Colonialism and State Dependency

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ABSTRACT

This paper conceptualizes colonialism from an indigenous perspective and analyses the effects of colonization on First Nations, with particular focus on explaining the fundamental roots of the psychophysical crises and dependency of First Nations upon the state. Central to its analysis is the effect of colonially-generated cultural disruptions that compound the effects of dispossession to create near total psychological, physical and financial dependency on the state. The paper argues that it is the cumulative and ongoing effects of this crisis of dependency that form the context of First Nations existences today. Social suffering, unresolved psychophysical harms of historical trauma and cultural dislocation are identified as the main sources of a crisis in which First Nations' opportunities for self-sufficient, healthy and autonomous lives on individual and collective levels are extremely limited because Indigenous people have developed complexes of behaviour and mental attitudes that reflect their colonial situation. Through a review and consideration of the scholarly literature, it identifies a direct relationship between government laws and policies applied to Indigenous peoples and the myriad mental and physical health problems and economic deprivations. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for developing policy responses to the situation which are oriented towards supporting and facilitating Indigenous people's reconnection to their homelands, restoration of land-based cultural practices and the rebuilding of indigenous communities.

KEYWORDS

Decolonization, social suffering, cultural restoration, resurgence, regeneration

INTRODUCTION

Ongoing indigenous struggles against colonialism consist mainly of efforts to redress the fundamental injustice of being forcibly removed from the land or being denied access to the land to continue traditional cultural activities. Yet there is another aspect to colonialism which is often ignored in the public discourse, and certainly does not form a major focus of either First Nation organization or Canadian government policy efforts. This aspect is the colonially-generated cultural disruption affecting First Nations that compounds the effects of dispossession to create near total psychological, physical and financial dependency on the state. The cumulative and ongoing effects of this crisis of dependency form the living context of most First Nations existences today. This complex relationship between the effects of social suffering, unresolved psychophysical harms of historical trauma and cultural dislocation have created a situation in which the opportunities for a self-sufficient, healthy and autonomous life for First Nations people on individual and collective bases are extremely limited.

As is typical in all colonial societies, First Nations today are characterized as entrenched dependencies, in physical, psychological and financial terms, on the very people and institutions that have caused the near erasure of our existence and who have come to dominate us.

> When one considers the material consequences of Canada's century-long policy of state-sponsored, forcible assimilation, a simple fact emerges: for generations, opportunities to live well as an *Aboriginal person* have been actively frustrated. Successive governments, committed to the notion that Aboriginal

National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)

> cultures belong only to the past, have made no provision for the well-being of these cultures in the present and future. In the arrangement of Canada's social affairs, only the assimilated Indian has been offered even the prospect of wellness. For those who resisted or refused the benefits of assimilation, government policies assured a life of certain indignity. That is the essence of life in the colony: assimilate and be like us or suffer the consequences (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009, p. xi).

Beyond the effects on the individual, it is a real tragedy that First Nations people are generally wanting of the inspiration and support that healthy and cohesive communities provide. Cultural dislocation has led to despair, but the real deprivation is the erosion of an ethic of universal respect and responsibility that used to be the hallmark of indigenous societies. The material conditions of First Nations life, pressures exerted on Indigenous people from settler society and this state of overall dependency has created a reality characterized by discord and violence experienced as daily facts of life in most First Nation communities.

The self-hating inward turn of this negative energy in reaction to colonization is one of the most damaging aspects of the problem, what Lee Maracle has called the "systemic rage" so common among colonized peoples (Maracle, 1996, p. 12). Colonialism, as it is understood by most people, consists in such things as the resource exploitation of indigenous lands, residential school syndrome, racism, expropriation of lands, extinguishment of rights, wardship, and welfare dependency. And while all of this is certainly colonialism, Indigenous people don't experience colonialism as theories or as analytic categories. Colonialism is made real in the lives of First Nations people when these things go from being a set of imposed externalities to becoming causes of harm to them as people and as communities, limitations placed on their freedom, and disturbing mentalities, psychologies, and behaviours.

In order to get to the root of the colonial problem in Canada, it is necessary to understand that oppression experienced over such a long period of time effects people's minds and souls in seriously negative ways. Meaningful discussions on the subject of alleviating the harms that colonization has wrought requires seeing beyond colonialism as historical process of societal changes or a set of legal and military events. It means recognizing that colonial injustices and oppression have had effects on both individuals and collectivities, and that addressing these effects necessitates perspectives and strategies that situate First Nations people not simply as individuals within Canada, but as members of cultured communities on the land. Understanding this history of colonialism – the political and economic aspects of the changing relationship between Indigenous peoples and European which resulted in the subjugation of First Nations to European powers – is, in a fundamental sense, less important than appreciating the damage to the cultural integrity and mental and physical health of the people and communities who make up those nations. As Eduardo Duran has characterized the problem:

> Once a group of people have been assaulted in a genocidal fashion, there are psychological ramifications. With the victim's complete loss of power comes despair, and the psyche reacts by internalizing what appears to be genuine power—the power of the oppressor. The internalizing process begins when First Nation American people internalize the oppressor, which is merely a caricature of the power actually taken from First Nation American people. At this point, the self-worth of the individual and/or group has sunk to a level of despair tantamount to self-hatred. This self-hatred can be either internalized or externalized (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 29; See also Trexler, 1995).

In particular, Indigenous men's difficulties in comprehending and dealing effectively with the source of their own disempowerment has led to a compounding of the problem for Indigenous women and children, who are frequently the targets of men's raging manifestations of internalized self-hatred. This problem exists in various forms and intensities across the entire economic and social spectrum in First Nations, and in spite of other recent politico-legal advances in the empowerment of First Nations enterprises and governments. Women express colonized mindsets as well, but mainly through self-destructive behaviour. Men tend to channel their rage externally, and as a consequence gendered violence has become endemic within First Nations communities.

The gradual transformation of First Nations communities from violent and discordant environments cannot be accomplished by conceptualizing the harm as dysfunction or by isolating problem behaviours. It is becoming clear, as this paper will argue, that without the foundation provided by a connection to land-based cultural practices and the reestablishment of authentic indigenous community life, individualizing efforts actually work to compound the problems by promoting further alienation from proven sources of strength and healing on the individual level, and the social-cultural atomization of indigenous communities. This paper advocates a radical

approach to change, consisting in the effort to reintegrate the essential features and benefits of a reconnection to homeland and of "traditional" indigenous land-based cultural practices that have proven in many cases to be key to the reclamation of spiritual, physical and psychological health and to the restoration of communities characterized by peace and harmony and strength.

