

Can the Sled Dog Sleep? Postcolonialism, Cultural Transformation and the Consumption of Inuit Culture

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ABSTRACT: This paper deals with the application of postcolonial theory to a commission of enquiry into the colonial history of Inuit in the Qikiqtani (Baffin) Region of Nunavut Territory. While the colonial history of the period 1950-1980 has been the focus of the commission, much attention has been directed at the fate of Inuit sled dogs. There are many reasons for this focus. If anything typifies the movement of Inuit from a world impregnated with ritual, relationship and meaning to one of impersonal, secular commodity relations, the fate of Inuit sled dogs is it. The replacement of the sled dog with the snow machine—what Sartre would call a ‘practico-inert’ manifestation of dead, and in this case imported, labour—was as existentially significant an act as one could imagine. The use of postcolonial theory in examining these transformations is explored. How the commodity has been treated (or largely ignored) by postcolonial theorists is examined and the claim made that in much postcolonial theorizing, the transformation from cultural to commodity forms, the role of the commodity, the nature of consumption and the role of community in the transformation from one form of capitalist production (and the logic that accompanies it) have often been overlooked, underplayed or aligned with what is heralded as fresh theoretical turf in an undeserving, celebratory way. Reference is made to the work of Spivak, Bhabha, Said, Derrida and precursors to postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Franz Fanon.

KEYWORDS: Inuit, sled dogs, truth commission, commodity, labour, postcolonialism, Spivak, Bhabha, Sartre, Fanon, capitalism, transformation, colonialism.

In October of 2008 I submitted to the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, a report dealing with the death of sled dogs in the Qikiqtani (Baffin) region of Nunavut Territory, Canada. It was based primarily on archival records and my ‘close reading’ (Derrida 2002) of these documents written, in the 1950s and 1960s, by government officials, agents of the State and the colonial administration of the region that is now Nunavut Territory. My ‘close reading’ of text pays attention to the methods, contexts, objectives and assumptions within which texts are written. The Commission’s mandate was to hold hearings and to report on the slaughter of Inuit dogs, “relocations and other decision-making of the Government up until 1980, and its effect on Inuit culture, economy and way of life” (Qikiqtani Truth Commission 2008). While many aspects of Inuit life in this period are

of concern to the Commission, the killing of Inuit sled dogs, in which the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) have been implicated, figures prominently in the work of the Commission. The fate of sled dogs and the claim that the RCMP deliberately slaughtered dogs as a means of confining Inuit to settlements in the 1950s and 1960s received considerable attention at hearings held in communities of the Qikiqtani region.

Much happened during this period, resulting in the move of Inuit from extended-family hunting camps to consolidated settlements commencing primarily with the construction, in 1956, of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line. The DEW line was an American cold war initiative of radar stations stretching across the Canadian Arctic. Some Inuit found employment in the construction of these sta-

tions, were accommodated in wood frame houses, fed Qallunaat¹ food and given an intimate introduction to Western material culture. Along with changing economic and other circumstances, this experience challenged camp life as a dominant cultural form.

By the late 1960s the process of consolidation in settlements under the watchful eye of the RCMP, Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) managers, teachers, social workers and administrators, was nearly complete. At the same time, approximately 30 percent of the population had been sent to southern sanatoria for treatment of tuberculosis and to residential and federal day schools that, in many cases, removed Inuit children from their families. The fox fur trade, sustaining Inuit economy since the introduction of the first HBC trading post in the eastern Arctic in 1911, collapsed. In the early 1960s Inuit were given the right to purchase alcohol. Settlement councils and representation in the Northwest Territories Council and federal governments introduced Inuit to Western ideas about democracy (Tester and Kulchyski 1994). Commencing in the late 1960s, the efforts of Greenpeace, the 1976 appearance of Brigitte Bardot on the ice off Newfoundland, and the subsequent European ban on the import of hooded and harp seal pelts had a devastating impact not only on the Inuit economy, but a relationship between Inuit and seals that constituted the soul of much of Inuit culture (Pelly 2001). Why the fate of sled dogs might receive so much attention in the midst of this turbulent sea of change is a legitimate question.

The moment of Inuit social history upon which the Commission has focused is a period of intense colonial rule. The archival record makes it abundantly clear that Inuit were not only subject to colonial relations of ruling—a civilizing mission—they were co-joined in a project wherein Canada colonized the high Arctic—and not just the high Arctic—in the name of sovereignty, commerce and industrial possibility. Ironically, these developments take place principally in the 1950s and 1960s as Canada is supporting the decolonization of British territory

internationally, and moving toward completing its own constitutional sovereignty with a greater degree of separation from the British Crown. The Commission, at the time of writing, has not yet finished its report on this tangled history and the fate of sled dogs. Dealing with this complex web of relations will be no easy matter.

