

Aboriginal Education in Canada as Internal Colonialism

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The power relationships of colonialism are recreated in the relationship between Canadian First Nations and the colonizing European-derived government. The work of some of the theoreticians who have explained Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships in North America in terms of internal colonialism is reviewed. The internal colonial model, however, does not provide a good direction for local advocacy positions. The position derived from that observation is that in order to change the colonial relationship, it must be First Nations people who determine the pace and direction of First Nations development, and the process has to be driven and directed by Aboriginal people.

Since the introduction of colonial education to the original inhabitants of Canada, Aboriginal people as a group have done poorly in school, as academic performance is measured on standard achievement tests and with grades. They have had higher dropout rates and lower educational attainment than other groups, and historically have not participated in educational decision making bodies. For example, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (Government of Canada, 1989) reported that 37% of all Aboriginal people have less than grade 9 education, a figure that is twice the proportion of other Canadians, 17%. Furthermore, Hamilton (1991) found a typical Aboriginal student arriving at grade 10 nearly a year later than his or her non-Aboriginal counterpart. In that study it was also found that most Aboriginal pupils selected general, vocational, or practical high school programs, whereas most non-Aboriginal students selected academic or college prep programs. Finally, Mackay and Myles (1989) report that Aboriginal students in their samples were identified as running a higher risk of dropping out than the non-Aboriginal students.

Canadian society considers success in educational institutions to be important for social, economic, and political advancement. In the sociology of education there is a basic relationship between education and participation in the economic and social benefits of society. Sociologists chart particularly the relationship between education and social mobility. Thus the academic failures and low participation rates of Aboriginal members in higher education indicate they have not enjoyed the social and economic benefits of the dominant society.

Many researchers have examined the educational problems experienced by Aboriginal students. Unfortunately, the theories and hypotheses advanced in most of these studies tend to focus on characteristics of Aboriginal people or on the Aboriginal culture as being the problem, while ignoring the characteristics of the education system itself in the context of the large social system of which it is a part. Iverson (1978), however, used a different approach in her analysis of Aboriginal education in American society. Her conceptual framework was based on the internal colonial model and therefore she viewed Aboriginal education in the United

States as colonial education. The major argument in this model is that the development of education for Aboriginal peoples is like the educational development of classical colonialism. This article examines the development of Aboriginal education with Canadian society, using that same approach. The internal colonial model allows for the exploration of educational issues in a broader perspective than simply examining school failure. It requires that Aboriginal education be described in the context of institutional arrangements that have been established by a manifestly dominant group. A major advantage is that it demands treatment from an historical perspective.

Colonialism and Internal Colonialism

The concept *internal colonialism* has been derived from the conceptual framework that sought to explain the situation of the classically colonized countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, most specifically by the white European powers during the age of imperialism. It would therefore be appropriate to discuss the concept *colonialism* and the characteristics of the colonial situation before tracing the development of internal colonialism and applying it to the Aboriginal situation in Canadian society.

Balandier (1951) and Blauner (1969) both discuss colonialism and the colonial situation and are in essential agreement that colonialism traditionally refers to the establishment of domination over a geographically external political unit. Further, the unit or colony is usually inhabited by people of a different race and culture. They also found the colonies to be dominated economically and politically and therefore subordinated to, and then dependent upon, the more powerful colonizing country. In addition, Blauner notes that the colonizer usually exploits the land, the raw materials, the labor, and other resources of the colonized nations. Finally, differences in power, autonomy, and political status are formally recognized, and the colonizer establishes mechanisms to maintain that domination.

In general, four basic components of colonialism can be identified from the literature. These include (a) the forced, involuntary entry of the colonized group into the dominant society; (b) the colonizing power adopting policies that suppress, transform, or destroy native values, orientations, and ways of life; (c) manipulation and management of the colonized by agents of the colonizing group; and (d) domination, exploitation, and oppression justified by an ideology of racism, which defines the colonized group as inferior.

It is from this conceptual framework that "internal colonialism" has its roots. The term itself is said by van den Berghe (1978) to have been used originally by Leo Marquard, *South Africa's Colonial Policy*, written in 1957, but Hechter (1975, p. 8) credits Lenin with the term and with the first social analysis using the concept. Casanova (1965) is one of a number of people who contributed to the development of the concept during the 1960s in his analysis of race relations in Latin American countries. Casanova notes that the concept became popular during the independence movement of the old colonies. Havens and Flinn (1970) applied the concept to the situation in Colombia. Both studies deal with dual or plural societies in which a weaker group is oppressed and exploited by a dominant group. Blauner (1969) used the concept to describe inequality and dependency in Black-White relationships in the United States.

