

Native Studies and Canadian Political Science: The Implications of “Decolonizing the Discipline”

Frances Widdowson
Mount Royal College
franceswiddowson@yahoo.ca

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The desire for the truth is in itself a legitimate motive, and it is a motive that should not be sacrificed to gratify social, professional, or spiritual desires. Those who violate their own intellectual integrity, for the sake of values they hold more dear, corrupt the very values for which they make the sacrifice. To sacrifice intellectual integrity for spiritual yearnings or political hopes is sentimental and weak-minded, and to sacrifice it for professional ambition is cynical and ignoble.¹

For a number of years, Canadian political scientists have expressed concern about native dependency and deprivation. This concern is not limited to political scientists with a particular ideology; it is expressed across a wide political spectrum, and includes neo-Marxist arguments as well as various liberal viewpoints.² Even political conservatives, who oppose state intervention in the economy to redistribute wealth, are uneasy that a *particular* ethnic group continues to suffer from disproportionate levels of poverty, unemployment and social, educational and health problems.³

With a few exceptions,⁴ this concern has resulted in the conclusion that “decolonization” is the solution to native dependency and deprivation. Decolonization, as it is currently defined with respect to aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations, is closely linked to what Alan Cairns has referred to as “parallelism”.⁵ Also called the “Two Row Wampum” approach, parallelism is the view that aboriginal cultures and the wider Canadian society should exist separately from one another, continuously reproducing distinctive economies, political systems and world views.⁶ Such a conception is opposed to the idea that cultural

¹ Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), p. 32.

² See, for example, David Bedford and Danielle Irving, *The Tragedy of Progress: Marxism, Modernity and the Aboriginal Question* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2000); James Tully, *Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Alan Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and The Canadian State* (Vancouver; UBC Press, 2000).

³ Tom Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000).

⁴ The two main exceptions in political science are the arguments of Alan Cairns and Tom Flanagan. Cairns argues for “citizens plus” (i.e. differentiated citizenship), whereby aboriginal peoples receive additional rights while being encouraged to participate within the wider Canadian society, whereas Tom Flanagan maintains that aboriginal peoples should be perceived as individuals with the same rights and duties as other Canadian citizens.

⁵ Cairns, *Citizens Plus*, pp. 70-3, 117, 132.

⁶ In a review of Cairns’ book *Citizens Plus*, Michael Murphy notes that parallelism’s “primary metaphor of a nation-to-nation relationship governed by treaties conjures up the image of a mini-international system of

osmosis will eventually lead to aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples becoming part of a larger, integrated, and species-oriented whole because it is believed that "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 the recognition and respect of all Canadians and the protection of the state".⁷ The most racially segregationist account of this vision can be found in H. Millar's "Record of the Two Row Wampum Belt", provided approvingly as the opening quotation in an article by the Canadian anthropologist Marc G. Stevenson:

The Whiteman said, "...I confirm what you have said. ...Now it is understood that we shall never interfere with one another's beliefs or laws for generations to come." The Onkwehonweh replied: "I have a canoe and you have a vessel with sails and this is what we shall do: I will put in my canoe my belief and laws; in your vessel you will put your belief and laws; all of my people in my canoe; your people in your vessel. We shall put these boats in the water and they shall always be parallel. As long as there is Mother Earth, this will be everlasting. The Whiteman said, "What will happen if any of your people may someday want to have one foot in each of the boats we have placed parallel?" The Onkwehonweh replied "If this so happens that my people wish to have their feet in each of the two boats, there will be a high wind and the boats will separate and the person that has his feet in each of the boats shall fall between the boats; and there is not a living soul who will be able to bring him back to the right way given by the Creator, but only one: The Creator Himself".⁸

These conceptions of aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations have resulted in challenges to the discipline of political science itself. Because parallelism promotes the recognition of indigenous world views as an aspect of decolonization, some political scientists now argue that historical attempts to reach a universal understanding in the discipline have made it complicit in the oppression of aboriginal peoples.⁹ This has created pressure to incorporate "indigenous theories and methodologies" – often drawn from the field of Native Studies – so as to "decolonize the discipline" of political science.

But how do aboriginal approaches to understanding politics differ from those that are non-aboriginal, and how will incorporating the former into political science aid the decolonization process and address native deprivation? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to understand what aboriginal theories and methodologies are

separate communities whose paths never converge". Michael Murphy, *Canadian Review of Sociology* 25(4), Fall 2000, p. 517.

⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [Final Report]* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1996), 1, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

⁸ Cited in Marc G. Stevenson's "The Possibility of Difference: Rethinking Co-management", *Human Organization* 65(2), Summer 2006, p. 167.

⁹ See, for example, Kiera L. Ladner, *When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Blackfoot Governance*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Carleton University, 2000 and Taiaiake Alfred, "Warrior Scholarship: Seeing the University as a Ground of Contention", in Devon Abbott Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson, *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004),

and how they are perceived to be linked to decolonization. As will be shown below, however, the linkage between the use of Native Studies' approaches and aboriginal liberation is not self-evident; in fact, promoting "indigenous theories and methodologies" acts to obscure the causes of aboriginal dependency and entrench native marginalization.

What are "Indigenous Theories and Methodologies"?

In 2007, the political scientist Kiera Ladner presented the paper "Decolonizing the Discipline: Indigenous Peoples and Political Science" at the University of Alberta.¹⁰ In this paper, Ladner argues that political science espouses a "western-eurocentric" conception of the world, limiting the acquisition of knowledge about indigenous politics in this country. Incorporating indigenous methods into political science, according to Ladner, would help to decolonize the discipline, thereby contributing to native liberation and social justice.

Arguments such as Ladner's have put pressure on the discipline of political science, and there is an increasing tendency for positions in aboriginal politics to be jointly offered with Native Studies. The University of Toronto, for example, recently advertised such a position. As it was to be located in both departments, the job description stated that "interest in applying Aboriginal methodologies to the study of politics" would be an "asset".¹¹

But while the use of aboriginal theories and methodologies is promoted, their specific character often remains elusive.¹² A question posed to the Chair of the University of Toronto's political science department – the person designated to clarify the job description of the Political Science/Aboriginal Studies position – asking "what 'Aboriginal methodologies to the study of politics' are, and how these methodologies differ from non-aboriginal methodologies used in political science"¹³ even was not able to shed light on the matter. It was merely stated that

...with respect to the job description, as reflected in our advertisement, we have found it best to let the ad stand on its own, without further interpretation, and

¹⁰ http://www.politicalscience.ualberta.ca/details.cfm?ID_event=9948&y=2007&m=3&d=22 (accessed May 2008).

¹¹ <http://listes.ulaval.ca/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0710&L=polcan&P=R9394&I=3> (accessed May 2008).

¹² The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), for example, maintains that it "has the unique opportunity to support the development of research that uses and further develops an Aboriginal paradigm, emphasizing the theme of decolonizing research...", which includes "the use of Aboriginal methodologies, as appropriate to local traditions and the subject matter being addressed...". Craig McNaughton and Daryl Rock, *Opportunities in Aboriginal Research: Results of SSHRC's Dialogue on Research and Aboriginal Peoples* Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2003), http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/background/aboriginal_background_e.pdf, p. 15 (accessed May 2008). However, it does not attempt to define what these "methodologies" are, and merely provides the following in a footnote: "See Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, pp. 42-57, for a discussion of some of the differences between Aboriginal and Western systems of thought in relation to concepts of time, space, the individual and society, and race and gender" (p. 18, note 32).

¹³ Personal communication with David Cameron, October 2007.

invite everyone interested in the position to apply on that basis, framing their application as they see fit....¹⁴

This response, of course, poses difficulties for applicants. If it is not known what methods are considered to be “aboriginal” by the hiring committee, how can an application be constructed to increase the likelihood of a candidate’s success? Surely the declaration that the use of these methodologies would be an “asset” indicates that there is some understanding of what they are and how they can contribute to political science. One of the disturbing possibilities is that the reluctance to explicate these methodologies could be an attempt to avoid transparency in the hiring process; the vagueness of the job description enables the hiring committee to avoid accountability for promoting a methodology that could, if scrutinized publicly, be found wanting. The University of Toronto does not maintain that other ethnically based “world views” are necessary for the study of politics, and so why has it singled out “Aboriginal methodologies”?