A report on the killing of Inuit sled dogs, at a moment when the treatment of text—particularly colonial documents—has given rise to a theoretical explosion called postcolonial studies, raises complex questions about the nature of 'truth.' The Qikiqtani commission was a *truth* commission. The Canadian residential school experience, coast to coast, is being examined by another truth and reconciliation commission. From the Canadian Arctic to Colombia and South Africa, there have been and are in progress, truth commissions whose mandates are, simply put, to 'get to the bottom of things'; to get at 'the truth' by "privileging the voices, testimonies, oral histories and stories of victims" (Bickford 2007:998). The paradox is that at an intellectual moment celebrating hybridity, indeterminacy, pluralities and one marked by ambivalence, many Indigenous and colonized people are using *truth* and reconciliation commissions to advance a factually determinable account of historical experience. Squaring this simple observation with the foundational writings of Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard and others, and especially the postcolonial variants of post-structural and postmodern theory articulated in the canonical texts of Edward Said, Homi Bahbha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, is a challenge.

Postcolonial studies embrace a wide domain of 'in between thought': in the interstitial tissue between cultural and literary studies, between theory and practice, between State and self, between communities—both geographical and virtual—and a globalized world, between the personal and the public. A plurality of meaning and a swirling indeterminacy of text are both characteristic and possible in an intellectual movement determined to break the dualisms, essentialism and fixed categories of Enlightenment (and not just Enlightenment) logic. Between literary and cultural studies, where culture is often claimed to be both made and demonstrated phenomeno-

1 The term Qallunaat is often used to refer to 'white folk' from southern Canada, although it is sometimes used for anyone who is not Inuk, including someone who may not be Euro-Canadian.

logically, and where the focus is image, page, words, symbols, phrases and thought—"the blank part of the text" (Derrida 1976:93)—postcolonial plurality and indeterminacy have a home. It is when the 'in between space' speaks to a new humanism and transformational politics that familiar categories of class, race and gender, tied to the familiar phalanx of capitalist means of production and colonial relations, suggest the necessity of a familiar interrogation. The struggle to address fundamental Marxist categories, important among them the commodity, including the commodification of labour, while challenging the machine-like trajectory of these categories and concepts in the making and interpretation of history is the theme of much of Spivak's work, particularly her essay, 'The Politics of Interpretation' (1982). In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), dealing with the representation of 'the subaltern' in Marx and other theorists, Spivak dispatches these machine-like categories *en route*.

Moore-Gilbert, Stanton and Maley, in a comprehensive overview of the many challenges and conundrums raised by postcolonial studies, speak to the matter.

One way to orient postcolonialism would be to place it between Marxism and existentialism, because many of its practitioners fuse political radicalism with a fundamental reconception of the self, in what Fanon called a stretching of Marxism, and others have termed a new humanism or a revolutionary psychology. ...In terms of political orientation, postcolonialism is a site of radical contestation and contestatory radicalism. ...In an important sense, postcolonial theory marks not only the return of the repressed, or the return of the native, but the return of class as a marker of difference. [Moore-Gilbert et al 1997:3]

This is a path trod most deeply by Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1976), attempting to return agency to his interrogation of an ossified Marxist orthodoxy; an interplay, evident in popular form from his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Fanon's analysis of the internal contradictions of Africa's post colonial leadership is strongly suggestive of postcolonial themes emerging in the writing of the 1970s (Young 2001). Theorists

like Fanon speak to the cultural legacy of colonialism, dissecting its logic and, in the process, projecting the normative agenda of making space for voices and ways of being that, it is claimed, were neither heard nor recognized within the confines of Enlightenment logic and the structuring of the colonial experience upon which it was—and is—premised. I use the present tense, suggesting that a globalized world, where diverse cultural products play an increasingly important economic role is, for many, still a colonial experience—albeit of a different type. What is bothersome in the mostly literary and cultural variants of postcolonial theory is not so much what is embraced, but what is discarded. In many cases, it can be argued that the reading of Enlightenment logic and the portrayal of the vice of colonialism underlying the assumptions of postcolonial writing involve questionable assumptions about what lies at the heart of Enlightenment thought and colonial enterprise.

My focus in what follows is on how the commodity has been treated (or largely ignored) by most postcolonial theorists. My concern is that the transformation from cultural to commodity forms, the role of the commodity, the nature of consumption and the role of community in the transformation from one form of capitalist production (and the logic that accompanies it) have often been overlooked, underplayed or aligned with what is heralded as fresh theoretical turf in an undeserving, celebratory way. My attention is directed to transformations taking place in Inuit culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Harvey (1990) relates transformations from one form of capitalist production to another in the modern era, to a crisis of accumulation emerging in the 1960s, and to the exhaustion of a long list of solutions proffered to deal with recurring crises of accumulation since the 1830s. Globalization and the commodification of culture are solutions ushering in what Fredrick Jameson (1991) calls "the cultural logic of late capitalism." What I believe Jameson underplays, however, is a contemporary form of industrial production that rivals anything Dickens documented at the root of the industrial revolution; a form now located offshore and out of mind. Cultural expression has also become a commodity accounting for an increasingly important portion of the surplus and accumulated

capital essential to keeping capitalism afloat in a post-modern age.