Political and social institutions, such as band councils and government-funded service agencies that govern and influence life in First Nations today, have been for the most part shaped and organized to serve the interests of the Canadian state. Their structures, responsibilities, and authorities conform to the interests of Canadian governments, just as their sources of legitimacy are found in Canadian laws, not in First Nations interests or laws. These institutions are inappropriate foci for either planning or leading the cause of indigenous survival and regeneration. Reconfiguring First Nations politics and replacing current strategies, institutions and leadership structures with those rooted in and drawing legitimacy from indigenous cultures is necessary for creating renewed environments capable of supporting indigenous ways of being. Transformations begin inside each person, but decolonization starts becoming a reality when people collectively and consciously reject colonial identities and institutions that are the context of violence, dependency and discord in indigenous communities.

It is evident to anyone who has experience living or working within First Nations communities that conventional approaches to health promotion and community development are not showing strong signs of success. Reconciliation and empowerment through economic development and as the expected outcomes of self-government processes, land claims agreements, and aboriginal rights and title legal strategies, have not materialized. This is in large part because they have proven to be weak challenges to the thrust of the colonial-capitalist enterprise: the destruction or dispersal of Indigenous populations from their homelands to ensure access for industrial exploitation enterprises and concomitant non-indigenous settlements. Conventional approaches are based on an accession to the colonial-capitalist agenda with respect to Indigenous people and their lands. The agenda is heavily promoted by largely pro-assimilationist media and mainstream non-indigenous scholars (Widdowson, 2008; Helin, 2006; Flanagan, 2006), with integration into the market economy and cultural assimilation advanced as the only viable pathways to a better life for First Nations people and communities. This perspective is also at the centre of government policy and, it is fair to say, forms the view of the vast majority of the Canadian population.

Even among First Nations leadership, there is reliance upon the promise of integration and assimilation as a panacea for the complex of colonization and its resulting social suffering. The implicit assumption being that indigenous spiritual and cultural attachments to their homelands are relics of the past, and that the land and land-based cultures are capable of providing nothing more than a touchstone for the formation of new ethnic adaptations of a dispossessed and decultured "Aboriginal Canadian" identity. But the acceptance of being such an "Aboriginal" within the larger social-cultural mainstream of Canada is as powerful an assault on meaningful indigenous existences as any force of arms ever brought upon First Nations by the colonial regime. This integrationist and unchallenging aboriginal vision is designed to lead First Nations into oblivion, as individual successes in assimilating to the mainstream are celebrated, and our survival is redefined strictly in the terms of capitalist dogma and practical-minded individualist consumerism and complacency.

Despite some celebrated successes in court cases and economic development ventures, neither of these strategies generates real transformation in the quality of the lived experience of Indigenous peoples' lives or expands the opportunities they have for living in ways that are not harmful to themselves or their communities. There is in fact not a shred of empirical evidence that increasing the material wealth of Indigenous people, or increasing the economic development of First Nations communities, in any way improves the mental or physical health or overall well-being of people in First Nations communities (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009). On the collective level, in terms of the need to empower First Nations communities, the self-government and economic development approach further entrenches both dependency and assimilation. As financial agreements, they are framed within and consistent with government policies without any real consideration of First Nations' needs and objectives. Structured as year to year funding agreements, they promote instability and work against long-term planning and capacity building. They also do not provide means for First Nations to develop autonomous means to generate revenue, and most self-government agreements contain significant disincentives for First Nations to even attempt to move towards developing a capacity for such, "own source revenue generation." In fact, business development and job training and other schemes to increase First Nations participation in the market economy are irrelevant to the basic problems that are the actual causes of the social and health crises in First Nations communities and at the root of First Nations psychological and financial dependency on the state. This "suffering as a causal web in

the global economy" (Kleinman, Das & Lock, 1997, p. x), understanding of the ties between the social and health effects of political processes involved in colonization is clearly stated in the literature on social suffering (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009). In this perspective bureaucratic government responses most often make the problems they are supposed to address even worse, most importantly by normalizing the psychophysiology of the experienced harm (Bordieu, 2000; Das, Kleinman & Lock, 2001). This is certainly the case here in Canada today with respect to indigenous-state relations.

In contrast to the failures of the governmental approach, cultural and spiritually-rooted efforts to re-establish land-based cultures as the framework of First Nations culture and life on individual and collectives levels are showing signs of being able to transform First Nations' realities (Alfred, 2005). Unlike the current government processes and programs, which often focus on helping Indigenous individuals develop the personal resources to cope with the colonial context in which they find themselves, and their symptoms of colonization-based suffering, this notion of change seeks to alter the situation by reorienting people's mindsets and to reshape colonial identities that create unhealthy and destructive incentives and imperatives facing Indigenous people as they try to live their lives. Current approaches are often based on concepts of healing, reconciliation or capacity-building. Problematizing the people and not the state's behaviour, such approaches are not intended to alter the underlying, colonial, causes of unhealthy and destructive behaviours in First Nations communities.

Throughout history, people that have overcome effects of colonization and recovered their dignity and regained the ability to be self-sufficient and autonomous have done so only after a sustained effort at spiritual revitalization and cultural regeneration. And in the vast majority of these cases, have done so in a context where the colonizer has physically withdrawn from the indigenous space. Indigenous peoples in our part of the world possess the potential to resurgence as well, even though this is complicated by the persistence of a colonial settler presence. In the face of that reality, there are still Indigenous people who have broken the bonds of dependency and created stability and self-sufficiency in many different ways, using all kinds of economic strategies and forms of political and social organization, but they have all accomplished their re-empowerment in political and economic ways after they have been successful in recovering a strong connection to their traditional culture and restored their spiritual strength on personal and collective levels (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005; Laduke, 1999; Alfred, 2005).

> Although the loss of land must be seen as a political and economic disaster of the first magnitude, the real exile of the tribes occurred with the destruction of the ceremonial life and failure or inability of white society to offer a sensible and cohesive alternative to the traditions which Indians remembered. People became disoriented with respect to the world in which they lived (Deloria, 2002, p. 247).

In confronting the disorientation at the base of indigenous discord and dependency, it is this approach that offers the best hope for the recovery of First Nations in Canada.

COLONIALISM IN CANADA

The invasion and eventual domination of North America by European empires that we know as colonization is best understood as the culmination of thousands of years of differential societal developments under specific environmental conditions. This has resulted in different features emerging among various peoples, some of which confer relative advantage and some of which confer disadvantage, when peoples come into contact and begin to contest the essence of societal existences: land. There is no evidence of any superiority of one group of people over another (Diamond, 2003). With this understanding, notions of genetic o r divine predestinations to dominate must be shelved in favour of analyses of the particularities of the relationship and instrumental behaviours of people as they played out in the development of the relationship between Indigenous and European peoples in this part of the world.

