. 370.

This economic genocide, or “economicide”<sup>209</sup>, has laid the path for the cultural genocide that ensues through the imposition of Western-derived self-government. As Howard Adams declares, “*no matter how much the whiteman praises their self-government, in the end it is still colonialism.*”<sup>210</sup> For “In Canada, capitalism is the base of society, and thus shapes the social ethic, customs, culture and economy of our society. Culture can thus be seen as a product of the economic base of society.”<sup>211</sup> And self-government can thus be considered an act of cultural genocide. The imposition of a foreign polity on Aboriginal peoples assumes the complete assimilation of Aboriginal peoples. It assumes the complete acceptance of property, class, labour and state. Essentially, given this reality, **“There can be no self-determination under capitalism.”**<sup>212</sup>

### **Self-Determination**

If self-government is going to reflect sovereignty and lead to greater self-determination, the sources of First Nations’ powers and the sharing of powers between First Nations and Canadian governments must be expressed in practical arrangements that grow out of nation-to-nation relationships.<sup>213</sup>

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This is a term used by Dominique Temple in his article, “Economicide”, *Interculture* 98, vol. 21, no. 1 (1988).

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Adams, p. 148. Emphasis added.

211

Ibid., p. 123.

212

John Moore, p. 278. Emphasis added. \*This is actually the title to a work done by Rosa Luxembourgh, 1976.

213

Cassidy, p. 8.

In pursuit of nation-to-nation relationships, many Aboriginal communities have launched a comprehensive, Aboriginally-directed, effort to reassert themselves as nations, revitalize their traditions, reinstitute their languages and reestablish self-governance, in their quest for self-determination. They have initiated their ultimate task of decolonization and the restructuring of Aboriginal-state relations.

Despite their aims and their efforts, to date self-government initiatives have been primarily directed by the federal government. As the federal government tries to incorporate self-government into the federal structure, it is forced to rework and restructure Canadian federalism. This leads us again to the present situation wherein the federal government is working towards an accommodation of self-government. At this time, this chapter will briefly reconsider the present Canadian federal system as a potentially viable structure for the successful implementation of Aboriginal self-government.<sup>214</sup> No explanation of the Canadian federalist system will be proffered as this paper assumes a familiarity with Canadian government. This chapter will now commence its study of the elements of federalism, beginning with a discussion on possible manifestations of a compact.

### **Nations Within v. Nation to Nation: Ideas on a Social Compact**

Canadian federalism is premised upon a “pact or quasi-treaty in the sense that the terms of that compromise cannot be changed unilaterally” as it is “a rational compromise

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Only municipal and constitutional self-government proposals will be revisited.

between the divergent interest-groups (factions) which history has thrown together.”<sup>215</sup>

But, to meet the changes of society, “the federative pact must be altered, and this must be done as smoothly as possible, by administrative practice...(or) by constitutional amendment.”<sup>216</sup> As a result, there are two models of formative self-government congruent with Canadian political traditions.<sup>217</sup> One model is municipal wherein Native peoples would be delegated limited authority by a supreme, legislative body. A second option is the entrenchment of specified Aboriginal jurisdiction within the existing Constitution.

*Municipal*

For the federal government a “*negotiated* level of self-government along municipal lines is preferred, to avoid creating a patchwork of independent nations outside Canadian law...”<sup>218</sup> Searching for an arrangement which will not alter or detract from the existing federal structure, the “nations within” are to be integrated into the current Canadian polity. Ideally, the federal government would like Aboriginal governments to form a municipal style of government, a comfortable idea for many native and non-native

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<sup>215</sup>

Pierre E. Trudeau, “Federalism, Nationalism and Reason”, in P.A. Crepeau and C.B. Mcpherson, eds., *The Future of Canadian Federalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1965), p. 191 and p. 195.

<sup>216</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>217</sup>

D.V. Smiley, *The Federal Condition in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1987), p. 72.

<sup>218</sup>

Fleras, Augie and Jean L. Elliot, *The Nations Within: Aboriginal-State Relations in Canada, the United States and New Zealand* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.23.

peoples who desperately seek to understand the implications of Aboriginal-controlled government. For though the services would be administered by Aboriginal peoples, they would remain subject to the provincial and federal governments, like any other municipality, thereby providing a place for the indigenous nations within the parameters of Canadian federalism.