The transformation of the unique relations of hunting as a cultural expression to those of a culture characterized by commodity relations (a transformation, never complete or without resistance) is central to the colonial experience of Inuit. The relationship between Inuit and their dogs was not a commodity relation. Dogs were a draught animal, assisting Inuit in moving from one location to another. They were essential to the hunting of seal, muskox and polar bear. They were seen as assistants and companions for hunters on long and often arduous hunting trips. Unlike the snow machine, what happened on the land was effected in large measure by the relationship that developed between a hunter and his dogs. The bond was an existential one. The care given to pups and the essential role of dogs in Inuit culture is well-documented (MacRury 1991). Dogs had use, but not exchange value. There was no market for their sale. They were sometimes given to others as gifts demonstrating friendship or familial solidarity.

The snow machine that increasingly replaced dogs in the 1960s was, by comparison, a 'thing'; a mystification made elsewhere by unseen hands in unknown circumstances. No degree of personality directed at its presence could affect its performance. It came with a price and could be sold for one. Its purchase required amounts of cash previously unnecessary to Inuit survival. It required for its maintenance, mechanical skills, as opposed to skills of personality and persuasion passed down for generations from one Inuk to another. In the face of disaster, its body provided neither warmth nor sustenance. It didn't require feeding, the skill of the hunter or recount, at every moment, the spiritual tie that bound Inuit to place, time, and other life forms on which they depended. If anything typifies the movement of Inuit from a world impregnated with ritual, relationship and meaning to one of impersonal, secular commodity relations, the fate of Inuit sled dogs is it. Within the confines of settlement living the snowmobile, which makes it possible to travel back to one's traditional territory in a reasonable length of time and with reasonable effort, makes sense. The snowmobile makes settlement living more feasible and settlement living makes the snowmo-

bile more necessary. The replacement of the sled dog with the snow machine—what Sartre would call a 'practico-inert' manifestation of dead, and in this case imported, labour—was as existentially significant an act as one could imagine.

The fate of Inuit sled dogs in the presence of wood frame housing and consolidated communities as a modern form, the discipline of the RCMP directed at community life and the replacement of sled dogs by snowmobiles, are hugely important dimensions of attempts to assimilate Inuit to Euro-Canadian culture. However, in detailing this historical regime, it is a mistake to essentialize the role of the RCMP—and not just the RCMP—as 'Other.' What complicates an examination of claims that the RCMP deliberately killed Inuit sled dogs to trap Inuit in the fledgling settlements developing along the Arctic coast is the changing role of the RCMP in relation to Inuit labour and commodity production. The role of the RCMP and others as 'Other' changes with the nature and form of commodity production in which Inuit are engaged, and with the needs of commerce and the State. Prior to the 1960s when fox trapping was still seen as a viable occupation meeting the trading needs of the HBC, the archival evidence makes it abundantly clear that the RCMP went so far as to chase Inuit away from HBC posts and missions in an attempt to maintain the trapping economy and to prevent the development of 'post Eskimos' (Damas 1993). Healthy dog teams were essential to this policy. The role of the RCMP with respect to Inuit dogs changes as commodity production in the Inuit economy shifts to a considerable degree from trapping foxes to a more conventional, settlement-based wage economy. Colonial agents not only twist, but are twisted by these changing relations.

It is therefore no surprise that the fate of the sled dog emerges as the most important focus of a truth commission examining this intense colonial period of Inuit social history. Colonization is about the commodification of labour and life in which texts—the law, policy directives and portrayal of 'the primitive'—have only a partial role to play. Colonization is a totalizing exercise fraught with contradiction involving a transformation of forms and relations

from the cultural, symbolic and spiritual to the economic, practical and secular. In theorizing this turn, the ways in which postcolonial theory treat the commodity are of considerable importance.

My argument is also that in interrogating colonial rule—then and now—postcolonial theory is largely given to critiquing forms of domination within the Enlightenment project that were neither as omnipresent nor as lacking in spaces for ‘Otherness’ as we are given to believe. Enlightenment logic is inherently contradictory and fragmented. Making capitalism work was often dependent on attempting to silence or civilize ‘the Other.’ This was particularly true where ‘the Other’ was engaged in, or aspired to forms of commodity production, consumption and accompanying social relations and cultural practices challenging the factory system and ideas about what constituted a proper, useful and modern commodity form. The Luddites were dealt with accordingly. North American auto workers, as the behemoths of the industry have fallen from grace, have received different but, none-the-less, effective treatment. As Mike Davis documents in *Late Victorian Holocausts* (2000), in the 1800s, the textile industry of India and the social relations that supported it, in the commercial interests of the East India Company, bent on importing cotton from India and exporting cloth back to the country, had to go.