Despite the reluctance to identify the specific nature of indigenous theories and methodologies, it is possible to investigate their distinctiveness through a review of the literature. This literature relates to the incorporation of indigenous world views in a wide variety of academic disciplines, including political science. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, for example, discusses aboriginal theories and methodologies with respect to understanding history, which is applicable to all the social sciences. It maintains that there are actually two “conceptions of history” – one espoused by aboriginal peoples and another by non-native Canadians.¹⁵ The main difference between the two, according to the Royal Commission, is that while non-aboriginal peoples see history as being “linear” in character, to native cultures it is “cyclical”.¹⁶ More specifically, the Royal Commission argues that these “conceptions of history” can be distinguished from each other in terms of four criteria: secularity, objectivity, conceptions of evolution/progress, and the sources that are used.¹⁷ It points out that the Aboriginal tradition in conceptualizing history “crosses the boundaries between physical and spiritual reality” and “is less focused on establishing objective truth and assumes that the teller of the story is so much a part of the event being described that it would be arrogant to presume to classify or categorize the event exactly or for all time”.¹⁸

¹⁴ Personal Communication with David Cameron, October 2007.

¹⁵ The Royal Commission's analysis of these two different “Conceptions of History” is drawn from three sources: Julie Cruikshank, “Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues”, *The Canadian Historical Review* LXXV/3 (1994), pp.403-418; Anthony F.C. Wallace, “Overview: The Career of William N. Fenton and the Development of Iroquoian Studies”, in Michael K. Foster et al (eds), *Extending the Rafters: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Iroquoian Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); and Bruce G. Trigger, “Indian and White History: Two Worlds or One?”, in *Extending the Rafters*, pp. 17-33.

¹⁶ The linear view envisions “time as an arrow moving from the past into the unknown future”, where the present relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians “grows out of the past...and can be improved upon”. The cyclical view of aboriginal peoples, on the other hand, perceives “time as a circle that returns on itself and repeats fundamental aspects of experience”. *Final Report*, 1, pp. 35-6.

¹⁷ *Final Report*, 1, p. 33.

¹⁸ *Final Report*, 1, p.33.

One of the main distinctive characteristics of aboriginal methodologies, therefore, is that they do not strive for objectivity,¹⁹ enabling any belief about the past to be considered an aboriginal “conception of history”. This holds even if it is contradicted by written records or archaeological findings. Furthermore, there is generally no attempt to reconcile contradictions *between* oral accounts.²⁰

Eschewing objectivity is related to two other characteristics of aboriginal methods referred to in the literature – the oral character of the aboriginal historical tradition and assumptions about the existence of a “spiritual reality”. Both contribute to subjectivity because there is no way for spiritual beliefs and “legends, stories and accounts handed down through the generations in oral form”²¹ to be verified as accurate by the wider academic community. When it is asserted, for example, that “the Creator placed each nation on its own land and gave the people the responsibility of caring for the land – and one another – until the end of time”²² there is no way of determining that this is the case because the contention is a matter of faith, not evidence. The same can be said of claims that prayers, dreams, prophecies, and spiritual ceremonies are pathways to “knowledge”.²³ As no “spiritual world” has been shown to exist, it does not make sense to claim that there are methods and theories that can access this realm and increase human understanding.

The use of oral accounts as evidence in aboriginal methodologies also contributes to their subjective character.²⁴ Although Kiera Ladner “...perceive[s] oral tradition to be a source of information which is superior to the written tradition...”,²⁵ this assertion is completely without evidential support and fails to consider the added difficulties in using oral accounts. Unlike interpretations of the past using written records, “oral histories” cannot be “pinned down”, making it possible for them to change dramatically over the years. As the anthropologist Alexander von Gernet points out,

a written document, while often biased in its original formulation, at least becomes permanent as it is archived and 'subtracted from time'. The original biases may be compounded by the interpretations of the historian who makes use of the document, but at least the content remains unaltered and may be interpreted by other parties.

In the case of “oral histories”, on the other hand, “a primary or 'original' version (if such existed to begin with) is lost to modern scrutiny since it is replaced by later versions.

¹⁹ “Aboriginal epistemology”, in fact, is defined as the “search for subjective inner knowledge”. Willie Ermine, cited in Ladner, *When Buffalo Speaks*, p. 29

²⁰ 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, pp. 75-134 for a detailed discussion of this.

²¹ *Final Report*, 1, p. 33.

²² *Final Report*, 1, p. 24; see also Kiera L. Ladner, “Women and Blackfoot Nationalism”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Summer 2000, 35(2), pp. 44-45.