In practice, though, “municipalized” self-government would essentially constitute a continuance of, and elaboration upon, the existing *Indian Act* government since, by municipalization, the federal government proposes simply to delegate more powers to the local band councils. This effort would transfer token authority over local matters to the control of Aboriginal groups but would eliminate the need for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DIAND), who currently approve all local initiatives. Therefore, by making DIAND obsolete, municipalization “could also be of significant benefit to non-Indian governments as they would no longer face the very difficult problem of administering a colonial regime over a subject people.”<sup>219</sup> But, by simply transferring administrative responsibility, the federal government is implementing self-administration, not self-government, and is effectively servicing its own political agenda and financial needs under the guise of Aboriginal self-government. Municipalization, as a federal formula for self-government, therefore, does not offer itself as a viable solution to the question of self-government, especially since, under this scheme Indian governments could only exercise delegated powers. This conflicts with Aboriginal claims of inherent and

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Cassidy and Bish, p. 171.

independent authority.

*Constitutional*

Another option is the constitutional entrenchment of self-government. In this case, self-government would be formally recognized, with jurisdictional powers assigned. In theory, this “inherent” right would be added to section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* which recognized the rights of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. A symbolic gesture, this entrenchment of Aboriginal peoples was proclaimed by political supporters as a great success. But, in the case of self-government, it is probable that its official entrenchment would also amount to nothing more than a token gesture as it would, in no practical way, affect and create change in the current federal relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Frank Cassidy and Robert Bish, explain:

The implications of the Indian perspective on self-government in the Canadian political order are certainly not damaging to the existence of that system as a federal one, nor would constitutional entrenchment of Indian government, with a specified range of jurisdiction, be likely to have a negative impact on non-Indians or non-Indian governments...<sup>220</sup>

Hence, the only tangible effect of entrenchment would be the bringing of “Canada’s Aboriginal people” into the constitutional family and not a concerted effort on the part of the Canadian government to redefine their relationship with Aboriginal peoples. The constitutional option, thus, is really meant to consolidate the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples, again as a means of integrating Aboriginal government into the federal structure. Therefore, as a federal study concluded: “Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal self-

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Ibid., p. 170.



government can only contribute to a more united Canada” and not to self-government itself.<sup>221</sup>

In practical terms, the constitutional model for renewal is redundant since section 35, of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, encompasses the inherent right to self-government. Hence, the entrenchment of self-government would be purely symbolic. It would have no practical implications and would not achieve tangible results for Aboriginal peoples. Lacking in substance, it would simply serve, for a limited few, as “a clear statement to the rest of Canada that we (Aboriginal peoples) are reasserting our place in this country; we are doing it in a peaceful way that respects your institutions, that respects you (Canada) as individuals, and respects your governments.”<sup>222</sup> It is inappropriate, however, for Aboriginal peoples to be included in the Canadian constitution. For the most part, though, many Aboriginal peoples have been convinced that it is only through the entrenchment of their rights and their incorporation into the federal system that the federal government relinquish power to them. They have been told by the federal government that Aboriginal self-government can only be implemented with federal consent and recognition and, therefore, they should look within federalism for a place for self-government. In other words, Native peoples must join the game to become a player - an oppressive concept inherent in the colonialist, Canadian federal system. As a result, many fight to secure

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<sup>221</sup>

Canada, *A Renewed Canada: The Report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons* (Ottawa: Dept. of Supply and Services, 1992), p. 30.

<sup>222</sup>

Ovide Mercredi and Mary Ellen Turpel, *In the Rapids* (Toronto: Viking Press, 1993), p. 111.

constitutionally sanctioned power, seeking to change their roles *within* Canadian federalism.

Whether formally recognizing self-government or localizing the existing governments, Canadian federalism has demonstrated that it is both willing and able to incorporate self-government. Despite the apparent flexibility that the principles of federalism seem to offer, “Canadian federalism, as practised, particularly in light of the Westminster model, has not accommodated fully recognized Indian government on the part of Indian peoples.”<sup>223</sup> This failure to aptly address Aboriginal needs is attributable to the fact that the “municipal and federal models are of course derived from the experience of peoples of European origin and may be irrelevant or worse to the needs and wishes of Canadian aboriginal peoples.”<sup>224</sup> Therefore, despite the municipal or constitutional options, Aboriginal self-government in either form is not truly reflective of the Aboriginal demand for self-determination.