The model has been widely applied. In a classic study, Hechter (1975) describes Welsh-English relationships in those terms. Welch (1988) explains Australian

Aboriginal education in terms of the model. In the context of the United States it has been applied to Native Americans (Bee & Gingerich, 1977; Iverson, 1978; Jorgensen, 1971, 1972; Lurie, 1972; Moore, 1976; Ritter, 1979), Mexican-Americans (Hurstfield, 1975; Flores, 1973; Maldonado, 1979; Moore, 1970; Blauner, 1975), and Blacks (Moore, 1976; Blauner, 1969, 1975). McRoberts (1979) describes francophones in Quebec in terms of internal colonialism. Jacobson (1984) names corporate America as the colonizer of Indian lands and labor in the United States between 1871 and the 1930s, and Churchill and LaDuke's (1991) discussion of post-World War II resource extraction on Indian land restates that theme. Bachman (1991) cites the social pathology created by internal colonialism in American Aboriginal communities in accounting for the lives of 30 violent offenders.

Its use in description in the Canadian context has been predominantly about Aboriginals and others. Watkins (1977) edited a volume about the Dene Nation of the Northwest Territories oriented toward explaining colonial relationships in the context of proposed resource development. Aboriginal-White asymmetrical relationships in the exercise of political power and economic freedom in Canada are described by Mortimer (1975); and Fisher (1981) used the model to explain the development and current dynamics of education in a Northern Alberta community. Devrome (1991), in a case study from North Central Saskatchewan, describes Aboriginal resistance to colonial education imposed by a colonizing federal and provincial educational hierarchy. Child welfare programs for Aboriginals in Canada, according to McKenzie (1989), have their origins in colonial relationships of power. Other recent works in which the concept is a central organizational principle are the comparative work by Fleras (1992) dealing with Aboriginal populations of Canada, the United States, and New Zealand; and Krotz's (1990) *Indian Country*.

In internally colonized peoples, Aboriginal societies are subjugated economically and politically by the dominant group. Some of the factors identified in the historical internal colonial relationship with the larger system include (a) displacement of Aboriginal peoples by European expansion; (b) isolation and containment of Aboriginal people inherent in the reservation system; (c) forced assimilation of Aboriginal societies; (d) increasing political and economic domination of reservation affairs by the colonizers; and (e) the development of a racist ideology portraying Aboriginal peoples as backward, savage, uncivilized, and childlike.

The situation of the Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society is similar to that of the United States. Aboriginal societies in both countries have experienced displacement due to European expansion, land alienation, isolation in reservation systems, forced assimilation, and legislative and administrative mechanisms that control the affairs of the Aboriginal communities. Furthermore, Aboriginal people have been excluded from participation in the development process; they experience obstacles to social mobility.

Patterson (1972) and Loree (1976) exemplify the internal colonial model in their historical analyses of the Aboriginal situation in Canadian society. Domination by Euro-Canadians of Aboriginal groups has been based on a profession of "advanced" technology and organization, combined with structures that maintain economic control. Both writers note that the emerging dominant institutions excluded Aboriginal peoples from access to power and from participation in resource exploitation. In short, Aboriginal members have been assigned a peripheral position and were eventually considered irrelevant to the larger society.

Colonized Schooling

Altbach and Kelly (1978) review writing about education under classical, internal-colonial, and neocolonial situations. They found that in all cases education for the colonized was planned and controlled by the colonizers, a reflection of the exercise of the power held by the colonizers. The political and economic dominant group of the internal colonial situation made the educational decisions for the colonized: they determined who would go to school, how long the children of the colonized group would attend school, what would be learned in school, and in what language it should be learned. Under this system the goals of schooling for the colonized population are designed to serve the needs of the colonizer, not the colonized.

Additional features of colonial education identified by Altbach and Kelly are (a) geographic separation of schools and communities from which students came; (b) the colonized were not consulted in the planning process regarding their education; (c) parents performed no role in the determination of educational content; (d) content had little to do with culture or society of the colonized; (e) usually only primary education was provided; (f) missionary schools emphasized moral training; (g) the language utilized in schools was that of the colonizer; (h) language of the colonized was devalued and discouraged; (i) practical skills like agriculture and manual trades were emphasized; (j) culture of the colonized was negatively evaluated; and (k) the history of the colonized, if given at all, tended to focus on tribal conflicts, famines, and barbarism in contrast to the "peace and orderly progress" under colonial domination.