What we refer to as "colonialism" is actually a theoretical framework for understanding the complexities of the relationship that evolved between Indigenous peoples and Europeans as they came into contact and later sustained those initial relationships in building a new reality for both peoples in North America. Specifically, colonialism is the development of institutions and policies by European imperial and Euroamerican settler governments towards Indigenous peoples. This process began with the development of religious and secular rationalizations of the simple fact of European presence in North America, based on the doctrine of *terra nullius* (the principle of "empty lands" asserting that North America was not populated by humans before the arrival of Europeans), and for the legal dispossession of Indigenous people from their original lands. Canada's legal claim to a territory is based on the doctrine of *terra nullius*, peace and friendship treaties with Indigenous peoples, and various Royal Proclamations assuming

imperial prerogative to pre-empt indigenous ownership of land. Britain (and France before it) secured control against other would-be colonial powers by recognizing indigenous nationhood and sovereignty both in rhetoric and practice, as Europeans were not militarily capable of defeating indigenous nations outright, and needed indigenous alliances to confront their colonial rivals. Once Britain gained a preponderance of effective control over North America, it ignored earlier recognitions of indigenous nationhood and political sovereignty, as well as the legal guarantees to land ownership and access provided by treaties. By then, Indigenous populations had been reduced substantially by epidemic diseases and no longer posed a serious military threat to Britain's colonial aspirations and the colonial regime, as it should be understood after this phase of history. Britain then began the process of consolidating its territorial control and expansion with an agenda centred on the elimination of First Nations as legal and political entities, destruction of remnant indigenous resistance on the land, the management of Indigenous populations through the reserve system, and eventually a move to gradually "civilize" the Indigenous population through religious instruction and trades education (Rotman, 1996).

Within this broad sweep of history, focusing on the political economy of the process sheds light on the "dependency" aspect of the colonial enterprise by accounting for the common end-result of diverse economic relations between Indigenous populations and the colonial regime. There are many differences between and among Indigenous peoples in their experience with colonization. Differences in class, race and gender account for many variations among the experienced realities of Indigenous peoples throughout history (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993, p. xiv). In the final analysis, European powers and Canada as the legacy state of European imperialism in North America have had a consistent goal centred on the seizure, control and use of indigenous lands in support of resource-based extractive industry to generate profits for, first, European regimes, later, for the resident Euroamerican metropolitan population, and more recently for globalized corporations. The policy of European and Euroamerican governments since first contact has not only been guided by mistaken notions of racial superiority and divine rights to domination, but also largely by the needs of a capitalist mode of production. Early in the fur trade era, Europeans required indigenous allies in trade and in war. The early peace and friendship treaties recognizing indigenous nationhood and sovereignty and guaranteeing protection of indigenous homelands flow from this politico-economic imperative. The shift from a mainly mercantile to an industrial form of capitalism created a need for the lands to settle large incoming populations of Europeans, thus the colonial regime pursued the objective of settling treaties (the so-called "numbered" treaties signed after Canadian confederation) with First Nations that extinguished indigenous land rights. State policy shifted around the turn of the 19th century, reflected in the establishment of the *Indian Act* and its governmental system, to become an important tool in assimilating or subjugating Indigenous peoples in service to the needs of Canadian capitalist expansion (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993, p. 14).

It is the forced, rapid reshaping of indigenous existence during this process of colonial-capitalist expansion and consolidation which is the most important aspect of the colonial experience for Indigenous peoples themselves – every aspect of their lives was reshaped in the interests of capitalism and to ensure the opportunity and profit potential of the white population recently settled in their homelands. Wotherspoon and Satzewich, considering the implications of Indigenous peoples' situation between capitalism and the land, explain that "people's lives were destroyed both inwardly and outwardly, in concert with idleness from lack of economic opportunity and the absence from any meaningful place in mainstream society" (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993, p. 157).

The anthropologist Hugh Brody's work with Dene peoples in north-western British Columbia, in his book, *Maps and Dreams*, details the specific causal linkages between aspects of colonization and the cultural and social harms to First Nations. In Brody's evaluation, the cumulative effect of resource extraction activities and of white settlement in indigenous homelands has been the disruption of traditional patterns of economic life, as well as serious damage caused to the natural environment caused by pollution and settlement activities. He sees these as the direct cause of First Nations social suffering. In Brody's words, these "environmental effects feed directly and frighteningly into all adverse social disruptions in Indian life" (Brody, 1981, p. 253).

The case of the First Nations fishery on coastal British Columbia is another illustration of the colonial state's efforts over time to undermine First Nations' economic autonomy and to generate the dependency. The indigenous economy in the area was based mainly on the harvesting and preserving fish from the sea and rivers. First Nations had adapted their traditional practices and expanded their activities to include participation in the commercial fisheries established by non-indigenous capitalists. They did this to accommodate the changing realities of modern life, maintaining control over the pace and nature of their adaption and preserving the basis of their cultures. Newell gives a detailed historical

account of indigenous involvement in coastal and inland fisheries, particularly the salmon fishery. The focus of her book is on federal and provincial regulation, and its effect on traditional fishing practices and indigenous participation in industrial fisheries. She gets beneath government claims to be regulating in the public interest – usually framed in terms of conservation – and shows how regulatory strategies were designed to assure cheap indigenous labour for canneries, and to prevent indigenous competition with the white-owned and export-oriented industry. She documents coercive and intimidating practices, including raids against fishing camps and the destruction of traps and weirs along salmon-spawning rivers, and also describes the ignorant destruction of harvesting grounds through blasting designed to "improve" river spawning sites. She also documents how subsistence economies were negatively affected as policy changes made indigenous communities into ever more marginal players in the fishery over time. After WWII, the government's fisheries policies were designed with the more rapid development of forestry and mining in mind, and were coordinated with other policies designed to encourage Indigenous people to migrate into cities and away from reservations. A particularly effective government tactic was to deny services to remote communities in order to spur migrations to urban centres. Putting this history of one activity in one region into a larger frame gives us a picture of the basic strategy and tactics used by the colonial regime in its sustained attack on indigenous economic autonomy and even subsistence livelihoods throughout the country (Newell, 1993).

