

Separate but Unequal: Exploring the Implications of Parallelist Ideology on the Political Economy of Aboriginal Peoples

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One of the most significant policy questions in Canada today concerns the continuing marginalization of aboriginal peoples.¹ It is well documented that aboriginal participation in the Canadian labour force is proportionally far lower than that for the non-aboriginal population.² Aboriginal people are far more likely to receive social assistance than other Canadians, and when employment is obtained, it is often in the form of seasonal or part-time work.³ This has resulted in deplorable living conditions for natives in one of the wealthiest countries in the world.⁴ And because of the sense of isolation that comes from not being involved in productive labour,⁵ social

¹ Throughout this paper, references to “aboriginal”, “indigenous” or “native” will be not be capitalized. This is because the terms are being used as adjectives in reference to people who have inhabited a land from the earliest times or before the arrival of colonists. Capitals, however, will be used for terms such as Mohawk, Cree or Dene because these names are derived from proper nouns such as languages, specific regions or tribes.

² Alan Noël and Florence Larocque, “Aboriginal Peoples and Poverty in Canada: Can Provincial Governments Make a Difference?”, Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the International Sociological Association’s Research Committee 19 (RC19), Montréal, August 20, 2009, http://www.cccg.umontreal.ca/rc19/PDF/Noel-A_Rc192009.pdf [accessed June 2014]; Jeannine Usalcas, “Aboriginal People and the Labour Market: Estimates from the Labour Force Survey, 2008-2010”, The Aboriginal Labour Force Analysis Series (Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, 2011), <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-588-x/71-588-x2011003-eng.pdf> [accessed June 2014]; Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, “Fact Sheet - 2011 National Household Survey Aboriginal Demographics, Educational Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes”, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1376329205785/1376329233875> [accessed June 2014].

³ Allan Moscovitch and Andrew Webster, “Aboriginal Social Assistance Expenditures”, in Susan D. Phillips, (ed) *How Ottawa Spends, 1995-96: Mid-Life Crises* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995). Noël and Larocque note that “Recent data for Aboriginal identity persons do not exist because provincial governments do not differentiate social assistance recipients on the basis of identity. The most recent statistics for on-reserve Indians, however, suggest the pattern has hardly been reversed. In 2003, 34.8% of Indians on reserve received social assistance, compared to 5.5% for the country’s general population (excluding Indians on reserve). In Manitoba, this rate for on-reserve Indians was 43.9%...”. Noël and Larocque, p. 16. Noel and Larocque acquired these data from National Council of Welfare (2007). *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Children: Time to Act*, Ottawa, National Council of Welfare Reports, 127, Ottawa, National Council of Welfare, Fall (www.ncwcnbes.net), p. 27.

⁴ Noel and Larocque point out that “in Canada, as in many countries, being Aboriginal often means being poor, or even very poor”. They note that “21.7% had incomes below Statistics Canada’s low income cut-of after tax, compared to 11.1% for the non-Aboriginal identity population ...”. Noel and Larocque, p. 5. Daniel Wilson and David MacDonald also note that “while income disparity between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canadians narrowed slightly between 1996 and 2006, at this rate it would take 63 years for the gap to be erased (Daniel Wilson and David Macdonald, *The income gap between aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2010), <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/reports/docs/Aboriginal%20Income%20Gap.pdf> [accessed June 2014], p.3

⁵ It has been pointed out that one of the effective ways to combat depression is to engage in meaningful work so that one has a “sense of purpose”. For a discussion of this, see Magdalena Błazek, Maria Kaźmierczak, Tomasz Besta,

dysfunction plagues many aboriginal communities. High rates of violence, suicide and substance abuse are endemic in aboriginal communities across the country,⁶ and even with the settlement of numerous land claims and the signing of self-government and economic development agreements, these problems show no signs of abating.⁷ As Fred Wien points out, “the rate of positive change on the available indicators has been greater for the Canadian population than it has been for the First Nations population”, and so “the gap in education levels...and on some indicators of employment and income has widened rather than narrowed”.⁸

Political economy is one of the approaches in political science that is well placed to provide insights into the causes of this continuing aboriginal marginalization, as it attempts to understand the linkages between economics and politics.⁹ Current Canadian political economy scholarship, however, has been reluctant to develop a historical and materialist¹⁰ understanding of how capitalism, over time, has shaped aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations.¹¹ There is little attempt to

“Sense of Purpose in Life and Escape from Self as the Predictors of Quality of Life in Clinical Samples”, *Journal of Religion and Health*, February 2014.

⁶ The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples extensively documented these problems in 1996 (see, for example, Final Report, 3, pp. 1-7). More recently, these problems have been noted by the Canadian Population Health Initiative, *Improving the Health of Canadians* (Ottawa: Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2004), http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/IHC2004rev_e.pdf [accessed June 2014]. Noël and Larocque point out that when the methodology of the United Nations Development Programme is used to apply its Human Development Index to the aboriginal population it would be in “32nd place, at a good distance from Canada, which stood among the top ten countries in the world”. Noël and Larocque, p.6. These poor social conditions are particularly significant for aboriginal youth. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, for example, is a problem that will impact not only current but future generations. Although methodologically rigorous studies of FAS in the aboriginal population are lacking, it is reported that “there is widespread recognition among Aboriginal communities and the population health community in Canada that FAS is prevalent and that it represents a serious health threat in many Aboriginal communities”. Michael Pacey, *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Among Aboriginal Peoples: A Review of Prevalence* (Prince George, B.C.: National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009), p. 1.

⁷ See, for example, “Poor Educational Outcomes for Aboriginal Students Threaten Canada’s Prosperity”, Policy in Focus, *Maytree*, Issue 5, September 2008; Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, “Put native women on the agenda: Tina Fontaine’s death highlights the need for a national plan to stop the epidemic of violence”, *The Globe and Mail*, August 21, 2014, p. A11; and “Tina Fontaine: To stop an epidemic”, *The Globe and Mail*, August 23, 2014, p. F9. The latter notes aboriginal communities across the country are “suffering from an epidemic of criminality, an epidemic of violence, an epidemic of victimization, an epidemic lack of education, an epidemic of joblessness, an epidemic of substance abuse and an epidemic of hopelessness”. More specifically, this editorial notes that while natives make up just 4 per cent of the population, they comprise 23 per cent of those incarcerated. With respect to education, it is noted that, in contrast to non-aboriginal Canadians’ 10 per cent high school drop out rate, the rate for Metis is 20 per cent, off-reserve Indians is 30 per cent, and on-reserve Indians is 58 per cent.

⁸ Fred Wien, “The State of the First Nation Economy and the Struggle to Make Poverty History”, Paper prepared for the Inter-Nation Trade and Economic Summit, Toronto, 2009, p. 113, cited in Rauna Kuokkanen, “From Indigenous Economies to Market-Based Self-Governance: A Feminist Political Economy Analysis”, *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, 44(2), June 2011, p. 278.

⁹ Michael Howlett et al., *The Political Economy of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-2 and Paul Phillips, *Inside Capitalism: An Introduction to Political Economy* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2003), pp. 1-5.

¹⁰ Glen Sean Coulthard has maintained that I am a “self-proclaimed ‘historical materialist’”. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 51. I assume that with the use of ironic quotation marks Coulthard is attempting to cast doubt on this circumstance, but he does not specify how my views are inconsistent with historical materialism.

¹¹ In their overview of the political economy literature, Frances Abele and Daiva Stasiulis claim that the lack of “synthetic works” on aboriginal peoples’ role in Canadian development is due to the diversity of aboriginal pre-

conceptualize aboriginal and non-aboriginal interaction in terms of modes and relations of production. The infringement of ancestral rights and the denial of political control and cultural autonomy are focused on as the sources of aboriginal marginalization, rather than the most significant causal variable historically theorized in political economy - the organization of labour and the resulting contradiction between producers and owners in class societies.

As will be elaborated upon below, this conceptualization of aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations prevails because Canadian political economy has been influenced by the ideology of parallelism.¹² Often linked to “the Left”,¹³ the term *parallelism* was coined by Alan Cairns, who describes it as “Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities travelling side by side, coexisting but not getting in each other’s way”.¹⁴ Parallelism is opposed to integrationist approaches in that it assumes that aboriginal groups and the wider Canadian society should exist separately from one another, continuously¹⁵ reproducing distinctive economies, political systems and “knowledges” or “world views”.¹⁶ Such a conception is opposed to the idea that cultural osmosis is increasingly leading all people to become part of a larger integrated system because, as

contact histories, the complexity of their relations with the Canadian state, and the belief that “generalizations tend to conceal more than they expose”. Frances Abele and Daiva Stasiulis, “Canada as a ‘White Settler Colony’: What about Natives and Immigrants”, in Wallace Clement and Glen Williams (eds), *The New Canadian Political Economy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), p.244. However, developing a theoretical framework for understanding historical development always involves unraveling complex social relations and a level of generalization. This has not prevented scholars from attempting to understand the role of different groups in global economic and political developments throughout history, so why should it be impossibly difficult to understand the role played by aboriginal peoples in the trajectory of Canada's capitalist development?

¹²I have provided a more in depth examination of parallelism elsewhere. See Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, “Introduction: Hunting Assumptions in the Search for Solutions”, in Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard (eds), *Approaches to Aboriginal Education in Canada: Searching for Solutions* (Edmonton: Brush Education, 2013), pp. xi-xiii.

¹³Noël and Larocque, for example, note that “authors, usually on the left and favorable to Aboriginal self-government, grant more importance to the cultural and political conditions created by an enduring colonial legacy and by a lack of recognition and political autonomy...”. They point to a tendency to “emphasize the mental health problems associated with cultural oppression, marginalization and uncontrolled social change, and stress the necessity of community empowerment and cultural renewal...”. As a result of these assumptions, the restoration of aboriginal rights, the settlement of land claims, and the development of autonomy through self-government agreements are perceived as the mechanisms to address the social problems in aboriginal communities Noël and Larocque, p. 12.

¹⁴Alan Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), pp. 70-3, 117, 132. Cairns’ understanding of parallelism has been incorporated into the analysis of *The Globe and Mail* columnist Jeffrey Simpson, as well as the work that I co-edited with Albert Howard, *Approaches to Aboriginal Education in Canada*. In 2014, Jeffrey Simpson gave the F.H. Scott Lecture at McGill University criticizing parallelist initiatives. In this lecture, he maintained that parallelism “places Aboriginals on a separate and distinct path from mainstream Canadian society, therefore preventing them from fully integrating and experiencing the benefits afforded to others”. Nadir Khan, “Review of the F.R. Scott Annual Lecture: Jeffrey Simpson Gets it Dead Wrong”, *McGill International Review*, October 24, 2014, <http://mironline.ca/?p=2233> [accessed April 2015].

¹⁵This is why Coulthard maintains that attachment to culture is “permanent” not “transitional”. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, pp. 23, 153-4.

¹⁶These words are put in ironic quotation marks to indicate that they are ideologically loaded, and used to support the highly questionable claims of parallelism. The notion of a “world view” is so vague that it cannot be accepted without further elaboration. The notion of “knowledges” is problematic because it assumes that knowledge cannot be universal, which is the essence of the concept. I have discussed this elsewhere (with Albert Howard). See Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, “Indigenous Knowledge(s) and the Academy: Facilitating Decolonization or Disguising Aboriginal Marginalization?”, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Socialist Studies, Saskatoon, May 30-June 2, 2007.

parallelist entities like the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples assert,¹⁷ "individuals are born into [distinct] cultures, and they secure their personal identity through the group into which they are born. This is their birthright, and it demands...recognition and respect...and the protection of the state".¹⁸

The influence of parallelist ideology in Canadian political economy has led to an idealistic view of history. As will be shown below, the ideology of parallelism requires a selective reading of historical evidence; views that support aboriginal autonomy are eagerly accepted, while those that challenge it are opposed because they are claimed to justify colonialism. The social implications of separation are not questioned because aboriginal beliefs and practices (i.e. cultural features) are imputed to be genetically determined, enabling cultural transformation to be labelled "genocide". As a result, many political economists now conclude that it is both possible and beneficial to rejuvenate aboriginal traditions in the modern context, so as to develop separate and self-reliant economies and political systems. This view ignores the huge difference in development that existed historically between tribal subsistence cultures and emerging industrial nation-states, resulting in proposals that will increase aboriginal marginalization and social conflict. It also fails to consider how increasing separation impedes the development of a species-based identity – the ultimate political aspiration of socialism.¹⁹

Parallelism and Political Economy

Wallace Clement has characterized political economy as "a holistic approach to understanding society from a materialist perspective" that "connects the economic, political, and cultural/ideological moments of social life".²⁰ Rather than examining political institutions, cultural features and ideologies in abstraction, political economy attempts to explain these phenomena by indicating how they have historically emerged in association with the development of productive and distributive practices. A historical sequence of events is constructed and analyzed to determine a materialist chain of causes and effects. In opposition to idealist theories that perceive history as the outcome of a "clash of wills" that arise spontaneously and inexplicably, political economy asks how human ideas and actions are *ultimately* socially determined by the "production and reproduction of real life".²¹

A focus on the historical development of production and exchange has meant that studies of indigenous peoples in Canadian political economy have tended to concentrate on the fur trade era

¹⁷ The Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is the quintessential parallelist document. This is the subject of my unpublished manuscript *Separate But Unequal: How Parallelist Ideology Conceals the Roots of Aboriginal Welfare Dependency*.