Specifically for internal colonialism, van den Berghe's (1978) definition includes (a) dominance by one group, or coalition of groups, over another, living within common boundaries; but with (b) territorial separation, with individual land tenure rights being different for the colonized group; with (c) an "internal government" for the colonized within the dominant government; and (d) the maintenance of economic inequality, reinforcing relationships of "dependency and inferiority in the division of labor and the relations of production."

Following Altbach and Kelly (1978), it is clear that colonial education suppresses, transforms, or destroys the values of the colonized. The colonized are not allowed to take part in the decision making process regarding the education of the subjugated group because they are considered as "inferior children" who are unable to define their own needs. Missionaries are used as agents of the dominant group, and their goal of conversion away from traditional beliefs makes missionary schooling of the colonized an important vehicle for devaluing and discouraging the practice of indigenous religion.

Altbach and Kelly also discuss some of the reactions of the colonized to colonial schools. Apathy was the most frequent response, the schools being considered by the colonized people as being irrelevant to their needs. Hostility to colonial schools was also frequent, with the parents being opposed to their children being sent to these schools. Finally, colonial education has often been perceived by colonized people being a threat to the Aboriginal society's continuing existence.

Low educational attainment of the colonized people in colonizing institutions can be seen thus to be a common reaction. The following section demonstrates the pervasiveness of a colonial pattern of education in Canadian society to which the colonized Aboriginal societies have been subjected. In a review of (a) the early foundations of Aboriginal schooling, and (b) the major policy changes to 1960s,

application of the colonial model to the description demonstrates that the changes do not constitute a movement away from colonial domination but rather a reinforcement of dependency and colonial status.

Federal Responsibility and Colonial Status

The current legislative foundation of the "internal government" for Canadian Aboriginals is the British North America Act (BNA) of 1867 (Section 91, subsection 24), in which Indians were declared to be the responsibility of the federal government. The Act gave parliament the power to administer Indian affairs, which included education. The first Indian Act was passed shortly after the BNA Act came into effect and provided the legal basis for federal administration of Indian Affairs. Several of the western treaties signed between the 1870s and the first part of the 20th century included a government commitment to educate the Aboriginal members. Control over the development of Aboriginal societies and control over the dynamics of change were placed in the hands of the non-Aboriginal government and its bureaucracy. The colonizer assumed total control of the changes that would take place in the major institutions of Aboriginal societies, including education, and therefore contributed to what Iverson (1978) describes as the "historical development of underdevelopment resulting from worldwide European expansion" (p. 150).

Colonized Schooling for Aboriginal People in Canadian Society

Aboriginal people in Canadian society were subjected to a colonial pattern of education long before Canadian confederation in 1867. The emergence of a dominant-subordinate relationship and an accompanying racist ideology can be seen in education efforts as early as the 17th century. There were competing ideologies among European colonizers concerning Aboriginal people, and insofar as Aboriginal people were considered to be uncivilized, savage, barbarian, and backward, the roots for an ideology that would justify the domination of Aboriginal members through education were established and developed in Canadian society.

Macleod (1966), Kaegi (1972), and Chalmers (1970) report how the early missionaries, the military, and the government of Upper Canada used the educational system to attempt to transform Indian societies. Kaegi (1972) notes that the missionaries in the early 1600s came to "civilize" and save the "souls of the savages" in the new world. Kaegi provides an example of the government and missionaries cooperating in an attempt to transform the Aboriginal cultures. In 1668 Louis XIV of France directed the clergy of New France to "civilize" the Aboriginal people, not only by changing their religion but also by encouraging them to change their traditional way of life. The clergy were instructed to encourage the Aboriginal members to adopt the "superior French culture" and reject everything that was Aboriginal. The goal adopted by the colonizer was clearly to assimilate the Aboriginal members, and education was considered to be one of the most effective means of achieving this goal. If this goal was to be achieved, the culture, traditions, values, and ideals of the Aboriginal societies had to be discouraged.

