

Storytelling Conference

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Is there a need to Indigenize the Concept of Wealth Accumulation with Native Americans?

A Commentary on Select Topics from December 2016 Storytelling Conference

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In the 2016 Storytelling Conference, one Native presenter adamantly espoused creating wealth as being the ultimate of one's profession. The viewpoint and theme championed wealth accumulation as *the* existential essence. In previous conference discussions on storytelling and wealth, we found many Native American cultures esteem sustainability of the community over the concept of individual affluence. The impact of historic colonization affecting and distorting these kinds of social, economic and cultural differences for Natives is presently an area of discussion in academic literature. The ideology of deconstruction of the effects of colonization is a significant issue today. The revitalization of indigenous knowledge, history, culture and language, from the point of view of aboriginal people, is a shared worldwide goal as reflected in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.¹ Thus, issues such as the role of cultural individuality and community in the process of accumulating wealth are important considerations. Because many Native communities are impoverished, they desire to improve their quality of life through things like economic development and self-determination. This commentary examines a different perspective than the above addressed in last year's storytelling conference.

Discussion

Values & Value Conflict

As a premise in this discussion, I believe Maslow had it partially right in regards to humankind seeking basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing as well as a sense of wellbeing and the need for socialization.² However, for many indigenous groups, the idea of self-actualization ties to socialization as the collective integrates into the scheme of things. For many indigenous groups the concept of wholeness and integration in a harmonious cycle of being is a generally accepted

¹ United Nations, *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, Published by the United Nations, 107th plenary meeting 13 September 2007 accessed on 12-8-2017. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

² Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs

worldview.³ Fairly recently, some First Nations scholars identified where and how Maslow added the concept of altruism to his theory of needs hierarchy.⁴

Narcisse Blood and Ryan Heavy Head, of the Kainai Nation in Alberta Canada, in an extensive research of their First Nation's oral history, coupled with a review of the literature, uncovered how Maslow amended his theoretical perspective. In a late 1930s, at an Anthropological Society conference in New York, renowned anthropologist Ruth Benedict urged Maslow to accompany some student researchers to the Blackfoot Reserve near Calgary Canada. She purported to Maslow that he could learn more about the nature of the human existence by way of participation in an ethnographic visit to another culture group.

Although Maslow was concentrating on deviance during the visit, he became enthralled with how the tribal group shared material goods and collectively raised children. He was amazed how the only vehicle brought by a returning soldier somehow became a communal resource for the entire village. Anyone needing the car could ask the soldier for the keys and proceed accordingly.

The research project by Blood and Heavy Head relied on communal memory and oral history of Maslow's visit. The resources and investigation credibility was bolstered by a recent Canadian Supreme Court case that determined aboriginal oral tradition could be used as court evidence.⁵

Many of the Native groups in North America reflect the principles of altruism and accumulation/redistribution in regards to wealth in the so-called give-away ceremonies, rituals and practices.⁶ This confounding principle is in juxtaposition to the tenets of capitalism that reverences individualism in the process of accumulating and stockpiling wealth. Albeit, the wealth is many times reinvested as a resource to gain further riches.

We now begin to see an inherent value conflict between the overall society and many indigenous groups in regards to cultural concepts and principles of wealth. Avis Archambault was one of the first to acknowledge some of the cultural differences between the worldviews of the overall

³ Bopp, J., Bopp M., Brown, L., & Lane, P. Jr. (1984). *The sacred tree*. Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada: Four Worlds International Institute.

⁴ Narcisse Blood and Ryan Heavy Head, (2015), "Blackfoot Influence on Abraham Maslow", Presented at the University of Montana, Retrieved from <https://www.blackfootdigitalibrary.com/publication/blackfoot-influence-abraham-maslow-presented-narcisse-blood-and-ryan-heavy-head>

⁵ Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 1997, retrieved from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/delgamuukw-case/>

⁶ Grace Ann Rosile, Don Pepion, David M. Boje, and Joe Gladstone, (January 5, 2012), "Comparing Daniels Principles of Business Ethics and Tribal Ethics: Using Indigenous Methods of Storytelling and Pedagogy to Convey Moral Principles" (An unpublished document)

society and Native Americans. Here is summary table of her comparison of conflicting values between the overall society and many Native groups:

Value Conflict: Indian vs Non-Indian

Prevailing Society	Traditional Indian
• Self (take care of #1)	• Group-take care people
• Prepare for tomorrow	• Today is a good day
• Time-Use every minute	• The right time/place
• Youth-rich, young, pretty	• Respect elders
• Compete!	• Cooperate
• Speak up!	• Listen-and you'll learn
• Take and Save	• Give and Share
• Religion-a part of life	• Spiritual-a way of life
• Conquer Nature	• Live in Harmony
• Skeptical/Logical	• Intuitive/Inductive
• Ego-Self attention	• Humility

**Depiction adapted by Donald D. Pepion, Ed.D.⁷*

Archambault states, “I must become aware of these conflicting values or I can become confused, angry, frustrated, unbalanced, mentally, physically, [and] spiritually”.⁸ Although behaviorists label some of these values as pathological, contemporary theorists such as Brayboy reveals the Native values such as cooperation are sources of cultural strength.⁹ In this case, “awareness” is the key term. Native students and others listening to the aforementioned presentation need to be aware the individual accumulation and hoarding of wealth is a value of the dominant society while altruism is a cultural value of most indigenous societies. This brings about the importance of indigenizing education on these kinds of matters to affect not only awareness but also a culturally appropriate synthesis of knowledge.

As indicated above, our prior conference discussions on storytelling and wealth acknowledged the epistemological differences between cultures. I believe this fits with the indigenous philosophy of humankind striving to maintain equilibrium or balance as a cosmological universality. Thus, the contention of individual wealth attainment as a definitive, essence of being is contrary to the time-honored values of many Native culture groups.

⁷ Avis Archambault, (1992), adapted from a conference handout

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Brayboy, M. J. B. “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education”, *The Urban Review*, Vol. 37, No. 5, December 2005 (_ 2006) DOI: 10.1007/s11256-005-0018-y, Published Online: March 14, 2006

In this situation, the individual espousing a dominant culture's value imposition on individuals of another belief system is oppression. It is especially disconcerting when the speaker's family of origin is indigenous. The presentation centered on the ability to obtain funds from the corporate or business sector for reinvestment. The presenter criticized his own community in deciding to use the wealth he brought them for human infrastructure needs rather than other profit making endeavors, He criticized the professional educators present at the meeting as being theoretical and not teaching practical application. It rings loudly of Freire's principle of the oppressed becoming the oppressor.¹⁰

Freirean theory and practice indicates the oppressed may liberate themselves through an authentic dialogical process and initiate their own actions to transform the situation. However, the oppressed empower themselves by realizing they have internalized the worthlessness and primitivation of their culture and knowledge as espoused by the oppressor. Consequently some of the indoctrinated oppressed continue to believe and act out the values and ways of the oppressor.

Colonization an Economic Endeavor

Both Brayboy and Smith acknowledge European colonization as an economic endeavor. Brayboy states that colonization is "endemic" to America. One of the first tenets in his critical race theory states, "U.S. policies are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy and a desire for material gain."¹¹ Smith recognizes the connected concepts of imperialism and colonialism in one of its first forms as "economic expansion".¹² She reveals how the English economic expansion in the Americas and the world was a system to secure "markets and capital investments"

Freire further recognizes the continuation of repression through the following realities:

Intergenerational oppression creates a strong *possessive consciousness*; everything is an object of power and domination [to the oppressor]. Everything is an object of purchasing power; a strict materialist concept of existence; money the measure of all things and profit is the primary goal.¹³

Accordingly, he relates the oppressors believe they have an "inalienable right" to things like wealth while others are "incompetent, lazy and ungrateful". Furthermore, any restriction on their way of life is a "profound violation of their [the oppressed] individual rights". The

¹⁰ Freire, P. F. (2009, 1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (30th Anniversary Edition). New York: Continuum International. Pp 46-54

¹¹ Brayboy, M. J. B. "Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education", *The Urban Review*, Vol. 37, No. 5, December 2005 (_ 2006) DOI: 10.1007/s11256-005-0018-y, Published Online: March 14, 2006

¹² Smith, L.T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. New York: Zed Books Ltd. P 22

¹³ Freire, P. F. (2009, 1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (30th Anniversary Edition). New York: Continuum International, 57-59

oppressors consider themselves as the only “human beings”; only they indisputably possess the right to peace.