²³ See, for example, *Final Report*, 1, pp. 617-18, 620, 632-33.

²⁴ Ladner, *When Buffalo Speaks*, pp. 39-49.

²⁵ Ladner, *When Buffalo Speaks*, p. 41.

What is left may be multiple layers of interpretations which have accumulated over time and a content that may only vaguely resemble an 'original' oration".²⁶ This is especially relevant when one considers that oral traditions have been passed down through a number of generations; the longer the passage of time between an event and a recollection, the more likely the memory will be distorted by other events".²⁷ Such a problem exists even when mnemonic aids like petroglyphs or wampum belts are used.²⁸

Oral accounts also present the additional possibility that they could have been completely changed from the original version after the fact (either consciously or unconsciously) to put forward a particular view of history.²⁹ This makes their incorporation different from the historian's use of written documents since, as Keith Windschuttle points out, very little of the written record that is available for historical interpretation "has been deliberately preserved for posterity". According to Windschuttle, "the biggest single source of evidence comprises the working records of the institutions of the past, records that were created, not for the benefit of future historians, but for contemporary consumption and are thus not tainted by any prescient selectivity. Most of these documents retain an objectivity of their own".³⁰

Bruce Trigger makes a similar point with respect to archaeological data. According to Trigger, "the past...had, and in that sense retains, a reality of its own that is independent of the reconstructions and explanations that archaeologists may give of it. Moreover, because the archaeological record, as a product of the past, has been shaped by forces that are independent of our own beliefs, the evidence that it provides at least potentially can

²⁶ Alexander von Gernet, *Oral Narratives and Aboriginal Past: An Interdisciplinary Review of the Literature on Oral Traditions and Oral Histories*, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, April 1996, p. 11.

²⁷ The archaeologist Mark Whittow has noted that locals visiting a 12th Century archaeological site in Jordan had "vivid and contradictory accounts of their father or grandfather living in the house the team was excavating" even though the site had not been occupied for hundreds of years. He goes on to point out that "anthropologists have demonstrated how fluid and adaptable oral history can be" and that "the oral history of a tribe was primarily concerned to explain the present" and "would adapt and shape its view of the past, creating stories with supporting details to explain and justify present circumstances". According to Whittow, even during continuous settlement of an area accurate memory lasts no more two generations and "in times of ...social upheaval change is quicker and more profound". Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 83.

²⁸ Alexander Von Gernet, for example, recounts a particular case where the Hereditary Mi'kmaq Chief Stephen Augustine read a wampum belt pertaining to "Mi'kmaq law", where it was later determined that the belt had been made by a Quebec group and had nothing to do with the Mi'kmaq. Ideas generated after the fact had enabled Augustine to become the "self-proclaimed interpreter of wampum belts", thereby inventing a "document" asserting the existence of "Mi'kmaq law". (2002), 202 N.S.R. (2d) 42; [2002] 3 C.N.L.R. 176 at para 115, cited in John Borrows, *Indigenous Legal Traditions*, Report Prepared for the Law Commission of Canada, January 2006, p. 26.

²⁹ This circumstance was documented by Peter Brosius, when he showed that a "reinterpretation of anthropological research by anthropologists with a political mission" was the accepted as authentic by the indigenous group who were the subjects of the original research. Peter J. Brosius, "Endangered Forest, Endangered People: Environmentalist Representations of Indigenous Knowledge", in Roy Ellen et al. (eds), *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and Its Transformations: Critical Anthropological Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 2000).

³⁰ Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists are Murdering Our Past* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 1996), p. 221.

act as a constraint upon archaeologists' imaginations". Although Trigger recognizes that the "propensity of value judgments to colour our interpretations" must be taken into consideration in analyzing archaeological data, he notes that "the deliberate construction and testing of two or more mutually exclusive interpretations of data can...increase the capacity for the constraints that are inherent in the evidence to counteract the role played by subjective elements in interpreting archaeological data".³¹ This capacity of both archaeological data and written documents to constrain "western-eurocentric" interpretations is very different from oral testimonies, which are obtained specifically for the purpose of constructing history.