The diversity of ideas as to what should happen regarding the fate of Inuit in the eastern Arctic during the period in question is illustrative, at one level, of a profound lack of unity and sense of purpose within the Canadian State, even during a period of high modernism otherwise thoroughly impregnated/imbued with the idea of progress and a technical mastery of nature and social relations. The ultimate objective, a totalization with capital accumulation at its core, is not in question. How best to get there, at historical moments where different commodities might be best served by different cultural forms and relations to production, was another matter. ‘The primitive’ is thus both celebrated and denigrated as, for example, when the RCMP encourage Inuit camp life, travel, live and eat like ‘the Other’ or, conversely, find Inuit relations to their dogs, once they have moved to town, to be an anathema to modern living.

As noted, in the 1950s Inuit are chased out of town by the RCMP and encouraged to retain their dogs and Otherness as fox pelts meant a living. Increasingly in the late 1950s and 1960s, other State actors—social workers, clergy, economic development officers—contradict RCMP directives. In town, the RCMP and increasingly Inuit discover Inuit dogs as menace and face their Otherness as a liability. Janitors are needed for schools, heavy equipment operators for air strips and clerks required for checkout counters at The Bay. Getting an education, the Christian faith and health care deemed to put a dint in statistics embarrassing to the march of modern medicine, locate Inuit in terms of place, space and resources, so as to make assimilation appear necessary and inevitable.

Other State agents play similarly contradictory roles even *within* the logic of racism and State oppression. Between the end of the First World War and the early 1950s, changes to game laws in the Canadian Arctic that oppressed Inuit hunters were based on racist assumptions and bad science. Nevertheless, they were intended to keep Inuit ‘out of town,’ off relief, and living subsistence and traditional lifestyles; in other words, functioning as ‘the Other’ for as long as possible during the modern era. There are times when ‘the Other’ is ‘okay’; the same being true for Scottish Highlanders and crofting, a feudal relationship to land and production that survived until the ravages of the Crimean and Napoleonic Wars, the demand for woolen clothing and the factory system made sheep more valuable to Clan Chiefs than crofters. How modernity has treated culture cannot ultimately be understood apart from the commodities—their production and consumption—from which capital derives its surplus. As the colonial experience of Inuit suggests, what is sometimes celebrated as the end of colonialism doesn’t mark the thundering of difference, unsuccessfully oppressed by Enlightenment logic, so much as it points to the exhaustion of one form of capital accumulation (the commodity as a material form) and the imperative of replacing it with another (the commodity as a cultural product).

Resistance to the contradictory civilizing mission of the Canadian State has always been a part

of Inuit culture and practices. In the 1950s and 1960s, attempts to impose game laws and other regimes without Inuit consent were met with defiant behaviour, letters and petitions written by Inuit dealing with the imposed logic unfolding around them (Kulchyski and Tester 2007). The petition of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights claiming that greenhouse gases, originating primarily with the United States, are impacting all aspects of Inuit culture, continues a tradition of petitioning for Inuit rights (Knox 2009). Difference thundering then as it does now, suggests that the 'post' in postcolonial may be seriously overrated. Inuit, celebrated and oppressed as primitive stalwarts of the fur trade are now lauded for their cultural product, displayed on stage at Vancouver's 2010 Olympic Games, and simultaneously oppressed as the social and environmental costs of capitalist relations of production melt their homeland.

The solution to one crisis of accumulation, originating in the success, for working people, of the social compact of the post-war years and cultural transformations made possible by an electronic revolution, are what some postcolonial theorists, of which Jameson's work is illustrative, regard as revolutionary. Morton, in documenting Spivak's response to Dirlik's contention that along with Said and Bhabha, she diverts attention away from the machinations of global capitalism by focusing on culture, notes her subsequent development of a criticism of the privileged position of Western diasporic intellectuals writing the postcolonial. Spivak, more than many postcolonial theorists, takes class and the oppressions of class seriously. However, the "restless process of self-criticism and revision" (Morton 2003:137) characteristic of postcolonial writing leaves critical assessment of it open, in turn, to an uncommon volume of criticism and counter-claims. Determining exactly what has been said is complicated by a proclivity, in much postcolonial writing, to refuse to say any 'thing,' consistent with a commitment to undermining fixed categories and allowing a plurality of meaning. The interrogation of ideas is affected accordingly.

Commodity forms and the social relations that both make and are made by them follow us from

one historic moment to another. The social compact of western-European states is associated with social transformations including decolonization and the rise of social movements, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and attempts to humanize and moderate the rapacious capitalism of previous decades. The electronic era—a post-modern age replacing steel with 'the chip' as the centre of capitalist production—includes elements that have broken free of the yoke of Fordist production. At the same time, these elements often re-introduce sweat-shop conditions, and have embraced the diversity and plurality that the micro-chip facilitates in all walks of life and all forms of production. This suggests that postcolonial studies must be concerned with material as well as cultural change. The resulting plurality and fluidity of forms and ways of being are what it is claimed challenge the so-called binaries and essentialism of the Enlightenment project.