¹⁸ *Final Report*, 1, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

¹⁹ In Marxism, this is referred to as "species being" or the ultimate realization of one's potential as a human being that can only be realized with the eradication of class division and alienation. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)* in Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), pp. 327-329.

²⁰ Clement defines "materialist" as "a perspective that begins with the assumption that the relations between people are fundamentally shaped by the way a society reproduces itself. How people make a living - for example, as use-value producers, commodity producers for sale, or wage earners - strongly influences how they are formed as social beings". For a further discussion see Wallace Clement, "Introduction: Whither the New Canadian Political Economy?", in Wallace Clement (ed), *Understanding Canada: Building on the New Canadian Political Economy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p.3

²¹ Letter from Frederick Engels to J. Bloch, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works*, Volume 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 487 [emphasis in the original].

because aboriginal peoples were integral participants as fur harvesters and middlemen. This was in contrast to the later economic and political developments that shaped the character of the Canadian federation, where aboriginal peoples were minimally involved. Because of political economy's focus on production and exchange, aboriginal peoples were largely ignored as a subject of Canadian political economy when the fur trade declined and Canada began to industrialize. Since aboriginal peoples were displaced from their traditional territories and contained in unviable areas of the country to facilitate agricultural and industrial development, they were not significant players in the production of economic value during this time, and as such, were deemed as "irrelevant" to Canada's political and economic development.²²

Because of its focus on native participation in the pursuit of mercantile wealth and/or capitalist production and exchange, however, traditional political economy generally has been seen as inadequate for analyzing the circumstances of aboriginal peoples.²³ It is accused of failing to understand what is perceived as the flourishing and renewal of aboriginal cultures, and the "political agency" that has enabled the native population to resist colonialism and avoid integration into industrial capitalism. There is criticism that aboriginal peoples are portrayed as an "historical relic", and that their societies are "dead or doomed".²⁴ It is now asserted, to the contrary, that native economic, political and intellectual traditions are viable in the modern context, and their promotion will benefit aboriginal peoples and society more generally.²⁵

These assertions have initiated a shift in Canadian political economy. Instead of perceiving the task of political economy as developing a general theory to explain "what happened" in history, and incorporating previously ignored evidence to enhance this understanding, it is now argued that the field should incorporate aboriginal "conceptions of history". This will require a transformation of political economy itself because, as Frances Abele points out, "the reality of history itself, as an enterprise, is conceived differently by historians of at least some Indigenous nations". Therefore, "integrating the historical knowledge and analysis of...[aboriginal peoples] is not simply a matter of including the information they provide; it is a matter of understanding history in a *different way* and of finding some means to include a quite different view of the individual in society, and in history, from that now common [emphasis added]".²⁶ Such a

²² Bruce G. Trigger, "The Historians' Indian: Native Americans in Canadian Historical Writing from Charlevoix to the Present", *Canadian Historical Review* LXVII: 3 (1986), pp. 323-5.

²³ Terry Wotherspoon and Vic Satzewich, *First Nations: Race, Class and Gender Relations* (Scarborough: Nelson, 2000), p. 12.

²⁴ Frances Abele and Daiva Stasiulis, "Canada as a 'White Settler Colony': What about Natives and Immigrants", in Wallace Clement and Glen Williams (eds), *The New Canadian Political Economy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), pp. 254, 269; see also Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto, Second Edition* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 83.

²⁵ Frances Abele, for example, approvingly quotes Kerry Abel "whose purpose in writing Dene history is explicitly practical and political". As part of this "practical and political" agenda, Abel maintains that "small but dynamic aboriginal societies continue to exist among us; we need to recognize that fact and attempt to understand the aspirations of those who want to safeguard a future of continuing choices for their children". Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), p. 269, in Frances Abele, "Understanding What Happened Here: The Political Economy of Indigenous Peoples", in Wallace Clement (ed) *Understanding Canada: Building on the New Canadian Political Economy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), pp. 123-4.

²⁶ Abele, "Understanding What Happened Here", pp. 124-5.

transformation, it is maintained, will increase Canadians' understanding of the past, as well as being consistent with the aspirations of aboriginal peoples.²⁷

Demands to understand history in a "different way" in political economy, however, indicates how the field has been influenced by the ideology of parallelism. The ideology is deferred to because aboriginal organizations and spokespeople maintain that, at the time of contact, aboriginal peoples intended that their "territories were to be shared" but "parallel paths of European and indigenous cultures were to be followed in a peaceful and mutually beneficial way".²⁸ This vision, also known as the "Two Row Wampum" conception of aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations, is based on the metaphor of "two parallel rows of purple wampum [that] represent two vessels travelling upon the river", where "the river is large enough for the two vessels to travel together". It is maintained that one metaphorical vessel (usually a canoe) will contain aboriginal peoples, and the other Europeans, each with different "laws, traditions, customs, language and spiritual beliefs". With this parallel development, "neither...shall intersect or interfere with the lives of the other. Neither side shall attempt to impose their laws, traditions, customs, language or spirituality on the people in the other vessel. Such shall be the agreement of mutual respect accorded in the Two Row Wampum".²⁹ This view assumes that aboriginal peoples and Europeans or "white people" will always remain separate from one another with different laws, beliefs and "ways",³⁰ and it is integrationist pressures that are responsible for continuing aboriginal marginalization. The desire to support the aspirations of aboriginal organizations has impeded critical analysis of what really amounts to segregation, discouraging questions from being raised about how further isolating aboriginal communities could be socially beneficial.

Widespread support for parallelism has been made possible by what, the New Zealand political economist, Elizabeth Rata refers to as the assumptions of "culturalism". In her examination of aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations in New Zealand, Rata notes that culturalism has resulted in Maori traditions being abstracted from historical processes of change,³¹ and culture (learned

²⁷ Wotherspoon and Satzewich also maintain that "for an increasing number of scholars, expressing their voices as Aboriginal people is vital not only for making sense of a colonial past but also, and more importantly, as a critical precondition for developing effective strategies for a post-colonial world". Wotherspoon and Satzewich, *First Nations*, p. xxiv.

²⁸ Tom Keefer, for example, notes that "The 'Two Row Wampum' was an agreement made between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch in 1613. It used the imagery of two separate vessels traveling down the same river to conceptualize Indigenous and settler relations. The essence of the agreement was that neither party would try to 'steer the other's vessel' and that peace and coexistence was possible between two different social systems". Tom Keefer, "Marxism, Indigenous Struggles, and the Tragedy of 'Stagism'", *Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action*, 10, May 2010, note 6, p. 113. Keefer provides no evidence or references to support this assertion. There is no recognition of the controversy surrounding this treaty. Some scholars have maintained, for example, that the Treaty of Tawagonshi of 1613, upon which the idea of the "Two Row Wampum" is based, is a fake. For a further discussion of this see William Starna, Charles Gehring, and William Fenton, "The Tawagonshi Treaty of 1613: The Final Chapter," *New York History*, 1987. For a discussion of the controversy, see Glenn Coin, "Two Row Wampum agreement is real even though written treaty is fake, Journal of Early American History says in special issues", http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2013/07/two_row_wampum_treaty_fake_journal_of_early_american_history.html [accessed May 2015]

²⁹ Cross, quoted in *Final Report*, 4, p. 120.

³⁰ Haudenosaunee Confederacy, quoted in *Final Report*, 1, p. 103.

³¹ Elizabeth Rata, "Rethinking Biculturalism", *Anthropological Theory*, 2005 5, p. 270.

behaviour) being causally connected to the group's ancestry. This leads the culture of Maori to be perceived as rooted in "race",³² because, as Rata explains,

cultural values and practices are considered to be fixed in a primordial past and linked to that past by the spirits of the ancestors. Only members 'of the blood' can fully understand the culture...because the spiritual link is created from primordial origins down through the generations. In this way, references to the spiritual character of the group replace direct references to racial links. Biological inheritance as members of a racial or ethnic group...is social destiny in this approach because 'what we do' is caused by 'who we are', that is, our 'blood' carried through the generations by ancestral spirits.³³

Critics of parallelism in the United States and Canada refer to this by a variety of terms – nativism,³⁴ aboriginalism,³⁵ and exoticism³⁶ – but essentially it amounts to an attempt to tie aboriginal culture to ancestral (i.e. "racial") characteristics to imply that indigenous traditions are immutable. This supports the claim, common in parallelism, that aboriginal people will lose their true nature if they are integrated into a modern nation-state. It is these culturalist assumptions, in fact, that enables the term "genocide" to be used in the context of the loss of aboriginal traditions.³⁷

³² References to "race" have now become very difficult for both political and scientific reasons. Scientifically, it is difficult because of the amount of hybridization and the fact that genetically isolated populations no longer exist. Politically, the idea of "race" is has been rejected because it is believed that linkages between genetics and individual characteristics could justify the oppression of particular groups.

³³ The first discussion of primordialism occurred in Edward Shills, "Primordial, personal, sacred and civil ties", *British Journal of Sociology*, 1957, 8(2), pp. 130-45.

³⁴ Rolf Knight, *Nativism and Americanism: A critical account of Native claims and fantasies in Canada and the United States*, 2014, <http://www.rolfknight.ca/index.htm> [accessed April 2015], p. 5. Knight notes that political arguments for aboriginal autonomy are rooted in "nativism". Nativism, according to Knight, "is the proposition that the native-born, usually with an ancestry of some generations, should direct America (or Canada) and that all things foreign to that society are to be distrusted and opposed". With respect to the aboriginal population, it is linked to romanticism and proposals aimed at resurrecting "alleged past ways of life". Native romanticism believes that "every identifiable group had its own unique culture which has come down from time immemorial" and that cultural change is "synonymous with loss and derogation" and even "cultural genocide". The resurrection of the past is encouraged because of the subordinate position aboriginal peoples have held in the wider society. There is a lack of understanding of the extent aboriginal culture has changed since contact, and there are "mythic reconstructions of aboriginal society which never have nor ever could have existed". Nativism also is a view held by those "who wish the world to be more spiritual, more localist, more conservationist; a world more given to all the superstitions and restrictions which people have inherited from the past and have only recently broken free from". Hardship and oppression in traditional societies are glossed over, and working class members of society are perceived as contaminating a more pure and natural existence.

³⁵ Robert McGhee, a Curator with the Canadian Museum of Civilization, further notes that such romantic primitivism is referred to in French as *nostalgie de la boue* (literally "wistfulness [homesickness] for mud"). Robert McGhee, "Between Racism and Romanticism, Scientism and Spiritualism", Kooyman and Kelley (eds), *Archaeology on the Edge* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004). See also Roger Sandall, *The Culture Cult* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), for a similar discussion of "romantic primitivism".

³⁶ Ingo W. Schröder, "The political economy of tribalism in North America: neotribal capitalism?", *Anthropological Theory* 3(4), 2003, pp. 435-456.

³⁷ David Bedford and Danielle Irving, *The Tragedy of Progress* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2001), pp.11-12; Howard Adams, *A Tortured People* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1995), p.29; Keefer, "Marxism, Indigenous Struggles, and the Tragedy of 'Stagism'", p. 101; and Paul Martin, "Indigenous thought belongs in the classroom", *The Globe and Mail*, February 9, 2015. Leanne Simpson now refers to the loss of Indigenous languages as "linguistic genocide". Leanne Simpson, "Our elder brothers: The lifeblood of resurgences", in L. Simpson (ed.), *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence and Protection of Indigenous Nations* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2008), p.76.