The Western European Promotion of "Indigenous Thought"

The subjective character of indigenous theories and methodologies, and how these are reinforced by spiritual beliefs and oral accounts, means that these cannot be considered "theories" or "methodologies" at all. There is no attempt to develop any kind of systematic approach for evaluating the evidence that is deployed to reach an understanding of the natural world. A spiritual belief, for example, is not a "theory", since there is no evidence that can be evaluated to determine its validity. And although it is often claimed that aboriginal peoples have their own standards for evaluating oral histories, elaboration of these methods actually reveals a lack of systematic assessment.³²

It is also difficult to determine why these world views are designated as "Indigenous". Does this mean that all aboriginal people believe in the supernatural and that "the Creator" made their ancestors the custodians of "Mother Earth"? This is obviously not the case since a number of aboriginal people do not accept these spiritual beliefs. Furthermore, many people with native ancestry are doctors, wildlife biologists and physicists, and this requires the use of methods that strive for objectivity.

"Indigenous theories and methodologies" also are not contrary to all "western-eurocentric" thought. One particular "world view" of western European origin, which has come to be referred to as "postmodernism", enthusiastically embraces subjective indigenous theories and methodologies. Defined by Alan Sokal 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",³³ this particular "understanding of the world" has profoundly influenced many academic disciplines, especially anthropology, history and sociology. It has also led to the development of a number of interdisciplinary programs – Women's Studies, "Queer" Studies, and most importantly, Native Studies.

³¹ Bruce G. Trigger, *The History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 381, 400.

³² For a discussion of this circumstance, see Widdowson, *The Political Economy of Aboriginal Dependency*, pp. 87-91.

³³ Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador USA, 1998), p. 1.

The support for integrating approaches from Native Studies into political science is due to the belief that aboriginal peoples' "subjective understandings of their conditions" must be accepted for them to be the "agents of their own liberation".³⁴ These subjective understandings, it is argued, will give aboriginal peoples power by enabling them to become stronger and better able to resist colonization.³⁵ According to this view, colonization occurred because indigenous world views were devalued, enabling Europeans to demobilize the native population and establish sovereignty over them.³⁶ As Angela Wilson asserts, "if Indigenous cultural traditions had been deemed to be on equal ground with the colonizer's traditions, colonialist practices would have been impossible to rationally sustain".³⁷ This conception is found in the postcolonial writings of Franz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Paulo Freire, which maintain that colonization requires the colonized to believe in their cultural inferiority.³⁸ Consequently, restoring the cultural pride of oppressed groups, including respect for "indigenous theories and methodologies", is essential for overcoming colonization.

In the case of aboriginal peoples, preserving culture is seen as necessary for decolonization because traditional cultures are perceived to be an essential aspect of indigenous existence.³⁹ This is related to the belief of a number of aboriginal peoples, including prominent indigenous educators like Marie Battiste,⁴⁰ that culture, knowledge, and spirituality are tied to their ancestry, and therefore unchangeable. Indigenous knowledge is believed to be the "original directions given specifically to our ancestors" and that colonization is resisted "by carrying that knowledge into the present".⁴¹ It is argued that the "relationship with Creation and its beings was meant to be maintained and enhanced and the knowledge that would ensure this was passed on for generations over

³⁴ Deborah Simmons, "Socialism from below and Indigenous peoples", *New Socialist*, 58, September-October 2006, p. 15.

³⁵ Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, "Introduction: Indigenous Knowledge Recovery is Indigenous Empowerment", *The American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3&4), 2004, pp. 359-372.

³⁶ Leanne R. Simpson, "Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge", *The American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3&4), 2004, p. 377.

³⁷ Wilson, "Introduction", p. 360.

³⁸ See, for example, F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963); A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); and P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1998). For an application of these ideas to the recognition of indigenous knowledges, see Glen Coulthard, "Indigenous peoples and the politics of recognition", *New Socialist*, 58, September-October 2006, pp. 9-12; George J. Sefa Dei, "Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy", *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 4(2), 2000; and Riyad Ahmed Shahjahan, "Mapping the Field of Anti-Colonial Discourse to Understand Issues of Indigenous Knowledges: Decolonizing Praxis", *McGill Journal of Education* 40(2), Spring 2005.

³⁹ Wilson, "Introduction", p. 370.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Marie Battiste, "Enabling the Autumn Seed: Toward a Decolonized Approach to Aboriginal Knowledge, Language, and Education", *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 22(1), 1998, p. 17.