But what has changed? By way of illustration, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) travel business is now a multi-million dollar industry. I am not convinced that celebrating the diversity of the postmodern or postcolonial, suggesting that we have moved beyond Enlightenment logic, is appropriate to describing an economy or culture that now celebrates the commodification of cultural (and sexual) diversity with the same commitments that guided the logic of the fur trade in the last century. The relationship to commodity production with its potential for anomie, distraction, alienation and abuse remains. There is more continuity than difference in this transformation. While, as a LGBT person, it is nice to have a place to go and reassuring to be able to be oneself in that space and while the product may be a cultural one, it still extracts a surplus, as did the purchase of a 1952 Chevrolet. Our postmodern or postcolonial consumption—where suppression of sexual orientation is an attempt to colonize the body—and the form of that consumption (a cultural experience), does nothing to liberate us from the great threats of the moment; a mound of social (exploited labour at offshore resorts) and environmental (carbon emissions from aircraft) costs threatening to overwhelm both global ecosystems and the social relations that depend upon them. The LGBT travel industry con-

tinues the same relations and perpetuates many of the same problems characteristic of the travel industry in general.

It is impossible here to do justice to the works of many postcolonial theorists who, in different ways and to different degrees, address (or largely fail to address) the relations I have attempted to illustrate. In what follows, I focus on the work of Homi Bhabha. The same interrogation can be applied to the theorizing of Lyotard, Said, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and others. Of these, Derrida's intellectual space is perhaps the most ambivalent and controversial. Bernstein makes the following astute observation.

There is nothing in Derrida's writings that seeks to rule out the importance of critical theoretical and empirical research into the structural dynamics of society and politics. On the contrary, such an endeavor is what his own questioning of boundary-fixing demands. Nevertheless, his neglect in dealing more directly and explicitly with political and societal institutions in their historical complexity does have the consequence of making his own understanding of society and politics sound rather 'thin.' [2006:93]

As someone intimately familiar with the archival record documenting relations of ruling in the North, at first glance, Bhabha's observations on the illusion of binary and essential categories constructed by colonial texts, fit in all directions. Colonial regimes never entirely 'Othered' those they colonized. They couldn't afford to. If assimilation succeeded it ran the risk of undermining what kept the colonized in a place of 'dominion over'; the necessity of maintaining power and control by insisting that European civilization was unique and only for the civilized to give away.²

In the early 1950s, Joseph Idlout was a very successful Inuit trapper and trader operating in the area of Pond Inlet. What was Joseph Idlout's alignment with the HBC and the Arctic fur trade all about? Was he 'the Other' or does film maker Doug Wilkinson emerge as the curious 'Other' in his film, *Land of*

the Long Day, focusing on the labour and culture of Idlout and Inuit camp life? Similarly, in the western Arctic, were Ike Bolt and Angulalik, Inuit Arctic traders and merchants, dupes and fools of a capitalist system or good examples of Sartre's cultural boomerang, where the negative (in this case an uncommon generosity that defied business logic) is reclaimed as an asset to be used against colonial minds and practices? Was Marjorie Hinds, a stern disciplinarian and 1950s welfare teacher serving in many communities of what is now Nunavut, a nasty agent of assimilation or should we take her mid-50s arguments for the provision of education to Inuit children in their camps where they could continue to learn to hunt, trap and sew, seriously? On the other hand, what was she doing in 1953 rounding up Inuit in Inukjuak, Arctic Quebec, for the trip north to Resolute Bay and Craig Harbour where they played a role in asserting Arctic sovereignty and suffered greatly (Tester and Kulchyski 1994)? The interrogation of history, sleeves rolled up, texts, film, interviews, artifacts and memory in hand, isn't very kind to binary or essential categories for describing either the colonial agent or the colonized.

Bhabha's angle on liberation is to argue that colonial logic forced binary and essentialist categories and totalizing logics on colonized people, thereby reinforcing their differences. The oppressive structures are never totalizing, the postcolonial project being to affirm and acknowledge a multiplicity of difference to break the power of binary and essentialist structures (Bhabha 1994). Not unlike Said, whose interrogation of the colonial is perhaps the most brilliant, clear and trenchant, my reading of Bhabha suggests that he applies to the colonizer an essentialism that he denies was never true for the colonized. And at this point, I suggest that his project goes off the rails because he fails to rigorously interrogate both the production of commodities and forms of consumption that mark a passage from what I call insecure capitalism (modern or colonial) to secure capitalism; the kind of production and consumption that fuels what Harvey, writing in *The Condition of Post Modernity* and *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, and Fredrik Jameson in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, call the postmodern period.

² A similar idea is advanced by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000:126). Hardt and Negri express this more in terms of an idea; that "civilization was endemic to the European race and theirs alone to give away."

Within the confines of the nation state, capitalism's insecurity is noted by the power of labour and restrictions placed on capitalist expansion. In a postmodern world, globalization removes the most important insecurities, turning the entire planet into a considerably less-regulated and restricted playground for capitalist expansion. And as we know, what appears within capitalist logic to be secure turns out to be anything but.