Freire reminds us that the oppressor considers the oppressed as “rejects of life” though processes not initiated by the oppressed.¹⁴ He further asserts the oppressor dehumanizes the oppressed through terms like “those people...savages or natives”. When the oppressed react to oppression, they are considered “subversives or violent, wicked, barbaric...”

Lateral Oppression

In another part of the presentation, it focused on urban Indian professors, who dressed in certain ways and “wore feathers” at times. This implied urban Indians are detached from their culture. The speaker also denounced Indians who only manage programs and did not create wealth. He further related that these types of managers really did not contribute any value to their communities. Jillene Joseph (Gros Ventre) the Executive Director of the Native Wellness Institute often speaks to these kinds of negative behaviors as “lateral oppression”. The organization’s purpose derived from the “Wellness Movement” includes the following from their website:

The Native Wellness Institute recognizes the great impacts of historical trauma and *oppression* on our people. We understand that historic trauma has caused current day trauma in our families and communities. This is evident by the high rates of substance abuse, violence, gossip, *negativity*, poverty and other destructive behaviors and conditions.¹⁵

The terms “oppression” and “negativity” are obviously apparent in the presentation by the guest speaker at last year’s Storytelling Conference. In the book, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” this author reminds us:

Freire expresses the duality of the oppressed being themselves while subconsciously internalizing the oppressor.... Conversely, the internalized oppressor may manifest in behavior that may be termed *horizontal violence*; wherein they *strike out at companions for petty reasons*. Freire considers this behavior as indirectly attacking oppressor. Thus, internalized oppression may be a subconscious and overpowering desire to become like oppressor. Freire believes this dysfunctional behavior is more prevalent with the middle-classed oppressed. This somewhat bipolar behavior is one of the complex effects of oppression that is associated with some of Freire’s many findings¹⁶

Smith declares the importance of indigenous people “writing and re-righting” their own history. She cautions about “Indigenous Elites” who align with the cultural and economic

¹⁴ Freire, p 55

¹⁵ Retrieved from <https://www.nativewellness.com/>

¹⁶ Donald D. Pepion (2015), “Oppression & Colonization: Creating Indigenous Identity” (an unpublished manuscript), p 7

interests of the colonizing group.¹⁷ Consequently, we begin to see the need for a process of decolonization.

Decolonization

Linda Tuhiwia Smith, a Maori, in her 1999 book “Decolonizing Methodologies” popularized the term “decolonization”. She conveyed the term decolonization as more than just deconstruction. Her thesis describes how the European imperialism and power subjugated indigenous knowledge. Besides delineating the historic development of Eurocentric domination, she embraces giving voice and insight to indigenous intellect and cultural knowledge. “Reclaiming a voice in this context has also been about reclaiming, connecting and reordering those ways of knowing which were submerged, hidden or driven underground”.¹⁸ This interfaces substantively with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People involving matters such as self-determination and agency. The methods part provides a “...critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices”¹⁹ Smith advocates indigenous people research back and rewrite history from their truth and reality. Furthermore, initiation of research is for and with indigenous peoples from their culture and knowledge framework.

Europeans after the age of enlightenment developed “positional superiority” over all knowledge through the creation of disciplines that became “regimes of truth”²⁰ Ever since the Doctrine of Discovery certain European nations were in a position of power and domination. The disciplines “discovered” Indigenous knowledge and archived it in systems of classification and categorization. By essentializing knowledge, Indigenous ways were relegated to ignorance and uncivilized nonsense. Commodification of stolen Indigenous knowledge in the form of education was “given” back to the indigenous pagans. In the United States, anthropology performed “salvage ethnography” to archive a period of time that perpetuated the ongoing noble savage to a stereotype, frozen image. Native Americans became a dying race of people who had lost their culture. Because of this form of knowledge imperialism, Indigenous people must deconstruct Eurocentric structures through the processes of decolonization.