In fact, the very idea of a political structure to incorporate self-government and Aboriginal peoples, is wholly unacceptable to many Aboriginal peoples who no longer wish to be subject to, or even share, power with another level of foreign government. For instance, as Billy Two Rivers exclaims: “This whole thing is not acceptable to the Mohawks...We will never allow Quebec jurisdiction over our lands.”<sup>225</sup> Many Aboriginal

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Cassidy and Bish, p. 163.

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Smiley, p. 73.

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Dan Smith, *The Seventh Fire* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1993), p. 229.

peoples, thus, no longer believe that the federalist approach to the matter of Indian government is appropriate, though, this is still the position of some, like the Assembly of First Nations. Likewise, many no longer believe that Canadian federalism can “provide an institutional basis for the fuller integration of Indian governments into the Canadian political order.”<sup>226</sup> It is clear, given the federal government’s effort to incorporate Indian government into the existing federal structure, that the government is not listening or hearing what the Indian people are saying.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, the very idea of indigenous nations as “nations within” the Canadian state reveals a narrow, exclusively Western mentality which continues to identify Aboriginal peoples as wards of the state, or at best, domestic, dependant “nations” “with special claims and collective entitlements that derive from formal recognition as the indigenous occupants of the land.”<sup>228</sup>

This sort of recognition serves only to protect the existing federal structure which does not appear to want to initiate real, meaningful change for Aboriginal peoples. Rather it is seeking a means which can simply facilitate the official recognition of self-government. For many indigenous peoples, no social compact can exist within the parameters of federalism primarily since any sort of pact must be negotiated on a nation-to-nation basis, as was the case with the treaties.

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Cassidy and Bish, pp. 159-60.

227

Ibid., p. 3.

228

Fleras and Elliot, p. 3.

### *Treaties*

Recognizing the implausibility of self-determination within the existing polity, many Aboriginal peoples focus on the restructuring of their relationship with Canada in accordance with the treaties which were signed at the turn of the century. Not only is this the most desirable approach to a social compact, especially for Aboriginal peoples, it is also in keeping with our history.<sup>229</sup> One must remember that the treaties “had nothing to do with land surrenders but instead focussed on political and economic relations. (Today) (t)his approach meets the Aboriginal objective of seeking to rebuild the nation-to-nation relationship while allowing the maximum opportunity to accommodate tribal or local variations.”<sup>230</sup>

While the federal government maintains that, as a result of the treaties, Aboriginal peoples ceded their land and surrendered their rights, Native peoples contest this assertion. According to William Erasmus:

“Our interpretation is that we didn’t give up any rights whatsoever... The only thing we did was that we acknowledged that other peoples were coming on to our land, so we had our hands open and said, ‘Yes, we have lots of land; come on our land.’ We didn’t say, however, that we were going to give up our right to make our own decisions over our own lives, to have our institutions so that we can continue to survive as a unique people.”<sup>231</sup>

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Ronald L. Watts and Douglas M. Brown, *Options for a New Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 184.

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*Ibid.*, p. 184.

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Geoffrey York, *The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), p. 129.

Native peoples hold steadfast to “the ideal of two fundamentally different systems coexisting in harmony, on the principle of the Two-Row Wampum”.

The Two-Row wampum describes how two different peoples relate to each other and how they can exist alongside one another, in a way of peace.<sup>232</sup> A belt composed of white beads, representing the River of Life, and purple beads, representing the two separate paths of Aboriginals and Europeans can be summarized as follows: “you keep your laws, ways and traditions in your vessel, and we will keep our laws, ways and traditions in our vessel; we will travel the River of Life side by side in parallel paths (two rows) which never meet, in peace and friendship, never interfering with one another.”<sup>233</sup> The Two-Row Wampum was hence a peace and friendship treaty, one negotiated on respect and honour. Comprehensively, it symbolized a social, political and constitutional relationship.<sup>234</sup> According to Pobihushchy, the only problem was that “the Iroquois people of three centuries ago could not conceive of a system so radically antithetical to theirs...They did not appreciate that there could be no existence with a people driven by the logic of empire, which is a logic of totalitarianism.”<sup>235</sup> Andrea Bear Nicholas is correct in saying that, for European peoples, the treaties meant not coexistence *with* the

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Haudenosaunee, “Two Row Wampum”, p. 4.