Most Canadians are completely unaware of this history. This is lamentable, but not surprising, given that it is a common characteristic of colonial societies is the settlers' entrenchment in irrational notions of racial and cultural superiority. Canadian culture and dominant notions forming the Canadian nationalist self-perception are loaded with colonial privileges and the most ludicrous of self-deceptive lies (Alfred, 2005, pp. 106-109). In terms of government and law, this is manifested in fictive legal constructs that legitimate white people's usurpation, and a feigned legitimacy is constructed to normalize the structure of racism built into notions of Indigenous peoples' land tenure and political rights. As an intellectual project, imperial arrogance takes the form of literature, scholarship and art to demonstrate the eminent merits and to replicate the simple fabricated facts and narratives needed to justify colonial privilege. Liberal, conservative and racist reactions across the political spectrum are the same and distinguish themselves from each other only in their varying intensities and styles. The unquestioned normalcy of the set of uninformed and fundamentally racist beliefs and assumptions held by non-indigenous Canadians must be challenged for decolonization to begin in earnest. The behaviours that flow from them must be linked to their roots as a way of tracing the imperial mentality to its source. As it stands, within the paradigms of Euroamerican arrogance, injustices and the evident effects of colonial oppression and indigenous social suffering are explained away through deflective strategies of denial, projection, or misappropriation. Health crises, racial discord, criminality, physical violence, and all other manner of conflict are attributable to strictly material causes or to dysfunctions within First Nations communities. Yet informed opinion on the matter is clear, as the most recent compendium of top-level medical and social science research on mental health issues in Indigenous populations confirms that it is not indigenous dysfunction that is the root problem, but the dispossession of Indigenous people from the land and their subsequent oppressive treatment on reserves in the *Indian Act* system and in residential schools, and through other government policies:

> Although it is difficult to prove a direct causal link, it is likely that the collective trauma, disorientation, loss, and grief caused by these short-sighted and often self-serving policies are major determinants of the mental health problems faced by many Aboriginal communities and populations across Canada (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009, p. xv).

In the face of this fact, self-government and economic development are ineffective ways of confronting colonialism. Rather than attacking the roots of the problem, they perpetuate a dualistic and dependent relationship between First Nations and the state. The pathways open to First Nations in this paradigm, because they require further movement away from the land and more dissolution of community and accept psychophysiological problems as normal, in fact imply a long-term surrender of indigeneity. Enforced isolation and poverty on reserves is no different from the destructive exploitation of the land from an indigenous perspective; both decimate the possibilities for living life according to indigenous cultural values and spiritual mandates. Similarly, discriminatory laws stacked against Indigenous people are paradoxically very similar in their ultimate effect on First Nations to constitutionally entrenched rights and privileges because each of these mean nothing more than changes in degree or a reversal of roles in a relationship that preserves its oppositional essence and in a system that remains the same and annihilates us spiritually

and culturally no matter what the strategic outcome of the struggle.

Meaningful change, the true transcendence of colonialism, and the restoration of indigenous strength and freedom can only be achieved through the resurgence of an indigenous consciousness channelled into contention with colonialism. Indigenous people need to challenge the continuing conquest of the land and our people, but doing so through the futile delusions of money or institutional power can only bring cultural stasis enshrined in law or further conversions to capitalist-consumerism. These outcomes do not reflect the ideals of peace, respect, harmony, and coexistence that are at the heart of indigenous spiritualities and philosophies. The struggle to live in the face of colonialism must be done in an indigenous way according to indigenous needs, values and principles.

Such a renewed consciousness has the possibility to become the sacred knowledge that guides First Nations out of fog of confusion that has enveloped our people. The resurgence of an indigenous consciousness is an explosive potential capable of transforming individuals and communities by altering basic conceptions of the self and in relation to other peoples and the world. Its elements are the regeneration of identities consistent with the sacred teachings that come from the land, commitments to stand up for ourselves, and just restitution for the harms that our people have endured. There is no apparent alternative capable of helping First Nations build better relationships within communities, restore regimes of peace, respect and responsibility, and to lead Indigenous people to courageously counter the legacies of historical trauma and still-present threats to our existences.

THE EFFECT OF COLONIZATION

The situation facing Indigenous people in North America is not unique – neither in the present or in terms of the dynamics of a relationship between invader/oppressor and the subjects of colonization. Frantz Fanon, a medical doctor, used the tools of psychoanalysis to explain why black people lacked the individual and collective confidence in the French Caribbean colony Martinique. Fanon attributed these problems to racist assumptions held by both black and white people. These assumptions placed white people at the apex of civilization, and measured everyone else against white cultural standards. Accordingly, only those black people who assimilated into French culture were deemed to be civilized. Those who did not assimilate experienced a form of perpetual ridicule, which resulted in feelings of personal inadequacy. In Fanon's analysis, colonized people who mimic the ways of the colonizer – who assimilate to the mainstream – and suppress their natural selves on a conscious and unconscious level begin to suffer from various psychological disorders (Fanon, 1982). There is certainly no evidence that the issues around assimilation and psychopathology are any different for Indigenous people. And, regarding the specific effects of colonization in Canada, Kirmayer and Valaskakis report that "it is likely that the collective trauma, disorientation, loss, and grief caused by these short-sighted and often self-serving policies are major determinants of mental health problems faced by many Aboriginal communities" (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009, p. xv), clearly verifying that a Fanonian perspective on the psychological stresses of colonialism are present in Canada today.

Drawing on his research among the Kluane First Nation in the Yukon, Paul Nadasdy has described the harmful effects of colonialism, manifest as modern land claim processes and wildlife co-management initiatives, on First Nations communities as collectivities. His conclusion is that the most significant changes forced on First Nations relate to the emergence of various bureaucratic structures, such as wildlife co-management boards and the various negotiating tables involved with land claims, which have supplanted indigenous governing structures in the community. This increases the social stratification between those educated and technically qualified to navigate government bureaucracies and those who maintain an existence on the land and who engage in traditional land-based practices. It also changes the community's relationship with the land, eroding relationships based on indigenous spiritual teachings to a framework of individual private property. It alters the people's relationship with animals, where over time Indigenous people begin to view and treat animals no longer as sacred beings worthy of respect but as natural resources and marketable commodities (Nadasdy, 2003).