The assertion that aboriginal societies have “primordial origins” and have an essence or “core” that remains fundamentally unchanged over time means that traditions can be restored by aboriginal agency acting independently of historical and material circumstances.³⁸ In New Zealand, as in Canada, this has resulted in a change in policy from attempting to form closer relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples – i.e. integration - to a “bi-ethnic division” (parallelism). The policy shift is due to the assumption that this division can never be crossed, even intellectually, because non-aboriginal people can never have a full understanding of indigenous “ways”. This view, according to Rata, is due to the notion that there are special aboriginal forms of “knowledge” that are tied to ancestry, resulting in the demand for separate indigenous institutions, especially those connected to education.³⁹

In Canada, the support for parallelism is buttressed by another ideological element that is becoming increasingly prominent in political economy – what Terrence Ball et al. refer to as “the politics of identity and entitlement”.⁴⁰ The politics of identity and entitlement asserts that groups come to identify with one another because of a history of shared oppression and exclusion, and that their emancipation is connected to efforts to change the social beliefs that justify their marginalization and inhibit their capacity for liberation. The lack of recognition of marginalized group identities is viewed as discriminatory and oppressive, resulting in demands that these movements be portrayed in a positive light and compensated for past ill-treatment.⁴¹ Accepting the arguments of Charles Taylor, proponents of the politics of identity and entitlement assume that “we owe equal respect to all cultures” since they “have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time” and therefore “have something important to say to all human beings”. These cultures, it is asserted, can “suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves”.⁴²

Parallelist support for portraying aboriginal groups in a positive light, however, comes into conflict with one of the major concerns of an academic pursuit like political economy – the

³⁸ This is why Taiaiake Alfred asserts that aboriginal people “have a responsibility to recover, understand, and preserve [aboriginal traditional] values”. Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power Righteousness*, p. 5, cited in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, pp. 154-5. Coulthard promotes similar comments by Leanne Simpson that “[decolonization] requires us to reclaim the very best practices of our traditional cultures, knowledge systems and lifeways in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context in which they were originally generated”. Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, pp. 17-18, quoted in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 155. Although it is recognized that culture is malleable and traditions change, Alfred maintains that there can be still an identification of “beliefs, values and principles that form the persistent core of a community’s culture” and that this is the “traditional framework that we must use as the basis on which to build a better society”. Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, p. xviii, cited in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 156.

³⁹ For a discussion of this in the Canadian context see Widdowson and Howard, “Hunting Assumptions in the Search for Solutions”, pp. xiv-xvii.

⁴⁰ T. Ball, R. Dagger, W. Christian, & C. Campbell, *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, 3rd Canadian Edition, (Toronto: Pearson, 2013), pp. 221–246. See also Alan C. Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, Unpublished research paper, University of Waterloo, December 19, 2008.

⁴¹ Ball et al., p. 223. For a very good example of the politics of entitlement and identity in the Aboriginal context, see Taiaiake Alfred, “Colonial Stains on Our Existence”, in M.J. Cannon and L. Sunseri (eds), *Racism, Colonialism and Indigenaity* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 4, 8–9.

⁴² Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 25, 66-7. For a discussion of the application of Taylor’s ideas to indigenous recognition, see Glen S. Coulthard, “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Recognition in Canada”, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6, 2007, pp. 440-443.

requirement for political economists to critically evaluate claims about the world and state the truth as they see it. What happens, for example, if an aboriginal organization is offended by a finding that is based on reason, evidence and logic? To resolve this contradiction between advocacy and truth seeking, the philosophy of “postmodernism” - defined by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont as "an intellectual current characterized by the more-or-less explicit rejection of the rationalist tradition of the Enlightenment, by theoretical discourses disconnected from any empirical test, and by a cognitive and cultural relativism that regards science as nothing more than a 'narration', a 'myth' or a social construction among many others"⁴³ – is deployed.⁴⁴ Postmodernism encourages political economists inspired by parallelism to avoid conclusions that are inconsistent with their ideology by maintaining that all research findings are shaped by the "ethnocentric" perceptions of the theorist; no agreement about the relationship between aboriginal peoples and "Westerners" can be found since they have "different" yet "equally valid" understandings of their circumstances. The result is a relativistic and idealistic analysis that impedes political economy's inquiry into aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations and the root causes of aboriginal marginalization.

Parallelism and the Uncritical Acceptance of the Internal Colonial Model

The postmodern concern with incorporating “Native ways of being” and the “differing perceptions” of aboriginal peoples has led Canadian political economy to move away from analyzing aboriginal peoples in the context of "the actions of capitalism and the state" since this "fails to account for the ability of aboriginal peoples to respond creatively to the challenges to their ways of life and their determination to struggle to maintain autonomy against pressures to assimilate them into a national norm".⁴⁵ It also has resulted in the perception that the most significant political cleavage in Canadian history is between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples.⁴⁶ This view cuts across class lines, creating the impression that all non-aboriginals

⁴³ Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador USA, 1998), p. 1.

⁴⁴ Deborah Simmons, for example, maintains that “science, thoroughly rooted in the history of capitalism, the state, and empire, is mobilized through alienated or ‘objective’ ideological frames that are easily turned to the service of profit, dispossession and environmental destruction”. She goes on to assert that “when scientific knowledge is detached from its own ongoing processes of inquiry, it soon becomes dogma, a weapon of repression and exploitation”. Simmons, “Residual Stalinism”, *Upping the Anti*, 11, 2011, <http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/11-residual-stalinism/> [accessed May 2015]. With these statements Simmons is engaged in the usual postmodern conflation of epistemology with questions concerning the sociology of knowledge and ethics. For a further discussion of this problem in postmodernism see Alan Sokal, “What the Social Text Affair Does and Does Not Prove”, in Noretta Koertge (ed), *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), <http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/noretta.html> [accessed May 2015].

⁴⁵ Michael Asch, “Native Peoples”, in Daniel Drache & Wallace Clement (eds), *The New Practical Guide to Canadian Political Economy* (Toronto: James Lorimar & Company, 1985), p. 152.

⁴⁶ Coulthard, for example, is critical of Marx's “largely incidental” concern about “the specific character of colonial domination” because he maintains that our attention should be shifted to “the colonial frame”. This does not result in ignoring class struggle, according to Coulthard, because colonialism is not perceived “as a primary locus or ‘base’ from which...other forms of oppression flow, but rather as the inherited background field within which market, racist, patriarchal, and state relations converge to facilitate a certain power effect – in our case, the reproduction of hierarchical social relations that facilitate the dispossession of [aboriginal] lands and self-determining capacities”. He also maintains that “it should be clear that shifting our position to highlight the ongoing effects of colonial dispossession in no way displaces questions of distributive justice or class struggle; rather, it simply situates these questions more firmly alongside and in relation to the other sites and relations of power that inform our settler-

benefited equally from the marginalization of aboriginal peoples, and all aboriginal people were equally marginalized.⁴⁷ The focus is on the alleged violation⁴⁸ of ancestral and/or legal rights,⁴⁹ rather than linking aboriginal marginalization to the most significant causal variable in political economy – the organization of labour and the resulting “contradictory social relationship between producers and non-producers, entailing mutual dependence but also entailing mutual power”.⁵⁰ Legal arrangements constructed hundreds of years ago are fetishized⁵¹ rather than being conceptualized as a result of productive processes⁵² and “the specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of the direct producers”.⁵³

colonial present”. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, pp. 10, 14-15. But by seeing the “colonial relation” as an “inherited background field”, it is abstracted from its historical and material foundations. This effectively “displaces” the fundamental explanatory variable – class struggle – from political economy.

⁴⁷For a discussion of this point see Wotherspoon and Satzewich, *First Nations*, pp. 9-10. This view of the relationship between aboriginal-and-non aboriginal peoples is present in the work of Taiaiake Alfred. In his most recent assertions, Alfred occasionally refers to “the white elite”, but it is usually aboriginals versus whites or “settlers” that dominates his analysis. Alfred, “Foreword”, in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, pp. ix-xi. Alfred’s major focus is “the dominance of white people on the North American continent and the removal and erasure of our people, our laws, and our cultures from our homelands”. This view is also present, albeit in a more sophisticated form, in the work of Coulthard. Coulthard advocates a “...contextual shift in analysis from the capital-relation to the colonial-relation...”. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 11. Although not stated explicitly, this appears to involve a shift from examining the conflicts between capital and labour to those generated between settlers and indigenous people.

⁴⁸This has become increasingly difficult to ascertain academically because of the significant influence of legal scholars working for aboriginal organizations. For a discussion of the role of “academic activism and legal scholarship”, see Cairns, *Citizens Plus*, pp. 175-188. Cairns notes that in their attempts to “maximize the autonomy of First Nations” by devising innovative constitutional doctrine”, these scholars “are more akin to an intellectual social movement than participants in a broad-ranging debate with checks and balances”. Cairns, *Citizens Plus*, pp. 178-9.

⁴⁹Joyce Green, for example, maintains that “decolonization implies wealth sharing with those who had their lands and wealth appropriated”, where “wealth sharing” is to be derived from non-aboriginals and all Aborigines are perceived as having their “lands and wealth appropriated”. Green, “Decolonization and Recolonization in Canada”, p. 54. See also Deborah Lee Simmons, *Against Capital: The Political Economy of Aboriginal Resistance in Canada*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, York University, p. 43 for a discussion of this point.

⁵⁰Leo Panitch, “Dependency and Class in Canadian Political Economy”, in Gordon Laxer (ed), *Perspectives on Canadian Economic Development: Class, Staples, Gender and Elites* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 273

⁵¹Fetishism is defined in anthropology as the belief, common in tribal societies, that supernatural powers infuse inanimate objects. In Marxism, this term was used to show how the true nature of commodities – i.e. the fact that their value was derived from the labour that made them – was mystified in capitalism. Dino Felluga, “Modules on Marx: On Fetishism.” *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, <http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/marxism/modules/marxfetishism.html> [accessed May 2015]. In parallelism, treaties are fetishized because they are perceived as being “sacred and enduring”, rather than being connected to particular economic and political circumstances. Early treaties, for example, were oriented towards facilitating the fur trade, while treaties signed during the period of industrialization were concerned with the cession of lands. For a further discussion of this see Frances Widdowson, *The Political Economy of Aboriginal Dependency*, pp. 266-280.

⁵²The fact that the original treaties did not involve the ceding of lands, while later ones did, was due to the different economic and political circumstances out of which each arose. The fur trade did not require strict controls over plots of land because no labour was added to it. Value in the fur trade was created by the killing of animals and the treatment and transportation of furs, which was not tied to a particular area of land; this differed from the adding of labour that occurred in agricultural settlement and later industrial developments. As a result, boundaries at this time were much more fluid. This is shown by a treaty of 1794, which allowed free passage of aboriginals from the United States to Canada to engage in trading activities. For a discussion of this treaty, see Russel Lawrence Barsh

The assumption that the aboriginal-non-aboriginal cleavage trumps class conflict as the significant force in history has led to the increasing prominence of the “internal colonial model” in Canadian political economy.⁵⁴ This model compares the historical circumstances of aboriginal groups to the colonized areas of the third world,⁵⁵ arguing that aboriginal peoples were subject to similar processes of domination. The main difference referred to is that the native population remains “inside the boundaries of the state which colonized it”, and as a result, the colonizer cannot be expected to “go home”.⁵⁶ Discussions of colonization also differ in that the cultures of aboriginal peoples are not seen instrumentally, as a transitional mechanism for transforming the conditions of the colonized, but as “*permanent features of...decolonial political projects...*”.⁵⁷

The notion of aboriginal cultural traditions being “permanent” in the application of the internal colonial model to aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations is due to culturalist assumptions about “primordial” aboriginal “nations”.⁵⁸ In the “primordialist paradigm” of studies of nationalism, it is maintained that nations “exist in the first order of time, and lie at the root of subsequent processes and developments”.⁵⁹ While this notion has fallen out of favour in mainstream studies of nationalism,⁶⁰ and it is noted that “only nationalist ideologues tend to assert ‘primordialist’ positions so strong that they imply that nations have existed in anything close to their modern

and James Youngblood Henderson (Apamuwek Institute), “International Context of Crown-Aboriginal Treaties in Canada”, *For Seven Generations* (Ottawa: Libraxus, 1997).

⁵³ Marx, *Capital*, III (Moscow, 1959), p. 772, cited in Panitch, “Dependency and Class in Canadian Political Economy”, p. 273.

⁵⁴ For examples of this approach see Mel Watkins, “Preface”, *Dene Nation*, p. xi; Gail Kellough, “From Colonialism to Economic Imperialism: The Experience of the Canadian Indian”, in J. Harp and J.R. Hufley (eds), *Structured Inequality in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1980), pp. 343-373; Joyce A. Green, “Towards a Détente with History: Confronting Canada’s Colonial Legacy”, *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 12 (Fall 1995), pp. 85-105; Norman Zlotkin and Donald R. Colborne, “Internal Canadian Imperialism and the Native People”, in John Saul and Craig Heron (eds), *Imperialism, Nationalism and Canada* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1977), pp. 161-185; and Rennie Warburton, “Status, Class and the Politics of Canadian Aboriginal Peoples”, *Studies in Political Economy* 54 (Fall 1997), pp. 119-141.

⁵⁵ John Loxley characterizes the northern areas inhabited mostly by aboriginal peoples as a “divergent economy”, which “like most underdeveloped national economies of the world...lacks internal linkages because what is produced locally is not consumed locally and what is consumed locally is not produced locally”. According to Loxley, imports constitute a large part of the native communities and there is a “high dependence...on state transfer payments from outside the region”. John Loxley, “The ‘Great Northern’ Plan”, *Studies in Canadian Political Economy* 6 (Autumn 1981), p.158.