⁴¹ Wilson, "Introduction", p. 361.

thousands of years".⁴² These assumptions, in fact, explain why some aboriginal peoples are opposed to the "spread of white-minded thinking" within the native population.⁴³

Aboriginal Subjectivity, Political Science and Decolonization

The connection between subjectivity and decolonization, therefore, concerns the postmodern assumption that the liberation of oppressed groups can be facilitated by the preservation of differences, including their distinctive conceptualizations of reality. This argument is sustained by postmodernism's claim that all attempts to strive for common understanding are power ploys aimed at maintaining subaltern marginality. Bruce Robbins, an editor of the prominent postmodern journal *Social Text*, for example, maintains that it is in the interest of oppressed people to insist that truth is socially constructed (i.e., not universal) because "truth can be another source of oppression". To illustrate this, Robbins notes that "it was not so long ago that scientists gave their full authority to explanations of why women and African Americans...were inherently inferior".⁴⁴

But how can the claim that oppressed groups are "inherently inferior" be true? As Alan Sokal points out, "claiming something doesn't make it true, and the fact that people...sometimes make false claims doesn't mean that we should reject or revise the concept of truth. Quite the contrary: it means that we should examine with the utmost care the evidence underlying people's truth claims, and we should reject assertions that in our best rational judgment are false".⁴⁵

In the case of political science, advocates for incorporating "Indigenous theories and methodologies" maintain that a number of explanations in the discipline have characterized the native population as inferior.⁴⁶ These are those theories that accept notions of historical progress and cultural evolution, such as neoclassical economics, Weberian sociology, and Marxist political economy. All conceptions of development maintain that humanity in general progresses with the increasing productivity of economic systems.⁴⁷ They propose that increasing productivity enables larger and more complex societies to come into existence, resulting in a number of political and intellectual developments. On the basis of the linkage between economic systems, institutional complexity and advancements in human knowledge, these theoretical

⁴² Deborah McGregor, "Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and Our Future", *The American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3&4), 2004; See also R. Cruz Begay, "Changes in Childbirth Knowledge", *The American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3&4), 2004.

⁴³ Wendy Hart-Ross and Deborah Simmons, "Wasáse FAQs", *New Socialist*, 59, November-December 2006.

⁴⁴ Bruce Robbins, "Anatomy of a Hoax", *Tikkun*, September/October 1996, pp. 58-9.

⁴⁵ Alan Sokal, "A Plea for Reason, Evidence and Logic", Transcript of a talk presented at a forum at New York University on October 30, 1996. It was reprinted in *New Politics* 6(2), pp. 126-129, Winter 1997.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Ladner, *When Buffalo Speaks*, p. 3, note 3 and James Tully, "Aboriginal Peoples: Negotiating Reconciliation", in James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagnon (eds) *Canadian Politics*, 3rd Edition (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999), pp. 416-17. Furthermore, the Royal Commission on aboriginal peoples dismisses evolutionary theories as inherently "racist", "ethnocentric", "intolerant", "contemptuous", "self-serving", "unflattering", and "demeaning". *Final Report*, 1, pp. 260, 600-01, 695.

⁴⁷ For a discussion see Widdowson, *The Political Economy of Aboriginal Dependency*, pp. 135-188.

frameworks conclude that the cultures associated with hunting and gathering economies are less developed than those that have emerged in the context of industrialization.

But why is it asserted that developmental theories assume that societies with less productive economies are inferior? This, in fact, is an incorrect interpretation of the developmental theories used in political science today. It is based on the assumption that these theories must be arguing that there is some biological (i.e. racial) reason for developmental differences, when they could be relying on environmental explanations. Marxist political economy's conception of hunting and gathering cultures, for example, is largely based on the writings of the anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan who linked human development to "enlarging the basis of subsistence".⁴⁸ Morgan maintained that human beings around the world were essentially the same, and that cultural evolution involved advancements in controlling nature with thought processes that were universal; it was just the fortuitous distribution of various plants and animals, making technological advancements such as iron, the wheel, and alphabetic writing possible, which resulted in different rates of this development.⁴⁹

Opposition to developmental theories also results from what Jared Diamond has referred to as "confus[ing] an explanation of causes with a justification or acceptance of results". As Diamond explains, "what use one makes of a historical explanation is a question separate from the explanation itself".⁵⁰ In other words, recognizing the unevenness in development that led to European conquest does not mean condoning the terrible harm wreaked upon the aboriginal population. Acknowledging that the developmental gap between hunting and gathering societies and industrial capitalism contributed to aboriginal deprivation, on the other hand, can aid decolonization by addressing the roots of aboriginal dependency.