The geographer Cole Harris' work on the economic, social and health consequences of colonial and reserve policy for Indigenous peoples elaborates on these themes. Harris links the imposition of a private property rights regime with ideas on the superiority of the white race and European culture, as well as with the imperatives of the state itself, most notably the requirements of the state for surveillance and discipline of dysfunctional or minority populations. He notes that in the early period of contact and settlement, Indian agents responsible for monitoring and managing the colonial regime's law and policy in relation to First Nations were often times unable accomplish their objective of total surveillance of Indigenous peoples, especially in

the early years of the colony. But once white settlement intensified, immigrant farmers and ranchers did much of the surveillance for it, and were always willing to invoke the colonial regimes criminal justice system against Indigenous people, as "trespassers," who were seeking to use their land as they always had – implicating private citizens and the public at large in the process of colonization. The private property regime displaced indigenous land uses, cutting off access to traditional food sources, timber, water, and other necessary resources. Throughout Canada, government policies officially encouraged farming as a replacement economy for Indigenous people, Indian reserve lands were generally too poor in quality and too limited in size to support whole communities. Harris' conclusions illustrate how difficult it was to sustain First Nations as cohesive communities in the face of colonialism. This is in spite of impressive survival strategies implemented by Indigenous peoples, usually involving a combination of land-based practices, wage labour, small-scale-horticulture and food fishing, depending on the region and specific location (Harris, 2002, Part IV).

Over time, for all First Nations, the success or failure of particular survival strategies depended more and more on general economic trends and government policy decisions over which First Nations had no control. Hunger became a persistent problem everywhere. Overcrowding and lack of access to clean water and poor sanitation on reserve housing contributed to very high rates of infectious diseases. The lack of access to traditional foods weakened health further; diets became less varied, and healthy traditional staples were replaced by refined foods like flour and sugar, causing further deterioration in First Nations' health status and dependencies on government and health bureaucracies that continue to this day in all First Nation communities.

Indian reserves have become dangerous environments, not only in a physical sense but in a psychological sense as well; colonization has created double-barrelled psychophysical effects. The research shows how it is due to the unrelenting stresses of colonization that reserve cultures do not reflect a meaningful notion of "community" and why life on reserves is characterized by a much higher degree of violence, hate and aggression driven substance abuse than other communities. This is a major effect of colonization: denial of access to land-based cultural practices leading to a loss of freedom on both the individual and collective levels equating to the psychological effect of *anomie*, or the state of profound alienation that results from experiencing serious cultural dissolution, which is then the direct cause of serious substance abuse problems, suicide and interpersonal violence. In the case of Indian reserve life in Canada, anomie has evolved into a culture in many First Nations as its effects have become normalized and people in First Nations communities entire life experience is coloured by these colonial effects (Tanner, 2009, pp. 251-252).

Colin Samson's research among the Innu of Davis Inlet and Sheshatshiu in Labrador gives a fuller picture of this set of effects. Forced assimilation of the Innu began in the 1960s when they were required by law to give up their nomadic hunting lifestyle and were pushed into settled villages. This new life saw the introduction of the *Indian Act* band council system, Canadian criminal courts (circuit courts system), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and mission schools. The band council system altered traditional authority structures, and governance in the Innu communities from being diffused, dynamic and accommodating of indigenous cultural values to rigid, static and controlling. Consequently, traditional relationships were abandoned as manipulation, bribery, deception and force became the primary tools used to achieve political objectives and social control. Circuit courts and the RCMP also contributed to dissolution of traditional social structures. Specifically, they diminished the role of Elders as arbitrators, and changed people's understanding of justice from a restorative concept to a punitive one. Mission schools promoted and normalized sexual violence and physical abuse, the English language, and Christianity. Taken all together, these changes and the forceful acculturation of Innu people to them, nearly destroyed the indigenous way of life over a short fifty-year time span. Today, the communities of Davis Inlet and Sheshatshiu are emblematic of the effects of colonization on First Nations, worst case scenarios in which the people suffer through record breaking suicide rates, infant mortality rates, chemical dependency rates, and incidents of domestic violence (Samson, 2003).

The experience of the Innu has been replicated in all indigenous communities in the course of their interactions with the Canadian state. The dynamics of the problem as well as the specific manifestations of these colonial effects exist in all First Nations communities today. The effects are typical results in what Adrian Tanner has called the "sedentarization" of Indigenous peoples. Across Canada, at various times according to the period when Indigenous peoples came into sustained contact with European or Euroamerican colonial regimes, integrated communities, traditional cultures, land-based self-sufficiency, and overall healthy existences were undermined by the forced movement and acculturation to the sedentary lifestyle and reconstruction of their social contexts to confirm to the *Indian Act* system. Drawing on Tanner's work among the James Bay Cree of Northern Quebec (Tanner, 2009, p. 254) it is possible to identify four specific effects of the

imposition of the *Indian Act* and the forced settlement of Indigenous populations on reserves:

1. **Disorientation** – caused by the lack of self-government and management capacity appropriate to the imposed bureaucratic and capitalist environment.
2. **Disempowerment** – due to coercive enforcement of colonial laws and policies by government authorities.
3. **Discord** – resulting from people's inability to fulfil traditional, social, cultural, and spiritual obligations.
4. **Disease** – caused by inferior nutrition and the sedentary nature of reserve life.

The experience of Indigenous people in the urban context has not been extensively studied, but even the limited research by Jim Silver on urban indigenous political participation does shed some light on the particularities of their situation. Silver links the urban Aboriginal experience, characterized by experiences of overt racism and social exclusion, with an ongoing colonial relationship that equates, in experiential terms, to the removal of a normative framework for life leading to anomie suffered by reserve-based First Nations. There is, then, evidence of significant commonalities of effect between the urban and reserve in spite of the obvious difference of circumstance in geographic and socio-economic terms. Confinement to rural reserves and confinement to economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in urban centres lead to the same results in the negative life experiences of Indigenous people.

The main differences between the two situations are that in the urban context Indigenous people's lives are affected by their experience of economic and racial discrimination – most cannot afford to live anywhere but in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and once there, the dynamics of enclave ghettoization and racism keeps them from locating elsewhere. Furthermore, just like in the reserve setting historically and in the contemporary period, the needs of Indigenous people living in indigenous enclaves or in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Canada's cities are neglected by the federal and provincial governments (Silver, 2006). Thus, for the purposes of understanding colonialism and its fundamental effects on Indigenous peoples in Canada, there is no basis for distinguishing between urban and reserve populations.