Postcolonial theory can also be understood as a response—a need to make sense of—transformations like our passage from the fur trade and sled dogs to the snow machine, Inuit art and sleeping out on the ice in an igloo as cultural variations on the logic of conventional commodity production. But the interrogations of postcolonial theorists do not offer us the liberation they seek precisely because the very thing they celebrate—the emergence of cultures and difference from the oppressive tracts of colonial enterprise—is what the new capitalism successfully cannibalizes in its consistent and omnipresent quest for capital, an essential category for social and cultural analysis.

Writing in *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri put it this way:

Postmodernists are still waging battle against the shadows of old enemies: the Enlightenment, or really modern forms of sovereignty and its binary reductions of difference and multiplicity to a single alternative between Same and Other. The affirmation of hybridities and the free play of differences across boundaries, however, is libratory only in a context where power poses hierarchies exclusively through essential identities, binary divisions, and stable oppositions. The structures and logics of power in the contemporary world are entirely immune to the “libratory” weapons of the postmodern politics of difference.... [Postmodernists] tumble unwittingly into the welcoming arms of the new power. From this perspective the celebratory affirmations of postmodernists can easily appear naïve, when not purely mystificatory. [2000:142-143]

And while my argument is a parallel one, I suggest that it is not simply contemporary structures and logics of power that postmodernists have missed. It is the consumption of culture and cultural difference as

commodities that the contemporary logics of power have warmly embraced.

As a contemporary foundation for the liberation of Indigenous people Bhabha's propositions—his equation of the binary with hierarchy, and his negation of the nation state and national movements as a basis for liberation (something he shares with Derrida)—from my vantage, fall flat on their face. Nunavut Territory is a geography defined in parallel with the territories of the South that concern him. I am not blind to the ways in which the decolonized nation states of the South have been drawn into relations that perpetuate the hierarchies and oppressive relations characterizing colonial rule—and more. Nunavut is no exception. But I fail to see the possibility—or reality—of a libratory politics in the terrain of fluidity, hybridity and cultural difference that Bhabha invokes to interrogate and criticize modern ideas of community, defined in terms of space, class relations and national identities. Bhabha (1994) states:

As a category, community enables a division between the private and the public, the civil and the familial; but as a performative discourse it enacts the impossibility of drawing an objective line between the two. The agency of the community-concept ‘seeps through the interstices of the objectively constructed, contractually regulated structure of civil society,’ class relations and national identities.³ Community [defined by Bhabha as culture and performative discourse] disturbs the grand globalizing narrative of capital, displaces the emphasis on production in ‘class’ collectivity, and disrupts the homogeneity of the imagined community of the nation. ... Binary divisions of social space neglect the profound temporal disjunction—the translational time and space—through which minority communities negotiate their collective identifications. [230-231]

This lofty, aesthetic and idealist take on community ignores the relationship between geographical location, place and culture, characteristic of Inuit identification of home with landscape and particular places and spaces as the substrate in which not only culture, but material life, politics and socio-eco-

3 Citing P. Chatterjee, ‘A response to Taylor’s “Modes of civil society,”’ *Public Culture*. Fall 1990 (Princeton University Press), p. 130.

conomic relations are grounded. The identification of culture, spirituality and identity with a specific physical location is characteristic of Aboriginal people internationally. In New Zealand, it explains the fact that despite the individuation of title and as a result of inheritance and the refusal to cede one's place and identity to market logic, many tiny pieces of Maori land now have thousands of names on the title. The struggle for Nunavut—the fact that Inuit wanted a territory—the importance of which is also evidenced by Indigenous land claims internationally—is I suspect, testament to the impossibility of a 'culture that floats' providing a basis for resistance that addresses the anomie and violence accompanying what colonial powers and their agents did (and continue to do in different ways, with different tools and different products in mind) to Indigenous lands and people.

The commandeering and control of place has been essential throughout human history, to all forms of resistance to dominant socio-economic orders. As Harvey notes:

Movements such as the Seattle general strike of 1918 (when workers effectively took control of the city of nearly a week), the St Petersburg uprising of 1905, coupled with a long and detailed history of municipal socialism, community organization around strike action (such as the Flint strike of 1933), through to the urban uprisings of the United States in the 1960s, all illustrate the point. [1990:236-37]

At the same time, while control of space is essential to resistance and the making of different socio-economic forms and relations, redefined space remains vulnerable to capitalist forms that individualize title and reduce space to a commodity *prima facie*. Recent moves by the Nisga'a Tribal Council in British Columbia Canada to individualize title to certain lands that are part of their settlement with the Crown, illustrate the difficulty alternative forms encounter when confronting the persistent and international power of capital.