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Bear Nicholas, p. 63.

British but “license for empire *for* the British.”<sup>236</sup>

Despite the manipulation of the treaties by the immigrant society, and their failure to honour their terms, the treaties are international agreements that “can only take place between nations, and not between citizens of the same nation...”<sup>237</sup> Therefore, the basis for a social compact already exists and is rooted in the idea of nationhood. Given the treaty relationship, most Aboriginal nations are not interested in government negotiations which are aimed at minimalizing self-government, or yielding to a federal governmentally contrived ideal of what self-government ought to be. Moreover, they are not interested in the imposition of any paternalistic form of self-government. In summary, the idea of Aboriginal peoples as Canadian citizens negotiating their position within a federal structure assumes the sovereignty of Canada whereas the idea of Aboriginal peoples as members of an indigenous nation<sup>238</sup> negotiating that same position is supportive of a nation-to-nation relationship.

Critical to the reestablishment of this nation-to-nation relationship is self-determination. To this end, Marie Smallface Marule urges communities to reestablish traditional Indian government. She explains how

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<sup>236</sup>

Ibid., p. 69. For original citation see Andrea Bear Nicholas, “Citizenship Education for Aboriginal Peoples: The Humanitarian Art of Cultural Genocide”, presented at the National Conference on Social Studies.” (Chicago: November, 1995), p 16. Emphasis added.

<sup>237</sup>

Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>238</sup>

Nation in this context refers specifically to Aboriginal peoples, being Maliseet, Micmac, Mohawk, et cetera.

The Canadian government, very deliberately and systematically, is seeking to undermine our tribal identity by imposing policies on Indians that emphasize individualism and materialism. This policy of 'detrribalization' subverts our consensual political system, our kinship system, our communal ownership system, and our collective economic system. This policy represents the biggest problem in our efforts to revitalize our Indian societies and governments.<sup>239</sup>

Marule urges the reinstatement of traditional governing structures to reintroduce communal and collective principles and values into Aboriginal communities and nations, to provide for commerce, trade and political representation. In particular, she expresses a need to resurrect the family-clan model at the community level. In addition, she advocates the reactivation of the national or tribal confederacies which are required to address issues of inter-tribal concern, such as economic trade. At the heart of her desire to restore traditional Aboriginal governing practices is the need to return the governance of Aboriginal peoples to the people, a government for the people, designed by the people. The answers to Aboriginal self-determination are thus to be found in traditional Aboriginal institutions. She explains, "If we really want to help ourselves, we must revitalize our institutions. We must turn to our own traditional structures, systems, and processes."<sup>240</sup> According to Marule, to return to the traditional path is the road to healing and self-determination.

Aboriginal self-determination is perceived with great disdain by many Canadians, including the government, which fears a loss of control over what it deems to be part of

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<sup>239</sup>

Marie Smallface Marule, "Traditional Indian Government: Of the People, by the People, for the People", in Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long, eds., *Pathways to Self-determination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 36.

<sup>240</sup>

Ibid., p. 44.

its citizenry. Kellough explains how the demand for control of their own communities through autonomy in the educational, political and economic spheres “is profoundly revolutionary, for it poses directly the question of who will have the decision-making power among the most oppressed colonized people on this continent - and what those decisions will be”.<sup>241</sup> Obviously decision-making power is equated with autonomy and sovereignty - for both Canada and Aboriginal peoples alike. The time has come, though, to realize that Canada and colonialism cannot continue to oppress Indigenous peoples for they are sovereign and autonomous. Gordon Peters explains that “There is only one source of authority...and that is the Creator. There is a natural law and a sacredness to the earth...and that natural law, which is the source of all power, must be respected by everyone.”<sup>242</sup> This, Peters claims, is the source and origin of Aboriginal self-determination.