Compounding the psychophysical and cultural effects of separation from the land and dissolution of community, there is the actual experience of harm and the multigenerational reverberations of the violence used in and associated with the oppression of First Nations. The historical traumas experienced by Indigenous people in the process of being removed from the land and in the construction of a colonial regime predicated on their marginalization are another factor at the root of the crisis of dependency (Whitebeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004, pp. 199-130). The spectrum of psychophysical effects being manifested in First Nations in Canada are the same ones that have been directly and causally linked to experiences of oppression in the research on Holocaust survivors and their families – recent research indicates that the direct effects and multigenerational legacies of the experience of colonialism has created similar effects on First Nations people as experiencing the Holocaust had on Jewish survivors (Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). Conceptualized as the source of "historical unresolved trauma," the pattern of colonization in Canada as experienced by Indigenous peoples has three identifiable features:

1. Ongoing multigenerational processes of dispossession and oppression;
2. Violent and systematic marginalization and assimilation; and,
3. Forced acculturation to Christianity and forced integration to market capitalism.

Whatever the particular situation, Indigenous people's basic relationship to the state is as members of nations in a colonial relationship with a dominating external power. All Indigenous people's personal interfaces with the state are channelled through and shaped by the collective relationship that their nation has, historically and currently, with the colonial regime. The laws and other types of institutions that give shape to First Nations life in Canada, and through which state agencies relate to Indigenous people, operate in a context that is historical and political and which reflects the objectives of the state in regard to the collective entities that make up the indigenous reality of Canada as economic, political and social facts. As such, the relationship between First Nations and the Canadian state remains colonial and is for the most part one of conflict rooted in the state's imperative to maintain its control over indigenous lands and to limit the power of First Nations.

In such a colonial relationship, impositions of power and authority by the regime may be absorbed, tolerated, or accommodated by Indigenous people in various ways over time, but the conquest of the Indigenous population

becomes inevitability only when settlers' imperial claims to legitimacy are accepted and normalized by Indigenous peoples. Legitimation (acceptance and support for colonial institutions) is a fundamental mandate of the colonial regime. The most important and immediate imperative once the seizure of land is accomplished is to assimilate those Indigenous peoples who have survived the initial assault on their existences. Without an autonomous and authentic indigenous identity and cultural foundation, there is no memory store or intellectual base upon which to maintain oneself as an Indigenous person or for communities to maintain their cohesion and to challenge the colonial regimes continuing efforts to marginalize and disempower.

Yet it is difficult for First Nations to summon the spiritual and psychological sources of power, not to mention the financial and political resources, to confront colonialism and demand an end to the colonization of their lands, recognition of the injustices perpetrated against them collectively and individually, and restitution for crimes large and small that have been committed by settlers and the colonial regime. There are real reasons for this psychological, financial and political dependency; real effects of the colonial enterprise which are constituted in the defeat of indigenous autonomy and the relegation of First Nations to a state of dependency upon the government which is also the source of their destabilization (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009, p. 453). The anger and mistrust arising from having endured colonialism is another main source of the crises facing First Nations – psychological distress and the inability to engage and form relationships in healthy ways with each other and with the settler society. In a 2004 psychological study on the effects of historical loss and possible linkages to PTSD symptoms, which included focus groups on two reserves in Ontario, nearly half the respondents thought about the effects of alcoholism on their people on a daily basis or even more frequently and between 33per cent and 38per cent thought about other issues of historical loss related to land, language and culture every day (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009, p. 454).

It appears to some Indigenous people that the way to alleviate the stresses of being in a colonized position is to accede to the colonial regime's demands to assimilate. Cultural assimilation is a direct and non-contentious route to the same place of conditional toleration within the Canadian mainstream. People who choose assimilation are enticed by and are allowed the promise of acceptance within the settler society's consumer culture and in the larger Canadian civic identity. But there is a large problem with assimilation even for those who choose it over any form of resistance: true assimilation, the complete immersion and integration into the mainstream, is impossible. It is around this psycho-cultural dynamic that another broad effect of colonialism revolves. "Aboriginalism," or the social and cultural reimagining of genocide, is based on the idea that what is integral to Indigenous peoples is an irrelevant relic, and that if First Nations are to have a viable future, it will be defined by and express itself only at the discretion of the dominant society (Alfred, 2005).

Aboriginalism assumes that in renewing relationships between First Nations and the colonial regime, the important and valuable aspects of indigenous culture will be abandoned or compromised in the interests of honouring Euroamerican values and cultures and preserving the central premises of the colonial regime and the preferences of settler society. In reality, aboriginalism is a false consciousness, a permanent embedding of colonialism's assumptions and attitudes into First Nations culture and society. This colonial consciousness generates a desire in the colonized person for non-contentious, cooperative identities, institutions, and strategies for interacting with the colonizer. In the absence of identities rooted in indigenous cultures, aspects of identity and cultural choices are selected from the pastiche presented by the dominant society and the bureaucratic and judicial machinery of the state. The most pronounced and obvious of aboriginalist postures is the seeker of recovery who desires only to heal and live in peace with the settlers. The reconciliator who prays a Christian god and strives before white judges is another. But both the victim and litigant reflect the essential colonial process of "civilizing" Indigenous people, making us into citizens of the conquering states, so that instead of fighting for our lands and resisting further colonization, we seek a *resolution* that is acceptable to and non-disruptive for the state and society we have come to embrace and identify with.

With aboriginalism, all the independent bases of indigenous existences are abandoned or compromised in the negotiation of our dependency and integration in every way into the settler society's institutions. The work of Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox in her forthcoming book, *Finding Dahsaa,* analyzes land claim negotiation processes in the Northwest Territories to illustrate how damaging it is to conceptualize indigenous values, principles, governance systems, traditional knowledge, and spirituality as part of the past. Aboriginalism does exactly this as part of its jettisoning of indigenous authenticity to accede to Canadian government policies and embrace mainstream values and culture. Conceived as part of the historical past, even if it admits colonialism, indigenous cultures cannot be relevant to future generations of First Nations people as viable alternatives to the current reality. Similarly, the injustices experienced by First Nations

are conflated with these historical processes, and therefore set in time and unchangeable. Since Aboriginal identities, legal constructs and policies are premised on these *historical* notions, politics cannot address the social suffering that results from *ongoing* injustice, and they become simply band aids for the symptoms of ongoing colonization. If aboriginalism were to become the main framework for indigenous identity and for constructing relationships between Indigenous peoples and state, it would lead to the complete erosion of First Nations as political and culturally distinctive entities. Such a result would no doubt deepen the crises facing First Nations.

As a political program and set of cultural assumptions, aboriginalism manages to gently step through the minefield laid by formal definitions of genocide in international law. But this psychological and legal security exists only because the Canadian government's agenda and policies are not critically scrutinized in the public discourse or by most mainstream scholars. The severe destructive and disintegrating effects of colonization in indigenous communities and the momentum towards assimilation, combined with the active construction of aboriginalist structures to support the elimination of authentic indigenous existences, make such self-examination unlikely. Instead, accommodations with colonialism are sought.