Within 50 years of the establishment of British dominance in the Canadas, a segregated system of schooling for Aboriginal students was in place. The colonial pattern of education included the establishment of industrial, residential, and boarding schools for Aboriginal students. The work edited by Barman, Hébert, and

McCaskill (1986), and works by Bearking (1969), Bull (1991), Chalmers (1970), Ing (1991), Kaegi (1972), and Macleod (1966) include descriptions of such schools. The early residential schools were run by religious groups who emphasized moral training and the teaching of practical skills. The missionaries believed that the "childlike" Indian had to be protected from the "corrupt whiteman." They also believed the Aboriginal students should be removed from the "poor" influence of their communities and especially from the influence of their parents and elders.

The Aboriginal students were required to work around the school engaging in farming, maintenance, cooking, and cleaning activities. The basic three Rs education—reading, writing, and arithmetic—were also offered, but did not seem to be considered the most important component of Aboriginal education. Though there are many examples of missionary use of Aboriginal languages in other contexts, and even in schools, the predominant language in most of the residential schools was the language of the colonizer. The use of Aboriginal languages was discouraged and severely punished by the missionaries. It is clear that the content of schooling was not based on Aboriginal societies or cultures except insofar as schooling was used to eradicate them. The architect of this school policy, Ryerson, who was the Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada in 1847, articulated the goal of residential schooling to be the preparation of the Aboriginal male students to be farmers and farm workers, while the girls were to be taught housekeeping. He also emphasized the importance of teaching Christian religious instruction to enable the Aboriginal people to be "civilized," to "improve and elevate" their character.

The changes in Aboriginal schooling following Confederation reinforced the colonial relationship. Following Confederation, authority to deal with Aboriginal education was placed in the hands of a federal department created to deal specifically with "Indian Affairs." The Department of Indian Affairs, therefore, assumed total control over Aboriginal education and its development. The policy initially adopted by the Department was consistent with the previous assimilation efforts of the missionaries, military, and the government of Upper Canada. The bureaucracy merely continued the efforts of the dominant group in "civilizing" and forcing the Aboriginal peoples to reject their traditional way of life. Aboriginal education under Indian Affairs witnessed the expansion of the system of boarding or industrial schools for Aboriginal children run by church missionary societies with the sanction of the government. The government was granted the authority to establish these schools by the Indian Advancement Act of 1894. The primary purpose of the industrial school was to teach farming as well as to offer religious instruction to Aboriginal students.

The change in the late 1940s and early 1950s to government operation of residential schools, the movement toward day schools, and finally the movement toward school integration served to reinforce the larger societal relationship of dependency, and thus could be said to reinforce the colonial relationship.

In the 1940s the federal government took charge of the residential schools established by the various religious groups. However, the transfer of authority did not translate into a change in curriculum. The Aboriginal students were still required to work around the school engaging in farming, maintenance, cooking, and cleaning activities. The federal department moved to establish more Indian day schools on reserves in the 1950s. Most of these schools taught only grades 1 to 6, and in keeping with the assimilation goal the curriculum was based on the

history and beliefs of the non-Aboriginal society. Because the schools were confessional, many of the teachers at the day schools were missionaries who emphasized religious instruction. If an Aboriginal student managed to complete grade 6 on-reserve at a day school and aspired to higher grades, he or she was required to attend school off-reserve. Higher grades required leaving friends and family to attend boarding or residential schools that were usually miles away from the reserve, or in some cases try for admission to a non-Aboriginal school.

The early 1950s was also the period when the Department of Indian Affairs began the policy of integration of Aboriginal students into the provincial education systems across the country. The policy was a response to the recommendations made by a Committee of the Senate and House of Commons established to examine the Indian Act and to make recommendations regarding the situation of Aboriginal people in Canadian society. Information was gathered over a two-year period, 1946-1948, and the final report in 1948 recommended an end to the "special status" of Aboriginal people and promoted their integration into the dominant society (Canada Parliament, 1946, 1947, 1948). The federal government accepted the challenge and in 1951 made it legally possible for Aboriginal children to attend provincial schools. The Department was given the mandate to negotiate agreements with provincial and local educational authorities regarding the education of Aboriginal children in provincial education systems. The primary purpose of the new policy was to integrate Aboriginal students into a provincial school system that ignored the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of Aboriginal societies. The curriculum, learning materials, and teaching styles reflected the culture of the dominant group.