The quest for their self-determination for liberation has begun and will continue in spite of Canadian authority and pressure. In his article titled ‘Indian Sovereignty’ Kirke Kickingbird recounts the words of a former commissioner: “...the will for self-determination has become a vital component of the thinking of Indian leadership and the grassroots Indian on every reservation and in every city. It is an irreversible trend, a tide in the destiny of (North)American Indians...”<sup>243</sup>

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Kellough, p. 358.

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Cassidy, p. 3.

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Kirke Kickingbird, ‘Indian Sovereignty’, in Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J.



### **Academic Recommendations**

This work is intended as a prolegomena for future academic work. It is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate the profound absence of substantial analysis on the genocidal implications of the imposition of western-style self-government. To this end, this thesis has shown the insufficiency of the literature with respect to the examination of the essential problems of self-government. Likewise, current literature is deficient in its exploration concerning the viability of a nation-to-nation relationship. As this thesis urges for the development of a body of literature which legitimately examines this relationship, it makes the following academic recommendations.

#### *On Property form*

As Vachon explains, “Western circles, even those who are most sympathetic and involved in the ‘native Indian cause’, generally manifest (consciously or unconsciously) an almost total indifference towards ‘traditional native indian economic-political culture.’”<sup>244</sup> To this end, one must recognize the imposition of any Western-inspired self-government as inherently economicidal as it usurps Aboriginal property form. As a result, self-government can no longer be considered exclusively as a political arrangement. Property form and economy must become a common consideration in its analysis. As Osennontion expresses her opinion on self-determination, she explains, “I prefer the term *self-*

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Anthony Long, eds., *Pathways to Self-Determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 53.

<sup>244</sup>

Vachon, “Political Self-determination and Traditional Native Indian Political Culture”, p. 39.

*determination* , as it better describes, for me, the action that needs to be taken. The establishment, exercise and enforcement of government, is only one aspect of *self-determination*.”<sup>245</sup> Hence, one could understand self-determination as one understands the medicine wheel. It is a circle with no end and no beginning. It is the circle of life, one which embodies all four directions. In the case of self-determination, this circle includes the spiritual, political, economic, and social realms of life. Literature supporting this all-inclusive view of self-determination needs to be developed.

Similarly, the quest for self-government and decolonization should not be limited to the political sphere. In accordance with Pobihushchy, the challenge arising out of this thesis is the development of literature to explore the means by which resources and land can be returned to Aboriginal peoples in a way which allows for its use consistent with Aboriginal economy and ontology.

### *On listening*

As Sharon McIvor succinctly states, “I have....come to the conclusion that the terms we’re speaking of are non-aboriginal terms...”<sup>246</sup> This is simply because the voices which tend to be heard are those of the oppressor. The language which is used is that of the colonizer. Instead of giving opinions or trying to control or direct self-government, the immigrant society needs to listen to Aboriginal peoples. If one listens, one will hear the call to consciousness. By listening, being patient and openminded we can fulfill our

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<sup>245</sup>

Osenontion and Skonaganleh:rà, “Our World”, *Canadian Women's Studies*, Volume 10, nos. 2 and 3 (1989), p. 10.

<sup>246</sup>

Cassidy, p. 7.

duty. As Vachon explains, "Life does take upon itself the responsibility of indicating to us what our duty is. The important thing is to listen to it and act accordingly."<sup>247</sup>

To conclude, this thesis has attempted to point out the overwhelming lack of real dialogue. The author is trying to reveal the reasons for the critical condition of Aboriginal peoples and the impass over self-government. Also, this author has endeavoured to set the conditions for meaningful and informed dialogue in the future. In the interim, the time has come for the immigrant society to reflect upon its economy and its polity, both of which oppress and devastate indigenous nations daily. The time has come for Western society to realize that private ownership is leading to the destruction, not only of other property forms, not only of indigenous peoples but, of all peoples.

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<sup>247</sup>

Vachon, "Political Self-determination and Traditional Native Indian Political Culture", p. 54.