Indigenous people who embrace aboriginalism become cultural mirrors of the mainstream society, and because they aspire to elevate their status inside settler society, they are afforded opportunities to usurp the voice and privileges of legitimate representatives of First Nations. Governments promote, and the general society accepts, the aboriginalist voice in politics and the arts, scholarship, media, and other public forums because it is the voice of accommodation and acceptance of the situation and allows settler society the hubris of its mistaken notion that indigenous dysfunction is responsible for First Nations dependency and suffering. This misappropriation of voice and subtle manipulation of the constitution of First Nations leadership in Canada is another powerful attack on the ability of First Nations to regenerate culturally and politically as collectives. From an indigenous perspective, it is not the Indigenous bureaucrats, businessmen, politicians, and lawyers holding positions of influence in state agencies or government-sponsored negotiation processes that have the right and responsibility to represent First Nations on the basic questions of indigenous identity and rights, cultural knowledge, traditional law and governance, or spirituality. It is the Elders and those who have been recognized as traditional knowledge holders or spiritual leaders that have that right and responsibility; and, it is theirs whose voice is being ignored, appropriated and manipulated in the advancement of the aboriginalist agenda.

Indigenous Elders, knowledge holders, and spiritual leaders are consistent in their conclusions on how indigenous cultures have changed in the wake of colonization. In the culturally and spiritually rooted indigenous perspective, the most significant issues are not legal, political or financial in nature, they relate to the destruction of languages, spiritual practices, and social institutions (family, community, and governing structures), and the importance of restoring these things in order to re-establish a sense of personal identity and belonging for contemporary Indigenous peoples (Kulchyski, McCaskill & Newhouse, 1999*)*. The respected Okanagan Elder and teacher Jeannette Armstrong describes how colonialism has led to the "slow internal disintegration of the survival principles developed over thousands of years;" and she tells how community focused relearning of traditional ways and governance systems (*enow'kin*) and a renewed focus on spiritual practices is the "backbone of the movement" to recreate solidarity within First Nations communities (Lobo, 1998, pp. 235-239).

Based on these understandings, from a solutions-oriented perspective, colonialism is best conceptualized as an irresistible outcome of a multigenerational and multifaceted process of forced dispossession and attempted acculturation – a disconnection from land, culture and community – that has resulted in political chaos and social discord within First Nations communities and the collective dependency of First Nations upon the state. This harm has resulted in the erosion of trust and of the social bonds that are essential to a people's capacity to sustain themselves as individuals and as collectivities.

Disconnection is the precursor to disintegration, and the deculturing of our people is most evident in the violence and self-destruction that are the central realities of a colonized existence and the most visible face of the discord colonialism has wrought in indigenous lives over the years. Cycles of oppression are being repeated through generations in indigenous communities. Colonial economic relations are reflected in the political and legal structures of contemporary indigenous societies, and they result in Indigenous peoples having to adapt culturally to this reality and to individuals reacting in destructive and unhealthy (but completely comprehensible) ways. These social and health problems seem to be so vexing to governments; large amounts of money have been allocated to implement government-run organizations and policies geared towards alleviating these problems but they have had only limited positive effect on the health status of our communities.

These problems are not really mysterious nor are they unsolvable.

The social and health problems besetting Indigenous people are the logical result of a situation wherein people respond or adapt to unresolved colonial injustices. People in indigenous communities develop complexes of behaviour and mental attitudes that reflect their colonial situation and out flow unhealthy and destructive behaviours. It is a very simple problem to understand when we consider the whole context of the situation and all of the factors involved. Hugh Brody's explanation of the effects of dispossession on land-based indigenous communities summarizes the overall problem facing First Nations today. There is an "astonishing" contrast between the experience and difference in the kind of life a person lives when land-based cultural practices form the core of their existence, one in which negative experiences are very rare, as opposed to the experience of poor health, accidents and injuries, violence, and alcoholism in the very same individuals, that connection to the land is broken and they are forced to centre their lives in cities or on reserves (Brody, 1981, p. 253; Lobo, 1998, pp. 388-400). This is as clear a statement of the basic effects of colonialism as experienced by Indigenous people in Canada as can be made.

To summarize and reflect on the effects of colonialism, we must reorient our understanding of what colonization is in order to situate ourselves to act on bringing health into our lives and to break the colonial regime's constant negative pressure on the practical reality of our lives. Whether it is the regime's destructive forces, which cause discord and imbalances in our lives that lead to sickness; its deceptive forces, which cloud our minds and prevent us from seeing and thinking clearly about our situations; or, its useless forces, which use up our time and energy to no good effect, we are bombarded daily with the power of these destructive, useless deceptions in the form of popular culture, mainstream education and government propaganda. Racist images and assimilative identities created by the colonial regime are manifestations of the power of empire to implant harmful delusions and to confuse our minds with libratory fantasies. As weapons of disempowerment, control and dispossession, they are superbly effective. Yet their full purpose and effect remains the spiritual defeat of Indigenous people and the dissolution of First Nations. The psychological landscape of contemporary colonialism is defined by extremes of self-hatred, fear and co-optation of the mind; the effect has been the creation of a reality and culture in which people are unable to recognize, much less realize, their value as human beings.

Disconnection from the spiritual, cultural and physical heritage of our indigenous homelands is the real reason for the cultural and physical disempowerment of First Nations as collectivities and as individuals. Health and healing, in the true sense of these terms, can only be achieved by breaking out of the toxic environments of the urban enclave and reserve; physical, spiritual, psychological health of Indigenous people, and socio-cultural integrity of First Nations are inextricably connected. Physical health is the bodily manifestation of recovered dignity, spiritual rootedness and connection to the land. When clear, calm minds and strong bodies are connected, we have whole persons again; working together we become strong and dignified nations.

The reason most Indigenous people endure unhappy and unhealthy lives has nothing to do with governmental powers or money. The lack of these things only contributes to making a bad situation worse. The root of the problem is that we are living *anomie,* a form of spiritual crisis, caused by historical trauma that has generated an "Aboriginal" legal-economic response that is not authentic and is designed by non-indigenous people to serve the interests of the colonial regime and capitalism.

Large-scale statist solutions like self-government and land claims are not so much lies as they are irrelevant to the root problem. For a long time now, we have been on a quest for governmental power and money; somewhere along the journey from the past to the future, we forgot that our goal was to reconnect with our lands and to preserve our harmonious cultures and respectful ways of life. It is these things that are the true guarantee of peace, health, strength, and happiness – of survival. Before we can start rebuilding First Nations and achieve meaningful change in the situation of dependency on the state, or in the areas of law and government, we must start to remember one important thing: our communities are made up of people. Our concern about legal rights and empowering models of national self-government has led to the neglect of the building blocks of nations: the women and men, the youth and the Elders.