⁵⁶ Jack Hicks, “On the Application of Theories of ‘Internal Colonialism’ to Inuit Societies”, Presentation for the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, Winnipeg, June 5, 2004, p. 1; Green, “Decolonization and Recolonization in Canada”, p. 53.

⁵⁷ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 23. See also Keefer, “Marxism, Indigenous Struggles, and the Tragedy of ‘Stagism’”, p. 111, where the destruction of “traditional culture” is lamented.

⁵⁸ The word “nation” appears with ironic quotation marks because the application of this concept to aboriginal groups in political science is contested. For an analysis of the debates surrounding the application of this concept see Frances Widdowson, Ezra Voth and Miranda Anderson, “Studying Indigenous Politics in Canada: Assessing Political Science’s Understanding of Traditional Aboriginal Governance”, Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, Edmonton, June 13-15, 2012, pp. 5-12.

⁵⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press), p. 51. The biological version of this paradigm “holds that nations, ethnic groups and races can be traced to the underlying genetic reproductive drives of individuals and their use of strategies of ‘nepotism’ and ‘inclusive fitness’ to maximize their gene pools”, while the cultural version “holds that ethnic groups and nations are formed on the basis of attachments to the ‘cultural givens’ of social existence”, pp. 52-53.

⁶⁰ One exception is the case of what Eric Hobsbawm refers to as “identity history”. Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 2002), pp. 356-8.

form since the beginnings of history”,⁶¹ these assumptions underpin parallelist discussions of aboriginal nationalism. These discussions assert that aboriginal marginalization can be addressed largely by “[revitalizing] aboriginal nations”⁶² that are claimed to have existed at the time of contact.⁶³ A primordial conception of aboriginal nationhood also means that “Aboriginal people’s sense of confidence and well-being as individuals remains tied to the strength of their nations”, so that that these nations must be “restored” to enable aboriginal people to “reach their potential in the twenty-first century”.⁶⁴

The prominence of the internal colonial model in Canadian political economy means that the focus of the analysis becomes aboriginal national self-determination. From this standpoint, there are two areas singled out to explain the marginalization of the aboriginal population – the destruction of a “land base”⁶⁵ and attempts at assimilation. As a result of this historical analysis, increasing the amount of land for aboriginal groups and aboriginal political autonomy, as well as preserving cultural distinctiveness, are proposed for “decolonization”. It is maintained that “*settler-colonialism is territorially acquisitive in perpetuity* [emphasis in the original]”,⁶⁶ but the historical and materialist reasons for this are not discussed. There is no linkage of the “territorial acquisitiveness” of the capitalist system with its exploitation of labour. “Land” and “resources” are assumed to be valuable in their own right, and not because of the labour that has been applied to them.⁶⁷

In three recent articles for *New Socialist*, for example, it is argued that the legal recognition of aboriginal title is an important element of aboriginal peoples’ anti-colonial struggle.⁶⁸ In these articles, the amount of land and resources aboriginal peoples own, not the exploitation of labour, is the focus, and conflict is perceived as being “between Indigenous Peoples and Canadians”. The vision of the future promoted is that of “the two row wampum”, where aboriginal sovereignty is recognized so that the native population can live as nations in their territories. The Canadian political system is not conceptualized in relation to capitalist imperatives, but in terms of its ability to make “settlers rich at the expense of Indigenous Peoples Aboriginal Title and Rights [sic]”.

A similar conceptualization of aboriginal circumstances is found in Glen Sean Coulthard’s recent book, *Red Skin, White Masks*. In this book, Coulthard maintains that the recognition of aboriginal cultural distinctiveness must come from aboriginals, not non-aboriginals, because

⁶¹ Craig J. Calhoun, *Nationalism*, p. 31.

⁶² See *Final Report*, 2(1), pp. 177-183; 2(2), p. 1019; 5, pp. 5-7.

⁶³ Alan Cairns, *Citizens Plus* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), pp. 128-132.

⁶⁴ *People to People*, p.x.

⁶⁵ This notion has been put in ironic quotes because it is hopelessly muddled in the literature, as capitalist development and the pursuit of traditional hunting and gathering practices are conflated.

⁶⁶ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 152.

⁶⁷ The reason why land is singled out is because indigenous perspectives maintain that it has “intrinsic value”. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 14.

⁶⁸ Russell Diabo, “The Tsilhqot’in Decision and Canada’s First Nations Termination Policies”, *New Socialist*, January 13, 2015, <http://www.newsocialist.org/782-the-tsilhqot-in-decision-and-canada-s-first-nations-termination-policies> [accessed May 2015]; Arthur Manuel, “The Tsilhqot’in Decision and Indigenous Self-Determination”, *New Socialist Webzine*, January 25, 2015, <http://www.newsocialist.org/785-the-tsilhqot-in-decision-and-indigenous-self-determination>; and Russell Diabo and Shiri Pasternak, “Canada Responds to Tsilhqot’in Decision: Extinguishment or Nothing!”, *New Socialist*, February 8, 2015, <http://www.newsocialist.org/component/taxonomy/indigenous%20struggle> [accessed May 2015].

relying on the gaze of settlers perpetuates colonialism. He consequently outlines an “alternative politics” where indigenous cultural practices are affirmed by aboriginal peoples themselves to aid empowerment.⁶⁹ To do this, Coulthard purports to develop a “placed-based” version of Marx’s primitive accumulation theory in conjunction with Frantz Fanon’s conceptualization of decolonization, so that aboriginal peoples will be able to resist “the continued dispossession of [their] homelands and the ongoing usurpation of [their] self-determining authority”.⁷⁰ In this way, Coulthard proposes a politics of recognition that he believes will serve aboriginal people rather than the interests of “settler-colonial power”.⁷¹

Instead of examining aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations through the historical and materialist lens of class exploitation and struggle, Coulthard’s ideas about aboriginal “self-recognition”⁷² and empowerment lead him to focus on indigenous control over land and restoring primordial aboriginal cultures as the mechanisms for future aboriginal-non-aboriginal reconciliation.⁷³ According to Coulthard,

the theory and practice of Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land* - a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms – and less around our emergent status as ‘rightless proletarians.’ I call this place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice *grounded normativity*, by which I mean the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time [emphasis in the original].⁷⁴

What is mentioned, but not explained, by Coulthard is that “it appears that the history and experience of *dispossession*, not proletarianization, has been the dominant background structure shaping the character of the historical relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state”.⁷⁵ Coulthard’s acceptance of “recognition” as being the key variable in politics leads him to minimize the analysis of class struggle in his theorization of colonization,⁷⁶ making any comparison of aboriginal circumstances with those of the third world (and the use of Fanon and Marx) strained. He does not discuss how third world colonies were subjected to what Erik Olin Wright has called “exploitative oppression” because the colonizer needed the local population for their labour. Wright points out that this kind of colonization did not occur in the case of

⁶⁹ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p.24.

⁷¹ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 24.

⁷² It appears that non-aboriginal recognition is acceptable as long as it supports the aspirations of aboriginal organizations. Coulthard’s work, as well as that of Taiaiake Alfred, for example, has been strongly influenced by the work of James Tully.

⁷³ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p.18.

⁷⁴ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 13.

⁷⁶ Coulthard, in fact, puts the word “class” in ironic quotation marks and criticizes Marxism’s “economic reductionism” and the “ideology of productivism”. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, pp. 7, 14.

North American Indians, and policies of genocide or “displacement” often ensued because aboriginal labour was not required by European conquerors.⁷⁷

Political economy needs to explain *why* the members of third world colonies were needed for their labour, while aboriginal peoples in Canada generally were not. The unquestioned application of the internal colonial model, however, has prevented political economists from exploring this question. This has diminished political economy’s understanding that, unlike a number of third world colonies, aboriginal peoples’ historical role in what is now Canada was not as exploited labour,⁷⁸ but as kinship oriented groups exchanging goods on “extremely disadvantageous terms”.⁷⁹ Because Canadian fur traders were able to use the practices, skills and knowledge that aboriginal peoples possessed as hunters and gathers to realize large profits in Europe, it was obviously in the interest of British and French merchants to “co-operate” with the native population. But when the profitability of the fur trade declined, and Canada was making the transition from mercantile to industrial capitalism, it was more profitable for the emerging Canadian state to import farmers and craftsmen from Europe, where the skills had been accumulated over a number of generations, than to spend the time and financial resources needed to provide aboriginal groups with the cultural prerequisites for participation in disciplined and coordinated economic activity.⁸⁰ The impracticality of plantation agriculture, as well as the sparse populations of aboriginal peoples in early Canadian history, also created conditions for aboriginal marginalization since the lands that natives occupied, not their labour, was sought in the transition to industrial capitalism.⁸¹

As a result of this history of non-exploitative oppression, aboriginal peoples have not been integrated into the Canadian labour force, remaining marginalized from productive processes on unviable reserves and isolated communities. The lack of economic potential in these areas has meant that they are heavily subsidized by the Canadian state. This means that any “economic development” that occurs largely takes the form of a rentier economy,⁸² where royalties, subsidies and various forms of welfare are distributed in traditional kinship networks.⁸³ The

⁷⁷ Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 11. For similar views see David Bedford and D. Irving, *The Tragedy of Progress* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2001) p. 25 and Peter Kulchyski, “Socialism and Native Americans”, *Rabble*, December 11, 2003.

⁷⁸ Ron Bourgeault, “Race and Class Under Mercantilism”, in B.S. Bolaria and P.S. Li (eds), *Racial Oppression in Canada* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988), p. 42; Abele and Stasiulis, “Canada as a ‘White Settler Colony’”, p. 252-3.

⁷⁹ H. Clare Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimar and Company, 1981), p. 23.

⁸⁰ For a detailed examination of this circumstance see Frances Widdowson, *The Political Economy of Aboriginal Dependency: A Critique of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, York University, 2006.

⁸¹ P. Ehrensaft and W. Armstrong, “The Formation of Dominion Capitalism”, in A. Moscovitch and G. Drover (eds), *Inequality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 140-4.

⁸² For a discussion of rentierism with respect to aboriginal economies see Frances Widdowson, “The Political Economy of Nunavut: Internal Colony or Rentier Territory?”, Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, London, Ontario, 2005 and John R. Minnis, “First Nations Education and Rentier Economics: Parallels with the Gulf States”, *Canadian Journal of Education*, 29(4), 2006, pp. 975-997.

⁸³ In the case of aboriginal groups in the north, in fact, Mel Watkins notes that it is aboriginal land, not labour, that is sought since “non-native labour is generally readily available from the South” since it is “trained” and “disciplined” in comparison...”. Watkins, “From Underdevelopment to Development”, *Dene Nation*, pp. 88-91. He maintains that, in any event, this is not a significant problem since aboriginal peoples may not want to become wage labourers since this would “deny them their role as the land-owners who should be entitled to appropriate the rents from projects which they choose to let proceed on their land”.

economic surplus used to reproduce aboriginal communities is not internally generated, thereby making the native population perpetually dependent on the wider society to produce most of what they need. The ideology of parallelism, however, has prevented these circumstances from being theorized in Canadian political economy. This can be remedied by incorporating two theoretical approaches developed outside Canadian political economy – Elizabeth Rata’s model of “neotribal capitalism” and Hossein Mahdavy’s concept of the “rentier state”.

A Failure to Examine the Dynamics of Neotribal Rentierism

The ideology of parallelism’s influence on applying the internal colonial model to aboriginal groups in Canada has impeded political economy’s capacity to examine the historical and material circumstances that influenced how capitalism has interacted with aboriginal societies. As culturalist assumptions maintain that a primordial aboriginality can be rejuvenated in abstraction from current economic and political circumstances, aboriginal “national self-determination” within Canada consists of restoring traditional lands and idealized aboriginal cultural traditions.

Any historical and materialist analysis, however, must consider how capitalism has resulted in profound changes in aboriginal societies, and that many of the notions attributed to a primordial aboriginality have been created by capitalism.⁸⁴ The result of this interaction has been referred to by Elizabeth Rata as “neotribal capitalism”.⁸⁵ Rata’s groundbreaking work, which is ignored in Canadian political economy,⁸⁶ examines how capitalist imperatives have combined with the kinship-based relations of indigenous tribes within nation-states. The result is a fundamental change in the economies and political systems of these tribes, as their collectively owned lands and resources are incorporated into the capitalist system.⁸⁷ The capital accumulated from tribally

⁸⁴ The most significant example of this is the idea that aboriginal peoples have a “conservation ethic”. Conservation only comes about with an understanding that a group’s actions are depleting the environment. This point is made by the anthropologist Natalie Smith, who argues that before assuming that a group has a conservation ethic it first must be established that “people [are] restricting their use of a resource when they would prefer to continue consuming *and* resource availability and the time permit further consumption”. Smith points out that this must be established even if resources are being consumed sustainably, since a harmonious relationship with the environment could be due to low population density or the existence of inefficient technology. In this case it would not make sense to infer conservation since a group’s “reasons for limiting exploitation of the resources would be a byproduct of factors beyond their control”, Natalie Smith, “Are Indigenous People Conservationists?”, *Rationality and Society*, 13(4), 2001, pp. 434-435, 439. These circumstances have not been shown in the case of aboriginal peoples in what is now Canada, but it forms the basis of many of the assertions about aboriginal peoples’ “relationship to the land”, including Coulthard’s “placed-base foundation of indigenous thought”.