According to Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird, the decolonization process involves questioning the “legitimacy of colonization” and distinguishing matters of truth and injustice. Besides critically analyzing colonization, they believe the process includes judiciously reflecting on ways to challenge and defy systems and ideologies that suppress and misuse indigenous

¹⁷ Smith, 67-68

¹⁸ Smith, 72

¹⁹ Smith, 21

²⁰ Said in Smith 61

peoples.²¹ They define colonization as “... both the formal and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies and economies) that maintain the subjugation or exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, lands, and resources.” Most of the prominent authors believe the decolonization process begins with the self through “decolonization of the mind”.²²

Chilisa speaks to the Indigenizing processes beginning with individual “decolonization of the mind”.²³ She conveys that Euro-Western educational systems imposed a normalization of their lifestyle and worldviews on Indigenous people. In her work, she communicates the verity of colonization stripping the Indigenous person’s mind of ancestral culture and replacing it with the Euro-Western dictates of knowledge. Colonization marginalized and subjugated Indigenous knowledge through the violent process of invasion and destruction of Indigenous systems and lands.

Indigenization

With the advent of Indigenous people understanding the process and effects of colonization, the idea of decolonization emerged. More recently, there is a movement to replace the term decolonization with “Indigenization”. Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how this term came about, our Canadian neighbors to the north have adopted the ideology of indigenization through the social/political movement entitled Truth and Reconciliation.²⁴ The Canadian government initiated a five-year study resulting in a massive document of information and findings related to the effects of colonization. A major impetus for the study included the result of court cases that developed into legislated reparation to First Nations for the abuse they received in the residential schools. The residential school experience equates with the mid 1800s mission and boarding school period in the United States that forcefully removed children in an effort to Christianize and civilize the Indians. As a result, many government and educational institutions in Canada are initiating actions and programs to systemically, indigenize their structures and historical literature. For example, the University of Calgary has an initiative to indigenize the institution and develop collaborations with regional First Nations groups.²⁵

²¹ Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird, M. (2005). “For Indigenous Eyes Only: Beginning Decolonization”, In Wilson, W.A. and M. Yellow Bird (Editors), *For Indigenous eyes only: A decolonization handbook*. Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, p 2

²² Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc., p 2; Smith, p 24 ; Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird, p2

²³ Ibid

²⁴ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, (2015), *Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, (Website: www.trc.ca): Winnipeg, Manitoba, retrieved at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>

²⁵ University of Calgary, (2017), *Together in a Good Way: A Journey of Transformation and Renewal Indigenous Strategy*, University of Calgary: Canada, Retrieved at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/indigenous-strategy/>

The above documents regarding “Indigenization” by Canada reference the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People as a primary source and influence for the Truth and Reconciliation movement. The documents also reference some of the African and Australian nations introducing this kind of social/political movement. Hence, we can see some of the evolution of enhancing the meaning and use of the term Indigenization from the idea of colonization.

One entity in Canada has developed some excellent definitions of decolonization and Indigenization. Here is how the “Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.” summarizes the definitions of these terms:²⁶

Decolonization:

- Decolonization restores the Indigenous world view
- Decolonization restores culture and traditional ways
- Decolonization replaces Western interpretations of history with Indigenous perspectives of history

Indigenization:

- Indigenization recognizes validity of Indigenous worldviews, knowledge and perspectives
- Indigenization identifies opportunities for indigeneity to be expressed
- Indigenization incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing and doing

Identity issues

From the above chart on value conflict, we see there is some potential for identity conflict in the quest for Native people to increase self-determination through economic and business development in order to improve their quality of life. This coupled with the complexities of effects of oppression and colonization makes for a potentially perplexing situation for individuals, Natives and their communities. The important issue in the literature is Native people through the process of decolonization/indigenization can transform their situation.