The assumption that all evolutionary theories were invented for the *purpose* of expropriating aboriginal lands, undermining native political systems and destroying indigenous cultures,⁵¹ however, has resulted in a reluctance to apply them to aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations in political science. There is a tendency to deny that there is a developmental gap, and assertions about the sophistication and complexity of aboriginal political traditions abound within the discipline. With one exception,⁵² even introductory

⁴⁸ Morgan, cited in Widdowson, *The Political Economy of Aboriginal Dependency*, p. 161.

⁴⁹ Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society, or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization* (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1974), pp. 3-21. Morgan's view is essentially the one adopted by Jared Diamond. In addition to linking cultural development to the global distribution of plants and animals, Diamond also points to the fact that the Old World was aligned on an east-west axis (unlike the Americas, which stretched from north to south), which allowed for a greater diffusion of domesticated plants (because of similar growing seasons across the continent). He also notes that domesticating animals enabled Old World cultures to develop immunity to diseases that did not occur in the New World. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1999), 195-214.

⁵⁰ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, p.17.

⁵¹ *Final Report*, 1, pp. 260, 600-01, 695.

⁵² Mark O. Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan, *An Introduction to Government and Politics: A Conceptual Approach*, Seventh Edition (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2006), p. 8.

textbooks in political science do not discuss developmental differences between kinship based systems and governance in modern nation-states.⁵³

“Indigenous political thought” rejects developmental theories on the basis that they harbour the “false assumption” that aboriginal political systems are relatively simple in comparison to those that developed in Europe.⁵⁴ But there is no way for subjective world views to determine what is “false” or “true”. Claims by Kiera Ladner, for example, that the Mi’kmaq had a pre-contact “constitutional order” similar to the one developed by the British,⁵⁵ that “Indigenous nationalisms are nationalisms with histories that pre-date colonization”,⁵⁶ or that “Indigenous ideas and practices contributed to how rights, liberty, happiness, equality, democracy, and federalism were understood by American founding fathers and institutionalized in the unique federal and constitutional system they created”,⁵⁷ are all truth claims, but none are supported with convincing evidence. They either rely on redefining “governance” and “nationalism” in a way that is not generally applicable in the discipline of political science, or use oral accounts that could have been refashioned for political reasons.⁵⁸

Political scientists like Ladner, however, are able to prevent their own truth claims from being scrutinized by arguing that their views are rooted in “Indigenist thought”, and therefore any challenging of their veracity is an indication of “Eurocentrism”. The tactic of name-calling is used to prevent the irrationality of “indigenous theories and methodologies” from being recognized. The result is that many of the arguments linking indigenous perspectives to decolonization have not been critically analyzed. This has enabled ideas that actually maintain aboriginal dependency and marginalization to be put forward under the banner of “decolonization”.

Justifying Aboriginal Dependency and Deprivation

In political science, indigenous theories and methodologies are largely supported because doing so is seen as aiding the decolonization of aboriginal peoples. Academics who would not support, for example, holding prayers at political science meetings, accept these instances when they are claimed to be associated with aboriginal decolonization.⁵⁹

⁵³ See, for example, Rand Dyck, *Canadian Politics; Critical Approaches*, p. 76 and James Guy, *People, Politics and Government: A Canadian Perspective*.

⁵⁴ *Final Report*, 1, p. 188.

⁵⁵ Kiera L. Ladner, “Up the Creek: Fishing for a New Constitutional Order”, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 38(4), December 2005, pp. 936-7.

⁵⁶ Ladner, “Women and Blackfoot Nationalism”, p. 36.

⁵⁷ Ladner, *When Buffalo Speaks*, p. 8.

⁵⁸ The claim that the Mi’kmaq had a pre-contact “constitutional order that comprises and defines distinct political, economic, educational, property and legal systems”, for example, was based upon a political declaration of the Union of Nova Scotia Indians. Ladner, “Up the Creek”, p. 936-37.