⁸⁵ Rata, “Late Capitalism and Ethnic Revivalism”, p. 45. Elizabeth Rata connects this intellectual transformation of political economy to the shift in the capitalist economy from fordism to post-fordism. For a discussion of this see Rata, “Late Capitalism and Ethnic Revivalism”, *Anthropological Theory*, 3(1), 2003, p. 54.

⁸⁶ One of the exceptions is the work of Andrew P. Hodgkins. See, for example, “Re-appraising Canada’s Northern ‘Internal Colonies’”, *The Northern Review* 30 (Spring 2009), pp. 179-2005. In the United States the framework has been used a few times. See, for example, Schröder, “The political economy of tribalism in North America: neotribal capitalism?”, pp. 435-456 and Samuel Rose, “Comparative models of American Indian economic development: Capitalist versus cooperative in the United States and Canada”, *Critique of Anthropology*, 34(4), 2014, pp. 377-396.

⁸⁷ This is called a “neotribe” by Rata. This concept is used by Rata “to theorise this articulation of the revived tribe’s economic character with the traditionalist ideology used to justify its claims for the economic and political inheritance of the past”. Rata, “Localizing neoliberalism: indigenist brokerage in the New Zealand university”, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 8(4), November 2010, p. 528.

owned resources, however, is not shared equally by all members since “those in possession of, and those in control of, the resources have moved into a privileging relationship to these sources of wealth, a position denied to those who remained without access or without control”.

While indigenous politics are often perceived as being a “defence against dispossession” and an attempt to prevent victimization from colonially generated capitalist processes,⁸⁸ Rata points out that “indigeneity also serves the capitalist market, and has done so throughout the capitalist era”.⁸⁹ Indigenous politics is often *supported* by modern capitalist states,⁹⁰ as this helps to remove lands from public control,⁹¹ deregulate economic processes⁹² and break down the welfare state and the system of organized labour that emerged during the post-war period.⁹³ This is facilitated by a “brokerage or ‘comprador’ strategy”, whereby indigenous leaders use their hereditary position⁹⁴ to encourage the capitalization of tribal resources in their incorporation into the global capitalist system. Rata notes that privileged access to these resources “developed as a consequence of [the indigenous leadership’s] brokerage positioning – both to the traditional resources through their role as tribal leaders, and to the state, as representatives of the tribes”.⁹⁵ She points out that this has included the creation of Maori positions on various boards, which further incorporate aboriginal leaders into the capitalist system.⁹⁶

The position of aboriginal leaders as the brokers of tribal resources also is evident in the Canadian case. It can be seen in land claims settlements in Canada, even those that parallelists have promoted as examples of “rebuilding [separate] aboriginal economies” and increasing aboriginal autonomy.⁹⁷ In these agreements, hundreds of millions of dollars have been provided to tribal organizations to give aboriginal peoples a role in regulating capitalist development, and indigenous corporations have been formed to share in the profits from resource extraction in

⁸⁸ See, for example, Keefer, “Marxism, Indigenous Struggles, and the Tragedy of ‘Stagism’”, p.110.

⁸⁹ Rata, “Localizing neoliberalism”, p. 531.

⁹⁰ This is also the view of Rolf Knight. For a discussion see Knight, *Nativism and Americanism*, p. 7.

⁹¹ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, p. 48. In Canada, most of the transfers of lands to aboriginal organization in land claims settlements were previously owned by the Crown.

⁹² In Canada, a good example of this in Canada is how casinos on aboriginal lands can contravene health and safety regulations by allowing smoking in their establishments.

⁹³ Rata, “The Theory of Neotribal Capitalism”, *Review*, 22(3), 1999, p. 239.

⁹⁴ In a reference to aboriginal politics in the United States, Schröder links this to the development of “big man” politics in the colonial period, which could be applicable to the Canadian case. According to Schroeder, aboriginal groups in the western U.S. in the 19th Century were “fairly egalitarian”, but “there existed in most cases a hierarchy among lineages and some tribal organizations were dominated by an hereditary elite of family networks, power depended to a large extent on individual prowess, charisma, and personality”. He notes that colonialism resulted “in a trend toward centralization and supported the rise of a group of powerful chiefs of a ‘big man’ type who distinguished themselves either as successful cultural brokers or war leaders. With the Indians’ confinement to reservations...this process of centralization was, as it were, ‘frozen’ in time and the possibility of power negotiations among various constituencies within the newly created reservation communities was severely curtailed by the immediate control of government agents”. Schröder, “The Political Economy of Tribalism in North America”, p. 440.

⁹⁵ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, p. 49.

⁹⁶ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, p. 50.

⁹⁷ The agreements singled out in this regard are the Inuvialuit claim in the Western Arctic, the Nunavut settlement, the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*. *Final Report*, 2(2), pp. 422, 558, 778, 822, 830.

aboriginal traditional territories.⁹⁸ These agreements, however, have just increased wealth for privileged aboriginal leaders and those who have been able to acquire sinecures on newly created boards and other jobs associated with government transfers.⁹⁹ Some royalties are distributed to the signatories of land claims,¹⁰⁰ but most remain on government assistance.¹⁰¹

An increased division between the haves and have-nots in neotribal capitalism is disguised by what Rata refers to as “neotraditionalism” - the perspective, common in parallelist ideology, that aboriginal politics are transcendently communal or socialistic.¹⁰² According to Rata, neotraditionalism acts to conceal capitalist exploitation because the economic control exercised by tribal leaders “is understood in terms of traditional leadership roles based upon status rather than in terms of the class position of the tribal elite”.¹⁰³ The increasing inequality created by the incorporation of tribal resources into the capitalist system is disguised by neotraditionalism because, as Rata explains, “the emergence of a class elite is understood as the revival of traditional leadership rather than a self-interested and self-privileging relationship of those who brokered the capitalization of traditional resources to those resources”.¹⁰⁴ With the development of neotribal capitalism, therefore, “a neotraditionalist ideology...and non-democratic neotribal modes of regulation create the social conditions that guarantee the stability of capitalist accumulation”.¹⁰⁵

Rata points out that, rather than being emancipatory for aboriginal peoples, neotribal capitalism is actually more oppressive than the form of exploitation that characterized the Fordist period of capital accumulation.¹⁰⁶ This is because neotribal capitalism challenges “the historical and contradictory settlement between liberal democracy and capitalism”, as new arrangements are created that combine “the oppressive political and social relations of traditional societies...with the exploitative economic relations inherent to capitalism”.¹⁰⁷ While both liberal and social forms of democracy uphold the interests of the capitalist system by reproducing the conditions needed for capital accumulation, Rata explains that the role of the state as “both the organizer of capitalism’s inequalities and democracy’s equalities” creates the possibility for “class antagonism to be expressed and contested”. Because of the kinship-based character of aboriginal politics and the hereditary nature of tribal leadership, on the other hand, aboriginal politics “does

⁹⁸ I have provided a detailed analysis of this elsewhere. For a further discussion see Widdowson, *The Political Economy of Aboriginal Dependency*, pp. 503-562. This analysis has been updated in my unpublished manuscript *Separate but Unequal*.

⁹⁹ Pedro van Meurs, "'Ten Years IFA' - Successes and Failures, A Report Card", December 1993, p.3 (Unpublished paper in the possession of the author) and Glenn Taylor, "Former IRC chair under investigation. Roger Gruben: facing tax fraud allegations", *Northern News Services*, August 15, 1997.

¹⁰⁰ "Inuvialuit profit up: Beneficiaries get \$1.3 million", *Northern News Services*, May 4, 1998.

¹⁰¹ 2007 October Report of the Auditor General of Canada, http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200710_03_e_23827.html#ch3hd5g [accessed March 2015]

¹⁰² Elizabeth Rata, “Rethinking Biculturalism”, *Anthropological Theory*, 5(3), 2005, pp. 275-276 and Rata, “Late Capitalism and Ethnic Revivalism”, p. 46.

¹⁰³ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, p. 45.

¹⁰⁴ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, pp. 44-45, 47.

¹⁰⁵ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, p. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Fordism is characterized by assembly line production, rights to unionization, and the development of the welfare state. For a discussion of this period with respect to unionization see Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: James Lorimar & Company, 1996), pp. 82-3.

¹⁰⁷ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, p.43.

not have these sites of contradiction, and hence, does not have institutional sites for the political struggle between unequal economic classes”.¹⁰⁸

These consequences of neotraditionalism also can be seen in Canadian aboriginal politics, as well as in the demands of parallelists for more aboriginal control over lands and resources. Aboriginal people are encouraged to reject liberal democracy because it is asserted that “individualism” is contrary to the communal nature of aboriginal societies.¹⁰⁹ This traditional communalism is romanticized as being essentially “egalitarian” by parallelists, enabling Coulthard to assert that “...Indigenous cultural claims *always* involve demands for more equitable distribution of land, political power and economic resources” [emphasis added].¹¹⁰ This innate egalitarianism, according to Coulthard, exists because aboriginal people traditionally have had “ancestral obligations”¹¹¹ to engage in reciprocity with the land and other people, and to avoid being exploitative, disrespectful and environmentally destructive.¹¹²

While it is recognized that a number of aboriginal people engage in activities that are authoritarian, exploitative and environmentally unsustainable, there is no consideration how this is an inevitable outcome of the combination of capitalism and tribal societies. Instead, because of the culturalist assumptions of parallelism, it is automatically concluded that oppressive aboriginal actions are indicative of an abandonment of indigenous primordial origins. There is no examination of the fact that the relatively egalitarian, nonexploitative and environmentally sustainable nature of traditional aboriginal societies was connected to the low level of productivity in hunting and gathering and horticultural societies, and the characteristics of these modes of production have been irreversibly transformed with the introduction of more advanced technology and the profit motive. At the same time, the increasing conflicts in aboriginal communities brought by the combination of capitalism and tribalism are undertheorized because neotraditionalism assumes that aboriginal politics is essentially cooperative.

In addition to pointing out how neotraditionalism can obscure the conflicts in aboriginal tribes that have been incorporated into the capitalist system, Rata’s analysis of neotribal capitalism is important because it raises questions about government efforts to entrench ethnically based institutions into modern nation-states. Rata sees these arrangements as compromising notions of “universal human rights and freedom of association”. She notes that concerns about universal human rights are at odds with “the use of kinship (genetically-based) forms of social structuration”, as well as the institutionalization of these forms through “ethnic ‘boundary’ markers” such as constitutionally entrenched treaties.¹¹³ She asserts that the notion of “partnership” between aboriginal peoples and the state in founding constitutional documents – a notion that has become embedded in institutions from decades of judicial activism – exacerbates

¹⁰⁸ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, p. 56.

¹⁰⁹ Tim Schouls, J. Olthuis, and Diane Engelstad, “The Basic Dilemma: Sovereignty or Assimilation”, in Diane Engelstad and John Bird (eds), *Nation to Nation* (Concord: Anansi, 2002), p. 17.

¹¹⁰ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 19; see also, p. 52 for a claim with the exact wording.

¹¹¹ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 42.

¹¹² Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 12, 42. Alfred appears to reify these circumstances to explain the absence of a state in aboriginal cultures. He maintains that traditional governance stands in “sharp contrast to the dominant understanding of ‘the state’: there is no absolute authority, no coercive enforcement of decisions, no hierarchy and no separate ruling entity”. Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, p. 56, cited in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 159.