Yet, as Champagne points out “Indian identity is a matter of social and cultural action as well as self-identification”.²⁷ Though the Harvard Project in their ongoing study of economic development in Indian country affirms, Indian tribes do not necessarily need to adopt the Western-style democracy.²⁸ As long as Indian people see their structures like tribal government as legitimate and have a history of effective operations, they do not have to sacrifice culture for

²⁶ Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., “A Brief Definition of Decolonization and Indigenization”, Port Coquitlam, Retrieved at <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/a-brief-definition-of-decolonization-and-indigenization>

²⁷ Duane Champagne. (2010). *Notes from the Center of Turtle Island*. New York: Rowin & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. p 19.

²⁸ Harvard, p 126.

economic development. Those tribes that have stable traditions in a way that fits with their culture appear to do better.

The self-identification of being Native American is certainly a matter of choice. As we have seen above, the individual needs to be conscious of these contradictions so they can be in a position to work through their self-actualization and personal identity. Obtaining ones full potential in a culturally well-adjusted acceptance of being human is a developmental process. In other words, cultural awareness and understanding is a life-long learning process. The world and existence is a dynamic ever-changing progression. Adaptation though continual awareness and education maintains ones self-perception though knowledge and understanding.²⁹

The idea of identity is a social/cultural matter. Community and culture group identity links to a shared history, place, and heritage. In the human and behavioral sciences, social organization is a component of humanization. Socialization through norms, values, and behavior shapes and encompasses culture and community. It defines membership through individuals acting in accordance with the conformities of their culture group.

Many Native American culture groups use the term “traditional” to identify those who believe and practice the historic and long established cultural ways. Just as there is much diversity in Native American language, cultures and geography, there is internal diversity in those who believe and practice the old ways and those who have adopted the overall society’s culture and values. In many instances, the division between these two internal social identities is not clear-cut. Here is the way I describe it in another manuscript:

I like to use the circle to point out that culture is dynamic and adapts to conditions over time. I call one-half of the circle “traditional” and the other half “contemporary”. A tribal group [or individual] could be anywhere on the circular line from overtly practicing their language and culture while others may give the appearance of practicing the values and customs of the overall society. It is also important to point out that within tribal groups there are individuals who consider themselves “traditional” while others are more “contemporary” oriented. However, I caution students and others to be careful in using these kinds of “labels” as there are many complex issues related to the social and cultural dynamics of tribal groups and individuals. Hence, it is important to learn about the many factors and variables throughout history that affect indigenous peoples. Things like effects of oppression and colonization produced a myriad of factors and related issues into the consciousness of all peoples regarding the Native American situation.³⁰

²⁹ Weaver, H. A. (2010). “Indigenous Identity: what is it and who really has it”, in Lobo, Talbot, & Morris. *Native American Voices: A Reader*. Boston, Prentice Hall. Pp 28—36.

³⁰ Pepion, D. D. (2015). “Oppression & Colonization: Creating Indigenous Identity”, p 3

Conclusion

This essay examined the need to indigenize the concept of wealth accumulation with Native Americans”. I communicate the inquiry within the context of a presentation made at a previous “Storytelling” conference produced by Boje and Rosalie. Although there are some of the shared human values, we find there are some cultural differences between Western society and many Native American groups. The concept of wealth accumulation and redistribution is in many cases dichotomous between overall society and many Native American cultures. Using one Native author’s depiction, we see that there are some value conflicts between Indian and non-Indian societies. The effects of colonization and its oppressive history demonstrate a need for Indigenous groups to decolonize or “indigenize” their history and culture. This means researching and reconstructing their own history and realities in order to “restore cultural practices, thinking patterns, beliefs and values”.³¹ By understanding themselves from their own assumptions and perspectives, they can transform the situation to improve their quality of life.

Many indigenous authors agree the process indigenizing begins with “decolonizing the mind”. Chilisa, a Bantu of Botswana, references Alatas who conceptualized the “captive mind” or colonized mind.³² The process of indigenizing identity involves awareness and education of the effects of colonization. Achieving indigenous identity is by deconstructing and understanding the effects of colonization. Individual identity and a shared cultural identity is a dynamic process of learning, growing and adapting from some core shared cultural values. Thus, one can accumulate and use wealth in a culturally and ethically appropriate way.

³¹ Chilisa, p 13-14

³² Chilisa, 7