⁵⁹ An editor from UBC Press, upon reading a letter posted on POLCAN protesting the imposition of prayers at the Canadian Political Science Association’s Plenary Session “Decolonization Impulses on Turtle Island”, June 14, 2004, <http://listes.ulaval.ca/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0406&L=polcan&P=R10740&I=-3> (accessed May 2008), stated that “it is a well composed letter that certainly made me face my own hypocrisy. While reading the first paragraph, I began to puff with outrage [that] a member of the Christian

Canada's native population has been terribly oppressed historically, and it is argued that recognizing and respecting native culture is a harmless way to right past wrongs.

But, as Alan Sokal points out in response to Roger Anyon, a British archaeologist who maintained that Zuni spiritual beliefs were "just as valid" as archaeological theories based on evidence, "Dr. Anyon has quite simply allowed his political and cultural sympathies to cloud his reasoning". Sokal goes on to note that this is without justification because

we can perfectly well remember the victims of a horrible genocide, and support their descendants' valid political goals, without endorsing uncritically (or hypocritically) their societies' traditional creation myths. Moreover, the relativists' stance is extremely condescending; it treats a complex society as a monolith, obscures the conflicts within it, and takes its most obscurantist factions as spokespeople for the whole.⁶⁰

While rational thinkers should not prevent the superstitious from going about their rituals, intellectual integrity is compromised when one pretends agreement or becomes a participant. This, however, is often what occurs in interactions with aboriginal peoples, when those who know better stand for prayers and participate in smudge ceremonies and sweat lodges out of a misguided display of solidarity. Political scientists who act in such a sentimental and weak-minded fashion, including those who promote the incorporation of irrational "indigenous theories and methodologies", are, as Joseph Carroll notes, "corrupt[ing] the very values for which they make the sacrifice".

In addition to the hypocrisy and condescension that is involved in the promotion of subjective world views in political science, questions should be raised as to why "valid political goals" require such obfuscation in the first place. If the parallelist political vision for aboriginal peoples will help the native population achieve self-sufficiency and self-determination, why is it necessary to support this project with special pleading and sophistry?

Such obfuscation is necessary because parallelist political goals are themselves invalid. Instead of facilitating liberation from oppression, "indigenous theories and methodologies" isolate aboriginal people, both as subjects of study and political scientists, from everyone else in society. Political scientists of European descent can collaborate with and criticize the views of other academics regardless of their culture or ancestry, and so why is this not possible in the case of aboriginal political scientists? Without honest interaction, in fact, aboriginal peoples will never be exposed to the challenging ideas needed for intellectual progress. They also will be limited to undertaking research within the field of Native Studies, since subjective theories and methodologies by definition cannot have universal applicability.

right was bringing Bush-ite prayer breakfast rituals to the CPSA". Personal Communication, UBC Press, June 2004.

⁶⁰ Sokal, "A Plea for Reason, Evidence and Logic".

As well as preventing aboriginal people from participating in the wider society, the promotion of indigenous theories and methodologies has an even more disturbing consequence. This is that their subjectivity enables the actual causes of aboriginal dependency and deprivation to be obscured. “Indigenous thought”, in fact, is deployed to undermine developmental frameworks that can help political scientists understand the aboriginal question. Declarations that notions of historical progress and cultural evolution are “western-eurocentric” has meant that their application to aboriginal-non-aboriginal relations in political science is largely off limits.

The reluctance to apply notions of development to the aboriginal question in political science has prevented the unviable and destructive character of the current policy direction from being recognized. Land claims and self-government initiatives are dependent on the racist assumption that aboriginal peoples are inherently different from “western-eurocentric” cultures, making integration into the wider society impossible. At the same time, however, it is argued that aboriginal people should achieve parity with the non-aboriginal population in terms of income, employment, health, education and housing. How this can be achieved when small and unproductive native communities remain separate from the wider society is never addressed as this provides the justification for demanding more money from government coffers.

Arguments that aboriginal cultures are both “different” and “developed”, in fact, are used to support the professional ambitions of non-aboriginal lawyers and consultants who negotiate and implement parallel policies.⁶¹ They provide a rationale for the expensive, separate structures being created in hundreds of aboriginal communities. But because the developmental gap between aboriginal and “western-eurocentric” cultures is denied, aboriginal problems continue, providing the necessity for more government funds. And since indigenous methods and theories cannot be verified, and have no capacity to evaluate the consequences of land claims and self-government initiatives, there will be no way that this policy direction can be critically analyzed and changed. It is time for progressive political scientists in Canada to resist this cynical and ignoble agenda.

⁶¹ This circumstance is discussed in detail in Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008).