¹¹³ Rata, “Late Capitalism”, p. 57.

economic inequality within aboriginal groups and increases social tensions between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples.¹¹⁴

While Rata's discussion of neotribal capitalism in New Zealand offers important theoretical tools for understanding aboriginal marginalization, it is important to point out that there is a fundamental difference between the Maori and Canadian aboriginal groups. Historically, the Maori made up a substantial proportion of New Zealand's working class, while aboriginal peoples in Canada have been historically marginalized from the labour force. This makes the political economy of aboriginal communities similar to the population of what has been referred to in the literature as a "rentier state".¹¹⁵ Originally developed by Hossein Mahdavy with respect to Iran,¹¹⁶ the concept of a "rentier state" has emerged to explain the unique character of the development in states that largely depend on external sources of revenue. Such a concept concerns "a windfall wealth of unprecedented magnitude in...a short time", which "conditions...political behaviour and development policies..." in a political system.¹¹⁷

What enables areas to be classified as a "rentier" type of political system is that they all have been impacted by the corrosive effects of "rent" as a dominant feature in their economies.¹¹⁸ In political economy, rent is perceived as being both an economic and political relation. Economically, it is the surplus "left over after all the costs of production [have] been met" that is "paid to the owner of the land for use of its natural resources". It is a "a gift of nature, which reflect[s] both the scarce quantity and differential quality of the land".¹¹⁹ But since it is "generally a reward for ownership", it is also "a social relation, reflective and derivative of historically specific property relations in the dominant mode of production".¹²⁰ In capitalism, the rentier's social position is different from the role played by capitalists and labourers because "the rentier is a social agent who does not actively participate in the production process yet still shares in the fruits of the product". It involves no sacrifice (risk, in the case of capitalists) or effort (the labour from workers) and therefore a rentier is characterized as "a parasite feeding on the productive activities of others". Differentiated by "the lack or absence of a productive outlook in his behaviour", rentiers have been negatively perceived by both liberal and Marxist political economists "as unproductive, almost anti-social, sharing effortlessly in the produce without, so to speak, contributing to it".¹²¹

This infusion of relatively large externally generated surpluses in these areas is hypothesized to create what has been called a "rentier mentality", which shapes the attitudes of citizens towards work and economic activity. Such a mentality exists in rentier states because of a "break in the work-reward causation", where "reward becomes a windfall gain, an *isolated* fact, situational or

¹¹⁴ Rata, "Late Capitalism", p. 52.

¹¹⁵ This analysis of the rentier state theoretical literature is drawn from Widdowson, "The political economy of Nunavut", pp. 8-14.

¹¹⁶ Hossein Mahdavy, "The Pattern and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran", in M.A. Cook (ed), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

¹¹⁷ Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World", in Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (eds), *The Rentier State* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 50; Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, "Introduction", in Beblawi and Luciani (eds), *The Rentier State*, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World", pp. 49-50.

¹¹⁹ Douglas A. Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa* (Trenton: African World Press, 1996), pp. 16-17.

¹²⁰ Beblawi, "The Rentier State...", p. 49; Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, p. 19.

¹²¹ Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, p. 17; Beblawi, "The Rentier State...", p. 50.

accidental as against the conventional outlook where reward is integrated in a *process* as the end result of a long, systematic and organized production circuit [emphasis in the original].¹²² It is maintained that “the rentier mentality isolates position and reward from their causal relationship with talent and work”, resulting in low productivity, high rates of absenteeism and few citizens willing to perform arduous tasks.¹²³ The most sought after employment, in fact, is within government administration, where the nature of bureaucratic output is intangible and almost impossible to measure – an environment where the rentier mentality thrives.¹²⁴ And although there is a “blatant maldistribution of income and wealth” in these political systems, class politics are undeveloped because “the economic conditions and sectoral imbalances of the rentier state discourage class formation in the usual sense of the term”.¹²⁵

The whole character of politics in rentier states, in fact, is not oriented towards progressive change. Political activity is overwhelmingly focused on increasing the acquisition of external rent, rather than domestic production and extraction of wealth. Consequently, “opposition necessarily focuses its attention on *how* those benefits are distributed”, rather than transforming the economic and political system. The prominence of the distribution/allocation function “shapes the entire political debate of dissent in the rentier state”, resulting in circumstances where citizens “[manoeuvre] for personal advantage within the existing setup” rather than “seeking an alliance with others in similar conditions”. The tendency is for obtaining more favourable access to the rent circuit, rather than mobilizing for a more equitable distribution of income within the system.¹²⁶

The opportunistic and fragmented character of politics in rentier type political systems is magnified by the tribal origins of these political systems. As Luciani and Beblawi explain, a “long tribal tradition of buying loyalty and allegiance is now confirmed by an *état providence*, distributing favours and benefits to its population...”. It is noted that it is acceptable for members of the rentier class who head government departments to appropriate a share of the budget for themselves. This is because “all government contracts are seen as [tribal] favours” to a certain extent, and as a result, “there seems to be no clear conflict of interests between holding public office and running private business at the same time”. Consequently, it is not uncommon for “high-ranking public officers (ministers) [to] take the trouble to form their private businesses under the names of their sons, brothers or similar *prête-noms*”.¹²⁷ It also has been observed that these same tribal values pervade the workplace, where the “obligation to family and clan” determine employment in economic enterprises “regardless of official merit or performance”.¹²⁸

After reviewing these aspects of the theory of the rentier state, it appears, at first glance, that aboriginal communities in Canada do not easily fit into this categorization. Aboriginal communities,

¹²² Beblawi, “The Rentier State...”, p. 52.

¹²³ Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, pp. 34, 212.

¹²⁴ Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, p. 22, 34; Beblawi, “The Rentier State...”, p. 55.

¹²⁵ Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, p. 35.

¹²⁶ Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, p. 35.

¹²⁷ Beblawi, “The Rentier State...”, pp. 53, 55 and Giacomo Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework”, in Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (eds), *The Rentier State* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 77-78.

¹²⁸ Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa*, p. 211.

after all, are not sovereign entities,¹²⁹ but dependent enclaves embedded within the Canadian state. Aboriginal communities also lack an agricultural and industrial sector, making many aspects of rentier theory inapplicable. Political economists studying rentier states, in fact, would likely characterize aboriginal communities as being beneficiaries of “domestic payment transfers” within the productive economy of Canada.¹³⁰

At the same time, however, it is difficult not to notice that aboriginal communities manifest all of the main features identified by Beblawi in his discussion of rentier states – i.e. external rent being prominent, few aboriginal residents being involved in the production of rent, and tribal governments being the primary recipient of rent. In fact, because of the lack of an agricultural and industrial sector in these communities, they constitute a more “pure rentier economy” than rentier states in Africa and the Middle East. Aboriginal communities, after all, receive almost all their budget from federal government transfers, while Luciani characterizes a rentier state as being one that receives merely 40 percent of its gross domestic product from external sources.¹³¹ Therefore, aboriginal communities can be seen as an extreme example of what Beblawi calls a “semi-rentier non-oil” type of political economy, where foreign aid constitutes a large percentage of revenues.¹³² These circumstances make aboriginal communities examples of a particular type of rentierism, with the same consequences of economic stagnation, increasing inequality and political authoritarianism.

Combining the model of neotribal capitalism with aspects of rentier state theory provides many insights into the political economy of aboriginal peoples in Canada. A neotribalist ideology justifies the tribal control over the distribution of resource rents, compensation packages, and government transfers, and it consequently acts to conceal the causes of the continuing problem of aboriginal marginalization in Canada. The development of “neotribal rentierism” in Canada means that monetary transfers for the services needed to address aboriginal marginalization become a revenue stream for privileged tribal leaders. The tribal status of these leaders means that they can gain access to these rents, and prevent them from being distributed to impoverished and isolated community members. This constitutes a rolling back of the progress that has been made in the post-war era toward universal, publicly funded service provision.¹³³

Parallelism’s focus on aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations as the primary cleavage in Canadian history,¹³⁴ however, has prevented political economy from coming to terms with these

¹²⁹ The definition used here is the one common in political science – “the highest governmental authority in a territorial state” and “independence from control by other states”. Mark O. Dickerson, Thomas Flanagan and Brenda O’Neill, *An Introduction to Government and Politics*, Ninth Edition (Toronto: Nelson, 2014), p. G-14. It is not the idealized concept used by parallelists, with definitions such as “allowing the legal expression of collective difference” or “the original freedom conferred...by the Creator rather than a temporal power”. Patrick Macklem, *Indigenous Difference and the Constitution of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 112 and *Final Report*, cited in Nelson Wiseman, *In Search of Canadian Political Culture*, p. 106.

¹³⁰ Beblawi, “The Rentier State...”, p. 51.

¹³¹ Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States”, p. 70.

¹³² See Beblawi, “The Rentier State...”, pp. 59-62 for his discussion of “semi-rentier” states relying on aid.

¹³³ I have discussed this problem in detail elsewhere, with Albert Howard, and will not do so here. For a further discussion see Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008)

¹³⁴ The most recent example of such a focus can be seen in an article by Joyce Green and Michael Burton. In this article, Green and Burton never mention the working class. They only talk about “settler privilege” and access to

consequences of neotribal rentierism.¹³⁵ Culturalist assumptions in conjunction with the politics of identity and entitlement encourage the native population to be perceived as having an immutably separate identity from non-aboriginals, leading political economists to uncritically assert that it is both possible and socially beneficial to develop autonomous and self-reliant aboriginal economies and political systems today. It is argued that the “land-based economies, worldviews and practices” of aboriginal peoples that existed before contact should be protected¹³⁶ because there is no recognition that the hunting and gathering and horticultural modes of production that existed before contact, and the kinship-based political relations and animistic world views associated with them, produce far less than what is required today. There is no understanding that perpetuating pre-contact economic practices in the modern context would mean aboriginal peoples consuming far more than they produced. The economic surplus needed for modern hospitals, schools, roads, housing, etc. could not exist in the traditional economies of aboriginal peoples, and parallelist attempts to rejuvenate these traditions today will result in increasing inequalities and deprivation. And as it is assumed that aboriginal peoples should have the same standard of health care, education and housing as non-aboriginal Canadians,¹³⁷ it is not unreasonable to assume that they should contribute to the economic processes that make them possible.

Canadian Political Economy and the Denial of Uneven and Combined Development

Political economy’s linkage of economic and political factors within a developmental framework makes it well situated to provide insights into some of the political problems and educational deficits that currently exist in aboriginal communities. Because political systems associated with tribal societies are kinship based, the distribution of resources occurs on the basis of one’s family relationship to the group in power. There should be no surprise about the existence of “neopotism” and “familial factionalism” in aboriginal communities, therefore, as this is not perceived as corruption in traditional societies.¹³⁸ The low educational levels in aboriginal communities also are consistent with the effects of combining unevenly developed societies within capitalism. Societies with hunting and gathering and horticultural modes of production

lands and resources. The solution to aboriginal welfare dependency is restitution and indigenization. Green and Burton, “A Twelve-Step Program for a Post-Colonial Future”, *Canadian Dimension*, December 6, 2013. The acceptance of the aboriginal-non-aboriginal (settler) cleavage as primary can also be seen in the work of Taiaiake Alfred. In *Wasáse*, for example, Alfred maintains that “settlers” assume that “sharing and equality are wrong”, which is shown by “the Settlers’ rejection of all forms of real socialism”. He also asserts that settlers maintain that “selfishness and competitiveness are good”, which is evident by their “sacred attachment to money, material goods and competition”. Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways to Action and Freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p.110.

¹³⁵Coulthard, for example, maintains that my claim that the politics of identity and entitlement is divisive and reactionary because it encourages the native population to identify in terms of *ethnicity* instead of *socioeconomic class* is “absurdly reductionist”. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, pp. 51. For Coulthard, out of hand dismissal is enough; he does not explain why he thinks that this is the case.

¹³⁶ Kuokkanen, p. 280.

¹³⁷ For a very recent expression of this view, see Kim Mackrael, “AFN urges action on development as UN goals expire”, *The Globe and Mail*, May 14, 2015, p. A4.

¹³⁸ Opposition to patronage in the distribution of public resources, in fact, emerged very late in industrialization. It is connected to the development of legal rational forms of authority, which requires a great deal of state capacity. For a further discussion of this see Alan Siaroff, *Comparing Political Regimes: A Thematic Introduction to Comparative Politics*, 2nd Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 39-85.

were preliterate and their “world views” animistic.¹³⁹ The isolation of aboriginal communities in a system of neotribal rentierism entrenches these cultural features.

Rather than recognizing the unviability of aboriginal traditions in the modern context, parallelist ideology has resulted in Canadian political economists exaggerating the development of aboriginal cultures. This can be seen in Frances Abele’s most recent review of the literature pertaining to aboriginal peoples and political economy. In this article, Abele notes that the “great, complex question of Canadian history”, and consequently the new Canadian political economy, is

how did the northern part of North America pass from the control of Indigenous nations possessing several languages, that farmed, fished, hunted and gathered in relative environmental balance, that were allied, federated, and sometimes at war, and that were internally organized in a variety of ways, to become a modern nation-state, in which a majority population, dominated by the languages and traditions of Europe, farmed and built factories, highways, and huge cities while they entirely reorganized the political map of the continent – literally as well as ideologically pushing the original landholders to the margins?¹⁴⁰

The way the question is worded equates pre-contact “Indigenous nations” with the “modern nation-state” that Canada became, thereby mystifying how the “majority population...entirely reorganized the political map of the continent...pushing the original landholders to the margins”. What is not made clear is that the features of “Indigenous nations” that Abele points to are indicative of the lower productivity, smaller scale and simple organization of aboriginal groups relative to European immigrants. The socially fragmented “several languages” that existed, for example, are indicative of the lack of political integration¹⁴¹ in North America (i.e. that it consisted of several tribal groupings, not “Indigenous nations”),¹⁴² while the “relative environmental balance” reflected the unproductive Stone Age technology and subsistence economies of hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists (who used less efficient slash and burn methods in comparison to the European system of field agriculture with draught animals and ploughs).¹⁴³ These differences in development, in conjunction with the exploitative character of capitalism, clearly explains why European governments were capable of “literally as well as ideologically pushing the original landholders to the margins”.