**Only after the last tree has been cut down,**

**Only after the last river has been poisoned,**

**Only after the last fish has been caught,**

**Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.**

**- Cree Prophecy**

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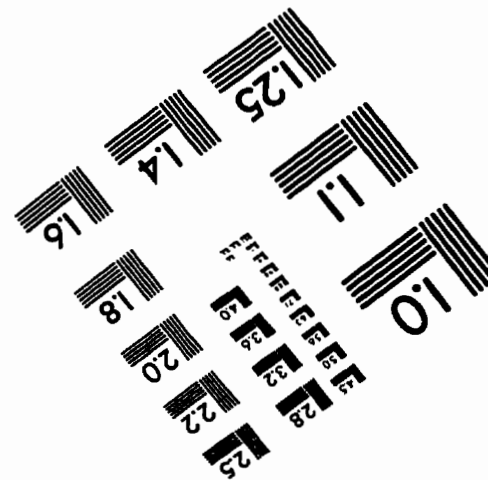
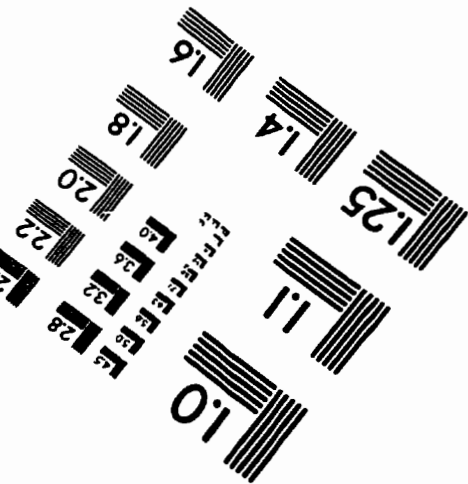
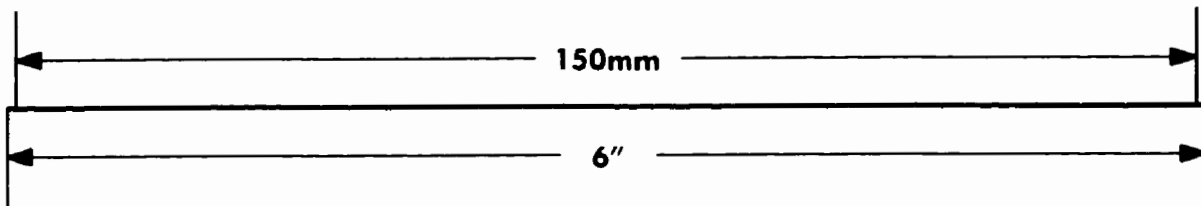
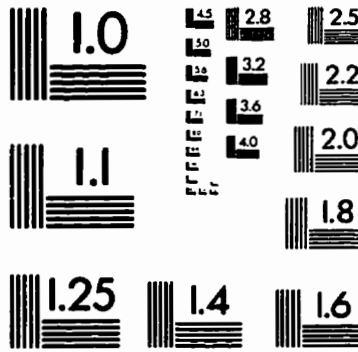
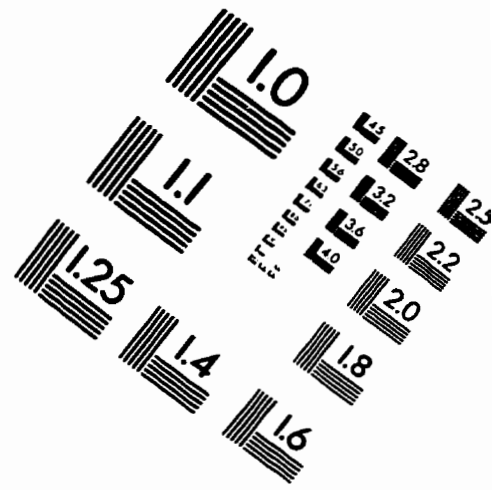
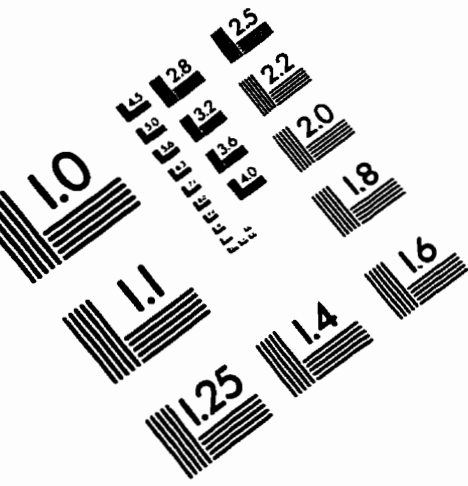


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