Community and community in relation to space are also essential to resistance. One need only look to the Alberta Tar Sands and the resistance of the Cree community of Fort Chipewyan, or the development of a gold mine 40 kilometers from the Inuit commu-

nity of Baker Lake to appreciate the importance of community as the potentially threatening and unstable 'Other'; as having potential for opposition (as well as compliance) in struggles over commodities and the relations to power accompanying their extraction or production. Community, geographically defined and easily recognized as the binary 'Other,' provides for Inuit and other Indigenous people, a foundation for the "recognition of cultural presence" (Bhabha 1994:8), however defined.

Recognition of cultural presence in hopes of breaking the binary assumptions and essentializing of colonial regimes appears to be the objective of Bhabha's theoretical journey. But Bhabha and other postcolonial writers may be too late. The train left the station some time ago and picked up new freight along the way. Sartre's interrogation of need and the dialectic of Otherness in the making of colonial and comparable relations is far richer ground for conceptualizing resistance which recognizes the social construction of the commodity and the successive relations thus engendered, as central to human struggle, including for recognition of cultural presence. In Volume 2 of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre develops a scenario involving the web of relations into which workers in the Magnitogorsk steelworks of the former Soviet Union were drawn, where meeting their needs through the exercise of their labour depended on the nature and efficiency of labour located elsewhere, including within their own communities. This would be true where not everyone, for example, was capable of dealing with the increased complexity of modern settlement living. (Who can fix the vent, furnace or space heater?) Increasingly, Inuit interests become significantly allied with those of the Qallunaat leadership in the new settlements concerned with the efficient operation of the place, as the ability of the HBC to supply snowmobile parts and of the State to supply trades people who can repair furnaces, pumps and windows is also of concern and of interest to Inuit. The following observation by Sartre in Volume 2 of *Critique* increasingly applied to the Inuk worker struggling to survive in the new settlements. "In order to be able to accomplish the task leadership had prescribed for him, he expected of others *exactly what the leadership expected*

of them: the maximum—the *optimum* variant”(158). Elsewhere, Sartre notes that the relationship of Inuit within their own culture is one where: “The Other is the Same, in the sense that he is subjected to the same dangers. In the Other who dies, I read my own death. In the other who works, my work” (435). The expanding role of commodities in altering these relationships is critical to understanding the dynamics of the colonial experience.

What has changed? Plenty. In the late 1950s James Houston working in Kinngait (Cape Dorset) and Peter Murdoch, working in Arctic Quebec, introduced Inuit to commercial print making and promoted soapstone carving as art forms with commercial value. These are long-standing illustrations of how the artistic expression to which cultural sensibilities give rise are commodified and enter a chain of relations from which postmodern surplus is achieved. Whether the recognition and accolade directed at Inuit art is indicative of something called postcolonial relations is another matter.

Inuit art has, in some cases, become a delightful expression of contemporary relations: the family captured by Annie Pootoogook, riding an all-terrain vehicle; a village, the lights of its many tiny homes twinkling at the viewer miles out on the ice, documented in print and imagination by Kininginak Pootoogook. The birds and animals of classical Inuit art are increasingly disturbed by the commodities of contemporary, everyday Inuit life. The commodification of culture is everywhere to be found, starting with the whaling industry in the 1800s and progressing to Inuit art in the late 1950s, followed by the sport hunting of polar bear and muskox in the following decade. A glance at *Up Here* magazine, published in Yellowknife Northwest Territories, confirms that spectacle (drop in from Japan for a one-night display of northern lights in Iqaluit) and cultural experience (spend a night in a real igloo wrapped up warmly in caribou skins and nourished by bannock and Arctic char) are cultural commodities upon which many enterprising and talented Inuit depend for a living. The Inuit sled dog remains iconic in this transformation being *the* unavoidable reality and symbol of a loss of culture and Being from which contemporary Inuit culture struggles to recover through forms

of both resistance and accommodation. My observation on this passage is not a romantic lament. It is only by way of acknowledging that the white fox furs that generated tokens at the HBC with which to purchase flour, tea, sugar, matches and ammunition in the 1920s, 30s, 40s and 50s, but that were, at the same time, laden heavily with non-market and existential relations, have given way to culture that is still commodity, laden with threatened non-market and existential relations. In ways that count, not much has changed. Otherness remains a reality of capitalist relations of production and it is these relations, and not just the culture to which they give rise, that require interrogation.

But this is ‘Up Here.’ Down there, in the barrios of Managua, the squatter camps of Maputo, the sprawling lanes and alleyways of Arusha, the export fee zones of Mexico, relations to the commodity are a curious mix of touristic voyeurism and sweat shop labour rivaling anything seen in the England of Charles Dickens. With its attention to cultural hybridity, a contingent politics, diversity, and a berating of totalizing logics as colonial remnants having failed under the crush of resistant and diverse voices that refused to be silenced, where does the postcolonial celebration of difference take us?