But if there is a great deal of evidence to support the argument that large differences in productivity, scale and complexity between tribal societies and modern nation-states exist, why is there such a reluctance to incorporate this into a political economy of aboriginal peoples? The reason is the same for all scholarship on aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations; the influence of parallelism means that this evidence is ignored because it is inconsistent with the political objectives of those undertaking the analysis.

¹³⁹ See Widdowson and Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry*, for a discussion of this.

¹⁴⁰ Abele, “Understanding What Happened Here”, pp. 118-19.

¹⁴¹ Global integration, in fact, has made it necessary to develop a common language to communicate in areas such as air traffic control.

¹⁴² One work in political economy even maintains that “the depiction of indigenous peoples as preliterate has devalued the rich and varied forms of literacy that have long been central to many First Nations cultures”. Wotherspoon and Satzewich, *First Nations*, p. xxiv. The sources used to make this claim is Battiste, 1986 [“Micmac Literacy and Cognitive Assimilation”, in J. Barman, Y. Hebert and D. McCaskill (eds), *Indian Education in Canada: Volume 1: The Legacy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), pp. 23-44.

¹⁴³ In subsistence and pre-market economies the surpluses produced are very small and consumed communally, which explains how aboriginal peoples alleged ecological sensitivity. For a further discussion of the unproductive nature of pre-contact aboriginal economies see Phillips, *Inside Capitalism*, p. 9.

In developing a historical and materialist analysis of aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations in political economy, two minefields will have to be negotiated. The first is the confusion that has occurred between culture and race, and the subsequent idea that identifying the lower level of economic development in hunting and gathering/horticultural societies, and the cultural obstacles to their entrance into the Canadian working class, is somehow "mean spirited", "insensitive" or, more offensively, "racist".¹⁴⁴ This rejection is related to wider trends in the humanities and social sciences where, as Bruce Trigger points out, "sociocultural evolution is now under more severe attack than at any time in its history",¹⁴⁵ as it is perceived as "inherently ethnocentric, racist, and factually untenable" and "a fantasy that was invented to justify colonialism, social injustice, economic exploitation, slavery, gender oppression, cultural elitism, and almost any other abuse that can be imagined".¹⁴⁶ Such opposition, as well as the fact that natives were largely irrelevant to the Canadian economy after the fur trade, has led political economists to either omit aboriginal peoples in their discussion of capitalist development,¹⁴⁷ or insist that the subsistence practices of aboriginal people must be assumed to be an important factor in understanding this historical period.¹⁴⁸ Any attempt to consider the economic and political implications of the fact that subsistence practices are less productive than capitalist ones leads to the accusation that one is

¹⁴⁴The political economist Joyce Green, writing with Michael Burton, for example, maintains that the idea of development itself is based on racist assumptions. Green and Burton justify this assertion with the following statement: "The proposition is that if we just help those people to get with the program of capitalism and a job in the waged economy, they will stop being so dysfunctional. The development cabal proposes that privatizing reserve lands and trading Aboriginal land claims for a mess of potage in the form of a few jobs with corporations will benefit Aboriginal people by getting them into the market economy. Aboriginal and treaty rights are never part of this calculus". Nowhere is there any explanation of how this is based on racist assumptions. Joyce Green and Michael Burton, "A Twelve-Step Program for a Post-Colonial Future", *Canadian Dimension*, December 6, 2013. The Royal Commission also maintains that theories that conceptualize pre-contact aboriginal and non-aboriginal societies in terms of different levels of development are inherently "racist", "ethnocentric", "intolerant", "contemptuous", "self-serving", "unflattering", and "demeaning". *Final Report*, 1, pp. 260, 600-01, 695. The most unfair deployment of accusations of "racism", however, is in an article by Tom Keefer. After referring to the existence of "racist assumptions" and "unconscious racism" without providing any evidence for this accusation, Keefer then asserts that the proponents of applying a developmental framework to aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations are "seeking to absolve themselves of charges of racism" by maintaining that peoples influenced by hunting and gathering and horticultural modes of production "are no less intelligent than those in industrial societies". Keefer, "Marxism, Indigenous Struggles, and the Tragedy of 'Stagism'", pp. 100-1, 104. Keefer appears to be suggesting that showing that one's arguments are not racist is an indication of racism.

¹⁴⁵ Bruce Trigger, *Sociocultural Evolution*, p. xi and Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁶ Trigger, *Sociocultural Evolution*, pp. 223, 259.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Drache, "The Formation and Fragmentation of the Canadian Working Class: 1820-1920", *Studies in Political Economy*, Fall 1984, 15; Howlett et al., *The Political Economy of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999); David McNally, "Staple Theory as Commodity Fetishism: Marx, Innis and Canadian Political Economy", *Studies in Political Economy*, Autumn 1981, 6, pp. 35-64; Leo Panitch, "Dependency and Class in Canadian Political Economy", *Studies in Political Economy*, Autumn 1981, 6, pp. 7-33.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Asch, "The Economics of Dene Self-Determination", in Turner and Smith (eds), *Challenging Anthropology: A Critical Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited); P.J. Usher, "Evaluating Country Food in the Northern Native Economy", *Arctic*, 1976, 29(2), pp. 105-120; George W. Wenzel, *Animal Rights, Human Rights: Ecology, Economy and Ideology in the Canadian Arctic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). Such an imputation has made academics like Steven High anxious to claim that natives *were* participants in the development of Canadian capitalism, despite the paucity of evidence that is gathered to support this assertion. Steven High, "Native Wage Labour and Independent Production during the 'Era of Irrelevance'", *Labour* 37 (Spring 1996), pp. 242-264.

"convert[ing] *differences* into *inferiorities*".¹⁴⁹

The rejection of notions of development is not based on an evaluation of the evidence; it is made on the grounds that evolutionary theories are unacceptable politically.¹⁵⁰ This is the second obstacle facing anyone who is attempting to develop a historical and materialist understanding of aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations - the extent to which political advocacy has intermingled with the scholarship pertaining to this subject.¹⁵¹ As Alan Cairns has pointed out, it is common for scholars studying aboriginal issues to take on the role of "academic missionary" and to use their research in "serving a cause".¹⁵² They see their role first and foremost as providing information that supports the parallelist aspirations of aboriginal organizations.¹⁵³ One scholarly press now even requires researchers to sign protocols with aboriginal communities, which then must approve all research findings before they are released to the public.¹⁵⁴ This, according to Cairns, means that

an academic publication on an Aboriginal issue may not be evaluated solely or primarily on its merits as a piece of academic research, but in a number of cases will additionally be viewed through [a] political lens. A scholarly article or book will be seen as aiding, or damaging, the pursuit of some political goal or objective. Unless he or she is particularly obtuse, a prospective author will understand that dangerous territory lies ahead. If the research project proceeds, the language that is employed will be carefully considered, and the questions that are asked might not be the researcher's first choice. A cautious scholar may even conclude that some subjects are best left for another day when passions have cooled, or that a safer less politicized field has greater attraction.¹⁵⁵

Cairns explains that "all who do research and publish in this politicized area have a consciousness that they are local participants in a global post-imperial arena that seeks to reorder relationships between indigenous peoples and the states in which they live".¹⁵⁶ Scholars understand that "what they write may have consequences outside the academy, and that there are

¹⁴⁹ *Final Report*, 1, p.45, emphasis in original. See also J.R. Miller, "Un pays de sauvages", *The Globe and Mail*, October 28, 2008, p. A18. Miller opposes evolutionary theories because "First nations were neither inferior nor superior to French and English newcomers. They had cultures that were adapted to their environments".

¹⁵⁰ *Final Report*, 1, pp. 260, 600-01, 695.

¹⁵¹ James A. Clifton (ed). *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996); Noel Dyck, "Telling it like it is' Some Dilemmas of Fourth World Ethnography and Advocacy", in Dyck and Waldram (eds), *Anthropology, Public Policy and Native Peoples in Canada*, pp. 192-212; and Robert Paine (ed). *Advocacy and Anthropology: First Encounters* (Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1985). With respect to the discipline of history, this problem has also been identified by J.E. Rea, "The Historian as 'Hired Gun'", *The Beaver* 73(2), April-May 1992; and J.R. Miller, "From Riel to the Métis", *Canadian Historical Review* LXIX(1), 1988, pp. 19-20.

¹⁵² Cairns, "Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times", p. 16.

¹⁵³ For a discussion of this in the context of the discipline of anthropology, see Knight, *Nativism and Americanism*, p. 64. I have also discussed this (with Miranda Anderson and Ezra Voth) in the context of political science. See Widdowson, Voth and Anderson, "Studying Indigenous Politics in Canada: Assessing Political Science's Understanding of Traditional Aboriginal Governance", Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Edmonton, June 2012.

¹⁵⁴ Personal communication with UBC Press, 2004.

¹⁵⁵ Cairns, "Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times", pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁶ Cairns, "Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times", p. 10.

prevailing narratives which act as [a] lens through which scholarly work on Aboriginal issues will, by some, be judged”.¹⁵⁷

Cairns notes that during the constitutional debates of the 1980s, for example, “there was a high degree of unwillingness to say anything that might be construed as unsympathetic to Aboriginal aspirations, such as impediments to or limitations of grandiose self-government ambitions for the small populations, under 500, of most Indian bands, or in the practical difficulties of self-government without a land base”.¹⁵⁸ Many academics studying these areas “were warned that high costs may follow any ‘deviation from the generally sympathetic orientation towards native rights’”.¹⁵⁹ As a result, the “‘few scholars who have dared to express doubts about the appropriateness, and indeed authenticity, of aboriginal claims have been attacked and even ridiculed, regardless of the substance of their concerns.’”¹⁶⁰ This circumstance is exacerbated by the fact that aboriginal scholars are reluctant to criticize each other and are seen as traitors when they question the claims of native leaders.¹⁶¹ This leads to the obstruction of the intellectual dynamism and critical thinking facilitated by open and honest debate.

This intrusion of advocacy has led some academics to raise concerns that “political correctness” and “academic self-censorship” is becoming pervasive in the study of aboriginal issues,¹⁶² resulting in the acceptance of dubious research findings. Research findings that are perceived to “soften the impact of colonialism by minimizing its negative effects”¹⁶³ are also rejected out of hand without considering the evidence that is used in their support.¹⁶⁴ There is a tendency for the aspirations of aboriginal organizations to be accepted without question for fear of being accused of racism, expressing “hate” towards aboriginal people, or being colonialist in intent.¹⁶⁵ There

¹⁵⁷ Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, p. 15; Noel Dyck, “Canadian Anthropology and the Ethnography of ‘Indian Administration’”, 2006, p. 87, cited in Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵⁸ Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, p. 18.

¹⁵⁹ Gibbins and Jhappan 1989, p. 211, cited in Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, p. 18.

¹⁶⁰ Gibbins and Jhappan, p. 24, cited in Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, p. 18.

¹⁶¹ Cairns refers to the cases of the aboriginal academics Emma LaRocque and Joyce Green to support his views. See Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, pp. 19-22. He also refers to Calvin Helin’s comment that it is even harder for non-aboriginal people to raise criticisms about indigenous politics as they are likely to be accused of racism.

¹⁶² Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, footnote 2, p. 2. Cairns and Flanagan, “An exchange”, p. 108.

¹⁶³ Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times”, p. 15.

¹⁶⁴ Disciplines like political science, for example, are now even actively trying to “decolonize” areas of research and actively politicize them. A number of workshops and panels at the 2012 CPSA conference, for example, were “seeking to critically examine the colonial impulses and decolonizing potential of political theory”. It was assumed that western political thought has “served, either implicitly or explicitly, to justify the dispossession of indigenous and/or other non-European peoples’ lands and self-determining authority...”, but that “colonized peoples and their allies [have] been able to selectively appropriate and critically transform these theoretical frameworks to support their own discourses and struggles over land and freedom...”. For a further discussion of this see Frances Widdowson, “Decolonizing Political Theory: Exploring the Implications of Advocacy for Political Science”, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Victoria, British Columbia, June 4-6, 2013.

¹⁶⁵ See Sandra Tomsons, “Part IV: Dialogue”, in Tomsons and Mayer (eds), *Philosophy and Aboriginal Rights*, p. 400. For the most recent example of this see Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, p. 146.

are even difficulties in presenting critical ideas at academic bodies like the Canadian Political Science Association.¹⁶⁶

Advocacy has become particularly pronounced recently because there has been an increasing amount of government funding provided to aboriginal organizations to pursue land claims and self-government initiatives,¹⁶⁷ and a number of academics now work directly for aboriginal organizations as lawyers and consultants. Especially prominent in this regard are the increasing numbers of legal scholars – a development that is directly connected to the court cases about aboriginal rights that are occurring across the country.¹⁶⁸ Part of the justification for these initiatives is that aboriginal peoples have unique "cultural insights" and "ways of life" that are beneficial to all Canadians.¹⁶⁹ This creates problems for the objectivity of research, because assertions that aboriginal economies are inherently dependent on the wider Canadian society in which they are embedded threatens the parallelist goals of aboriginal organizations and the academic and legal advocates that are associated with them.