The policy of integration was adopted without the consent of the Aboriginal people. The colonized Aboriginal members were not involved in the planning and decision making process. This is typical in the internal colonial situation whereby the policies adopted by the colonizer were always formulated without any input by the colonized. Macleod (1966) and Chalmers (1970) demonstrate how Aboriginal people were excluded from the planning process because the authorities believed they were too childlike and therefore incapable of identifying what was best for their children. This paternalistic attitude has been prevalent throughout the history of Aboriginal education.

As in other colonial situations, the most common response of the Aboriginal people in Canadian society to imposed, colonized education was apathy. Schools were considered to be irrelevant to the needs of Aboriginal societies. For example, the curriculum of the colonial schools was considered to be insensitive to the developmental needs of Aboriginal societies. Aboriginal people also reacted to colonial education by expressing hostility to the schools that they attended, the result of the anti-Aboriginal attitudes of most schools. In particular, they discouraged the use of Aboriginal languages and also devalued Aboriginal culture.

The colonial relationship, even in the face of a policy of integration, has in fact hindered the integration of Aboriginal students into the academic and social systems of colonial education. My study (Perley, 1980) of dropouts of Aboriginal students from a university in New Brunswick found that the students were not integrated into either the academic or the social system of the university. It was concluded that dropout occurred because of insufficient interactions with others in the university and insufficient congruence with the prevailing value patterns of the

university collectivity. Social identification as Aboriginal in a colonial context has social status implications that affect individuals at an interpersonal level.

Conclusion

The poor academic performance exhibited by Aboriginal students is a reflection of their colonized status in Canadian society. The education system adopted by the dominant group has not been geared to allow the colonized Aboriginal members to succeed in that system. Colonial education has actually contributed to the underdevelopment of Aboriginal societies. Education, therefore, has to be decolonized if improvements are to be made in the education of Aboriginal people. The process of decolonization will require transfer of control from the colonizers to the historically subjugated, colonized Aboriginal people.

Since the early 1970s the terms of Aboriginal education and schooling have been completely reoriented to local control, relevant curriculum, and teacher education for Aboriginal people. This appears to be a change in the colonial situation. The broader political relationships between Aboriginals and the colonial structures of government have appeared to change from absolute control without consultation to a policy of devolution of control and movement toward self-government. The problem remains that political rhetoric and policy changes are not sufficient to change longstanding structural relationships.

What can be learned from a review of this relationship? Urion (1983) found, in reviewing internal colonialism, that although it described historical relationships and macrosystemic relationships well, it did not provide a good direction for local advocacy positions. It seems clear, however, that if the changes over the past century appear to be oriented toward decolonization but in fact reinforce dependency, we should examine the current changes to Aboriginal control and involvement in education to see what dependency relationships they entail. From this review, two clear principles emerge.

1. *The pace and direction of development have to be determined by the First Nations.*
In essence, decolonization is a process of liberation for both the colonized and the colonizer. It liberates the colonized from the shackles of control by an oppressive, dominating, and paternalistic society. Decolonization also liberates the colonizers from their colonial mentality and preoccupation with control, superiority, and dominance over First Nations. The fact that the pace and direction of development should be determined by First Nations should not be seen as a challenge to other Canadians.
2. *The process of decolonization has to be driven and directed by the Aboriginal people.*
The planning and decision making processes regarding Aboriginal educational changes and initiatives are the responsibility of First Nations people. A decolonized education system may have the effect of greater participation of Aboriginal people at in all levels of a truly pluralistic education system, but it is not a question of the "colonizer" opening up places to "accommodate" Aboriginals. Aboriginal people have the responsibility to decide the terms under which they participate; otherwise relationships of dependency are reinforced.

Minimum requirements for participation in such a pluralistic educational system would be recruitment of teachers, specialists, and professionals of Aboriginal background; creation (not adaptation) of a curriculum that promotes the Aboriginal cultures, recognizing and legitimizing Aboriginal histories, languages,

and learning styles; and the real incorporation of Aboriginal parents in participating in the education of their children. In addition, a decolonized education system will foster understanding, tolerance, and respect between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

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First Nations Freedom: A Curriculum of Choice (Alcohol, Drug and Substance Abuse Prevention) Kindergarten to Grade 8

The Mokakit Education Research Association is pleased to announce the launch of **First Nations Freedom: A Curriculum of Choice**, a national alcohol and drug abuse prevention curriculum (kindergarten to grade 8) for First Nations schools.

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