Epifanio San Juan Jr., a prolific Filipino scholar and cultural critic, has much of relevance to say. He cites Aijaz Ahmad in addressing the postmodern sensibility. Ahmad (1992) is trenchant in his criticism of Said’s *Orientalism* for ignoring how Western texts about the non-Western have been received, adopted, modified, overthrown and reproduced by the intelligentsia of colonized countries as social agents driven by their own contradictions, commitments and locations of class, gender, religion and geography. The necessary libratory potential of such texts escapes him.

Postcolonial doctrine assigns ontological priority to the phenomenon of cultural difference between colonized and colonizer. The articulation of such difference in “in-between” spaces produces hybridization of identities: “It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community

interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha 1994:1-2). Since capital ethnicizes peoples to promote labour segmentation, hybridity and other differential phenomena result (Wallerstein 1991). But for Bhabha, ambivalence arises from the post-structuralist “*difference* of writing” that informs any cultural performance, not from encystment and historical social catalepsy (Memmi 1965). ... In the discursive realm of floating signifiers and exorbitant metaphors, the objective asymmetry of power and resources between hegemonic blocs and subaltern [a reference to racialized minorities in the metropolises] and in the “third world,” as well as the attendant consequences, disappears. [San Juan Jr. 1992:6-7]

And speaking to an asymmetry of power and resources, Inuit of Nunavut have the highest rates of domestic violence in the country (14 times the national rate), the highest rate of young male suicide in the world (10 times the Canadian national average), a housing crisis that is the worst in Canada—approximately 50 percent of all Inuit homes are overcrowded compared to 7 percent nationally—and an official unemployment rate of about 17 percent while unofficial rates can be 50 – 70 percent in some communities at certain times of year (Tester 2006). While the accuracy of statistics can be debated, they most often point to what is ‘more or less true.’ It is, for instance, ‘true’ that Inuit are poorer than most Canadians. These are truths—realities—the Qikiqtani Truth Commission is going to some length to explain through an examination of a colonial history mediated through the relationship of Inuit to the fur trade, the industrial experience of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line and the consolidation of Inuit in settlements. Addressing relationships revealed by the statistics I have cited and positing alternatives, means interrogating and addressing historical relations of production and consumption in Inuit culture. Hardt and Negri (2000) put it this way: “In the context of state terror and mystification, clinging to the primacy of the concept of truth can be a powerful and necessary form of resistance. ... Truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will” (155-56). While truth may be hard to achieve, approximating it by exploring and remembering how history has been experienced, remains a worthwhile objective.

There is, as I have elsewhere reported, no evidence found to date in the archival record that the RCMP had a deliberate and articulated policy of trapping Inuit in the colonial relations of ruling characteristic of settlements developing in the eastern Arctic in the 1950s and 1960s by killing their dogs (Tester 2008). It is this claim upon which an RCMP investigation of the matter has focused, and in finding themselves to be without fault, they have missed the point (RCMP 2006). Sled dogs died as Inuit relocated to settlements, their unchained dogs, and even unattended dogs in harness, seen as a menace to health and safety. And in a few cases they were, as children—and others—were mauled and killed. In some settlements the HBC had no chain in stock with which to tether dogs. For some Inuit struggling in the early 1960s on cash incomes of as little as \$400 a year, chain was expensive. A lack of means to feed dogs, their owners now having relocated long distances from hunting grounds, meant that some had little choice but to leave their dogs loose to scrounge food. Some RCMP, unsympathetic to and failing to understand the chaos and cultural confusion confronting Inuit, took their mandate to shoot loose dogs literally and without question. Others were not so inclined. The result was that, in addition to dogs shot elsewhere, about 500 dogs were killed in two communities of the Qikiqtani region between 1966 and 1967 (Tester 2008). Without dogs and without access to snow machines—something that necessitated having cash that many older, Inuktitut-only speaking Elders would not have been able to earn in settlements catering to the language and other skills of the young—some Inuit, and likely those most intent on preserving their culture and way of life, were indeed trapped in town.

But other things happened. Earlier, in the winter of 1961-62, about 700 of 900 sled dogs in Cumberland Sound of the Qikiqtani region died of distemper. On this occasion, the RCMP and other colonial agents mounted a heroic, and largely futile, attempt to inoculate dogs and to find replacements hoping, initially, to keep Inuit in their camps. Fearing starvation, they evacuated many Inuit to Pangnirtung. The colonial Mountie, wanting Inuit ‘out of town’ so they would not become ‘dependent’ and thus

contributing to the maintenance of a traditional, land-based way of life, was 'Othered' by those wanting Inuit 'in town' where they could be assimilated and modernized.

The recall of these complex and contradictory experiences before the Qikiqtani Truth Commission can be seen as the Inuit equivalent of a collective oral missive directed not simply at the RCMP, but successive generations of Inuit and Qallunaat alike. It is, if you will, a gift from Elders to those of us who, in the presence of environmental, social and cultural practices threatening our survival on the planet, need to remember and reconstruct different ways of mediating our needs and conceptualizing 'the Other,' and our relationship to Others; to interrogate the commodity and relations to which it gives rise, like never before in human history.

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