While one can understand why neoliberal¹⁷⁰ governments that want to offload responsibility for aboriginal peoples would support parallelist arguments, what is puzzling is how this has impacted the analysis of aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations in political economy. Because political economy is historical and materialist in its methods, it should be a bulwark against this advocacy and special pleading. Its linkage of economic and political processes enables it to be grounded in material reality, and thus positioned to offer important insights into how the combination of hunting and gathering/horticultural and capitalist modes of production have influenced aboriginal marginalization.

Parallelism: An Aristocrat in Socialist Clothing

Canadian political economy continues to be impeded by developing a historical and materialist analysis because it, too, has been influenced by parallelism and the politics of identity and entitlement. Being on "the Left" today is equated with supporting the arguments of oppressed groups, including the recognition of, and respect for, "indigenous knowledges".¹⁷¹ Unscientific

¹⁶⁶ This circumstance was made apparent in 2008 when a number of political scientists debated charging me under hate speech provisions for suggesting that indigenous theories and methodologies were not rigorous enough to meet the standards of the discipline. For a discussion of this case, see Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, "Hunting assumptions in the search for solutions", p. xiii.

¹⁶⁷ Cairns, *Citizens Plus*; Doug Daniels, "The Coming Crisis in the Aboriginal Rights Movement: From Colonialism to Neocolonialism to Renaissance", *Native Studies Review*, 1986, 2(2), pp. 97-115.

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion of this see Cairns, *Citizens Plus*.

¹⁶⁹ *Final Report*, 1, p. xxiii, 2(2), pp. 778-9.

¹⁷⁰ Neoliberalism has been defined in political economy and ideologies that argue for a minimal state. For a discussion of this with respect to aboriginal policy, see Rata, "Localising neoliberalism".

¹⁷¹ Nowhere is this sentiment more evident than in Roderick A. MacDonald and Thomas McMorrow's attempt to "[analyze] the political economy of Aboriginal communities from the inside out". In this article, MacDonald and McMorrow maintain that "...we are all situated in a *spiritual* world", and an attempt to separate this from our analysis of political and economic factors "is a particular feature of European-derived cultures". They argue that political economy needs to understand that "the manner in which we come to understand how this appropriation, division and sharing should be done is deeply influenced by the spiritual world we inhabit", and that "a large part of the difficulty in attempts to understand gross economic disparities between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples lies in the fact that the framework of analysis has typically been that of western trading economies. Those looking at economic matters assume that it is possible to treat the material world (most particularly land and that which is found on land) simply as an object of exploitation, without any reference to its moral, cultural and spiritual

aboriginal beliefs should be recognized and respected as "knowledge", political economists argue, on the grounds that the native population's "subjective understandings of their conditions" must be encouraged for them to become "agents of their own liberation".¹⁷²

But how can the recognition of "indigenous knowledges" be consistent with socialist ideas when this embraces spiritualism and kinship forms of political organization? Socialist ideologies prescribe moving humanity beyond particular and exclusive identities, such as those based on ancestry, to a universal species identity, determined by participation in production, shared interests and objective human needs. Political economy also uses the methodology of historical materialism to understand economic and political developments, rejecting all supernatural claims as bourgeois mythology and mystification.¹⁷³ And doesn't challenging the universal validity of scientific methods by asserting the existence of different "knowledges" prevent socialists from forming the common understanding necessary for mobilizing against capitalist exploitation and colonial domination? As Alan Sokal points out, "for most of the past two centuries, the Left has been identified with science and against obscurantism; we have believed that rational thought and the fearless analysis of objective reality (both natural and social) are incisive tools for combating the mystifications promoted by the powerful – not to mention being desirable human ends in their own right".¹⁷⁴ He goes on to state that he is worried about postmodern trends in the academy "that at minimum divert us from the task of formulating a progressive social critique, by leading smart and committed people into trendy but ultimately empty intellectual fashions, and that can in fact undermine the prospects for such a critique, by promoting subjectivist and relativist philosophies that in my view are inconsistent with producing a realistic analysis of society that we and our fellow citizens will find compelling".¹⁷⁵

Although proposing mechanisms to address the problems brought about by the combination of capitalism with less developed hunting and gathering/horticultural modes of production are fraught with difficulties and beyond the scope of this paper, one thing is clear – the causes of problems must be understood *before* any real solutions can be proposed and evaluated. This means that ideology must be set aside long enough to determine whether or not the claims being

dimensions". Roderick A. MacDonald and Thomas McMorrow, "Rabbits, Ravens, Snakes, Turtles: Analyzing the Political Economy of Aboriginal Communities from the Inside Out", in P. Noreau (ed), *Gouvernance Autochtone: reconfiguration d'un avenir collectif* (Montreal: Thémis, 2010), https://www.mcgill.ca/macdonald-symposium/files/macdonald-symposium/cg2_rabbits_ravens_snakes_turtles_2010.pdf [accessed May 2015], pp. 214-216.

¹⁷² Deborah Simmons, "Socialism from below and Indigenous peoples", *New Socialist*, 58, September-October 2006, p. 15. This view is also commonplace in idealistic works on aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations. See, for example, Elaine Coburn, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, George Sefa Dei et Makere Stewart-Harawira, "Unspeakable Things: Indigenous Research and Social Science", *Socio*, 2013, p. 331-348

¹⁷³ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels even referred to their own framework of analysis as "scientific socialism", which has been characterized as "the study of the nature of, and the route to, socialism, using the most advanced resources of social science, and within the frame of a socialist commitment". G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. xxvii. See, for example, Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific", in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works*, Volume 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) for a discussion of this viewpoint.

¹⁷⁴ Alan Sokal, "A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies", *Lingua Franca*, May 1996.

¹⁷⁵ Sokal, "A Plea for Reason, Evidence and Logic", http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/nyu_forum.html [accessed May 2015].

made are based on a rigorous evaluation of the evidence.¹⁷⁶ This is the major problem with the influence of parallelism on political economy. Sympathy for aboriginal circumstances has enabled advocates to inveigle support for parallelism, but embracing this ideology has prevented a critical analysis of the validity of its assumptions.

It is this politicized character of research on aboriginal peoples, in fact, that has led to the current aversion to theories about historical development. Because this tradition in political economy challenges parallelist political aspirations, it has been completely rejected in the literature.¹⁷⁷ But it is this tradition that provides valuable insights into the causes of aboriginal marginalization. Without critical engagement with this body of research, aboriginal policy will continue to propose “solutions” that could further entrench native marginalization and social dysfunction.

In addition to the possibility of helping to maintain aboriginal deprivation, parallelist arguments about the necessity of preserving aboriginal traditions have an even more disturbing characteristic – they are anti-working class in their analysis. Although those influenced by this ideology purport to be “progressive”, their arguments are actually reactionary and more right wing than those of classical liberals. Rather than seeing the main struggle as being one between labour and capital, as is the case in Marxist political economy, or the pursuit of individual freedom in liberalism, supporters of the continuation of aboriginal traditions in the modern context see the retention of “traditional culture” and aboriginal peoples’ “relationship to the land” as paramount. Aboriginal peoples are the original “landowners”, we are told, and this gives them the legal capacity to “resist” capitalism.¹⁷⁸ Their position as landowners, however, is not in opposition to capitalism; it is a consequence of neotribal rentierism. Neotribal rentierism dictates that tribal leaders should act as brokers within the capitalist system and that non-aboriginal people should be charged rent by an aboriginal aristocracy on lands that used to be publicly owned.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Melvin J. Konner, “Science and Anti-Science in Anthropology: A Look Back”, in Michael Egan (ed), *The Character of Human Institutions*, p. 335 and. Robin Fox, “The Last Word”, in Egan (ed), *The Character of Human Institutions*, p. 351.

¹⁷⁷ Coulthard, for example, calls this aspect of Marxism as “normative developmentalism”, and mischaracterizes it as “teleological”. Coulthard is opposed Marx’s characterization of traditional societies as being “at the lower end of [the] scale of historical or cultural development as ‘people without history,’ existing ‘separate from the development of capital and locked in an immutable present without the capacity for historical innovation’”, because he perceives this as being denigrating to aboriginal peoples. Without any discussion of the evidence that exists for assertions about historical development, Coulthard concludes that “clearly, any analysis or critique of contemporary settler-colonialism must be stripped of this Eurocentric feature of Marx’s original historical metanarrative”. In another area, Coulthard refers to these developmental notions as “cultural racism”. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, pp. 9-10, 146. Coulthard’s parallelist ideology also prevents him from considering arguments that show that Marx’s theory of history is not teleological because it “[discerns] a progressive directionality in the course of history” that involves “the development of the productive forces”. This acknowledges patterns that are separate from the explanation that it gives for the specific transformation of society. In other words, “the nature of every social form” is not explained in terms of “the final state of affairs towards which it is a step [teleology], but on the basis of the powers and relations constituting it, which give that form its identity but may threaten its survival”. For a further discussion of Marx’s theory of history see Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁸ For a discussion of this see Douglas Daniels, “Crisis in the Aboriginal Rights Movement: From colonialism to neo-colonialism to renaissance.” *Native Studies Review*, 2(2), 1986, p.99.

http://iportal.usask.ca/docs/Native_studies_review/v2/issue2/pp97-115.pdf [Accessed March 2015].

¹⁷⁹ This view is blatantly expressed a Mohawk elder who told the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: “You have no right to legislate any laws over our people whatsoever. Our lands are not yours to be assumed. You are my

The right wing character of arguments for aboriginal autonomy, according to Rolf Knight, is linked to a long history of romanticism that pervades the study of aboriginal peoples. He notes that “enthusiasm for native Indians in North America has frequently been linked with anti-industrial and anti-working class sentiments”, which assume that the “‘lower classes’ of the dominant population are rapacious and racist and that native peoples must be protected from being contaminated by them”. Knight points out that these views are consistent with the reproduction of capitalism, rather than socialist opposition to capitalism. The result “is the creation of a fundamentally divided society in which rights are based on an individual’s ethnic derivation”. This, Knight points out, “is the antithesis of any view which calls for the recognition of class interests as those fundamental in the contemporary world”, as it assumes that “the interests of native bosses and entrepreneurs are inherently the same as those of their native employees while the interests of white workers are inherently different from and normally opposed to those of native people”. This, in fact, can be seen in the arguments that assert that unionization is contrary to aboriginal traditions.¹⁸⁰

The current pressure for political economy to support parallelist arguments, therefore, has nothing to do with constructing a “left wing” analysis of aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations. It is aristocratic, not socialistic. For this reason, it has an interest in hiding its motives, and has become profoundly irrational. As Alan Sokal has pointed out, any analysis must be based on reason, evidence and logic, to prevent the emergence of “wishful thinking, superstition and demagoguery”.¹⁸¹ By failing to understand the developmental differences between tribal subsistence societies and modern nation-states, no analysis can be developed that properly includes the aboriginal population. We need to understand how capitalism has got us to where we are so we can accurately analyze the possibilities for superceding it. Any analysis that proposes going back to a primordial Arcadian¹⁸² past that never existed will not assist political economists in this endeavour.

tenant, whether you like it or not”. Debbie Hum, “Ottawa Has No Right to Impose Its Law on Natives: Mohawk,” *The Gazette*, March 18, 1993, cited in Thomas Flanagan, “Native Sovereignty: Does Anyone Really Want an Aboriginal Archipelago?”, in Mark Charlton and Paul Barker (eds), *Crosscurrents: Editor’s Choice*, Eighth Edition (Toronto: Nelson, 2015), p. 49.

¹⁸⁰For an example of this circumstance see John Stackhouse, “Norma Rae of the Okanagan”, *The Globe and Mail*, November 8, 2001.

¹⁸¹Sokal’s quote is the following: “my goal is to defend what one might call a scientific *worldview* -- defined broadly as a respect for evidence and logic, and for the incessant confrontation of theories with the real world; in short, for reasoned argument over wishful thinking, superstition and demagoguery”. Alan Sokal, “A Plea for Reason, Evidence and Logic”, http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/nyu_forum.html [accessed May 2015].

¹⁸²For a discussion of this see Jeffrey Simpson, “It’s time to put down the guilt tool”, *The Globe and Mail*, September 5, 2001, p.A13. Simpson notes that the parallelist view, that aboriginals in the ‘pre-settler’ era lived a kind of Arcadian existence”, is “demonstrably false” but is “deemed essential to today’s aboriginal political struggles”. He notes that besides distorting the analysis of history “it usually impedes reconciliation by demanding that today’s generation pay for alleged sins of previous ones. And it invites not the careful study of history but the wallowing in one interpretation of it”.