Colonialism has retrenched three basic options for Indigenous people: destruction, dependency or assimilation. None of these are morally justifiable, and none of them in fact work very well in practice even from the perspective of the colonial regime. The fact of a continuing indigenous existence is not in question any longer; the population growth in real terms and as a percentage of the overall population of the country is rising. But in the current conceptual frame and following established policy pathways, the problems plaguing First Nations communities are growing in number and depth as well. The fact of indigenous existence is not in question, but the quality of indigenous existence is.

The elements of a meaningful indigenous existence are land, culture and community. As it stands today, First Nations people are denied these basic human rights as they are forced to endure intolerable and humiliating existences in unacceptable conditions on reserves, separated by law and policy from their lands by the colonial regime. Or they are forced off their lands into the larger Canadian community and while they may on occasion achieve a measure of success economically in this situation, they are denied their basic human right to their culture and authentic community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Serious consideration of overcoming the history, nature and effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples in Canada, through politico-economic as well as through psychological and sociological theory lenses, points in one direction only:

> The solution to the problem of First Nations psychological and financial dependency on the state caused by colonialism is the return of land to First Nations and the re-establishment of First Nations presences on and connections to their homelands.

It is through the regeneration of their communities around land-based cultural practices that First Nations can rebuild autonomous social and cultural existences and self-sufficient economies.

The causal relationship of the basic impacts of colonialism – the loss of land, consequent dissolution of community and culture, and the harms suffered as a result of government policies of assimilation – are clear. There is a direct relationship between government policies and institutional power as they have been, and continue to be, applied to Indigenous peoples and the myriad of mental and physical health problems and economic deprivations – their social suffering- of Indigenous peoples in Canada. As stated clearly in the most recent compendium of research on mental health issues in indigenous communities: "Connection to the land has played an important role in Aboriginal conceptions of personhood and wellness. Disruption of this link has been a major contributor to the social suffering endured by Aboriginal communities" (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009, p. 446). Thus:

> Government policy changes and First Nation community and organizational efforts must begin to focus on the fundamental aspects of the problem: loss of land and consequent restriction of First Nations people to reserves or dispersal to urban centres, destruction of indigenous land-based cultures leading to dissolution of the spiritual and social foundations of indigenous existences, and colonialism's psychophysiological impacts in terms of self-perception, gendered and family violence, substance abuse, and diet-disease.

With the need to address these fundamentals in mind, the following are recommendations on broad strategic goals that can serve to orient new government policy-making and the development of initiatives by indigenous organizations.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) studied the problem of dependency in the context of colonialism as one of the main focuses of its work, and developed an extensive research program involving all of the country's expertise, individually and institutionally, on this subject. The work was done between 1992 and 1996, and the RCAP's final report on this subject remains the most comprehensive study to date on the roots and causes of economic dependency and the situation of the relative deprivation of First Nations communities in Canada (RCAP, 1996, Volume 2, Part 2). The report makes clear, "Aboriginal self-government would be a sham without a reasonable basis for achieving economic self-reliance." It, recommends, fundamentally, a large scale "reallocation of lands, determined by rational criteria," that would result in a significant expansion of lands "wholly owned and controlled" by First Nations, as well as a "share in the jurisdiction and benefit from a further portion of their traditional lands, as determined in treaty negotiations." There is no research in the scholarly literature which contradicts or differs substantially from these conclusions.

The basic recommendation remains the same today as when RCAP offered its recommendation to the federal and provincial governments in 1996:

> the financial dependency of First Nations upon the state and the accompanying psychophysiological and social problems afflicting First Nations communities and people can only be resolved by returning land to First Nations on a massive scale or by restructuring the relationship between First Nations people and the law in such a way that will allow and facilitate First Nations people access and use of their homelands in culturally and economically beneficial ways.

It is the use and occupation of lands within traditional territories, economic uses, re-establishing residences, seasonal/cyclical ceremonial use, and occupancy by families

and larger clan groups that will allow First Nations to rebuild their communities and reorient their cultures.

The restoration of the capacity, on an individual and communal level, for trust and love to exist in the relationships between First Nations people is absolutely crucial to any real transcendence of the effects of colonialism (Maracle, 1996).

> The other psychophysiological effects must be addressed by focusing not on healing individuals, but in rebuilding communities.

Adrian Tanner's concise statement reflects a general consensus on the scholarly literature: the solution to social breakdown is thus to build and heal the community, not to concentrate on the treatment of individual problems within it (Tanner, 2009, p. 267). This sense of rebuilding First Nations communities on traditional cultural foundations as the precursor to the restoration of physical and mental health as well as the bulwark against future generations becoming dependent on the state for provision of basic life necessities is supported by studies of colonized people globally (Trinh, 1989). The recovery of health in mind, body and spirit, from an indigenous perspective, is only possible in the context of a strong, stable and healthy community. With this in mind, the following set of characteristics of a strong indigenous community, adapted from Taiaiake Alfred's study of retraditionalized indigenous communities (Alfred, 2008, p. 106) provides both strategic objectives and an evaluative framework for efforts at reconstructing indigenous communities:

1. Members of the community are confident and secure in their indigenous identity – knowing who and what they are – and they possess and demonstrate high levels of commitment to their land, culture, community, and solidarity with the larger indigenous community, but are also accepting of the non-essential differences that emerge on issues that are not related to the central premises of the community's identity.
2. Members of the community know their history, spiritual teachings, sacred places within their homelands, and are connected to the land through residence, seasonal land-based practices or ceremonial cycles, and the values and norms that form the basis of the community are clearly established, universally accepted and transferred between generations.
3. There are clear, open and extensive networks of communication among community members, and institutions governing the community have clearly established channels by which information is made available to the people and through which people can communicate their opinions and political participation to governing authorities.
4. People trust, love and care for and about each other, they cooperate with each other, and they base their interactions on the assumption of each other's integrity and honour.
5. Community members are proud to be a part of the community, they make decisions to remain a part of the community and to be accountable to their people; they collectively establish clear cultural expectations and criteria for determining membership in the community, and work to maintain the community's culture from eroding.
6. Community leadership is responsive and accountable to the other members; the governing authority operates in a manner that is consistent with traditional indigenous values and principles, and makes decisions on the basis of a general consensus.
7. The community is committed to mentoring and educating its young people, involving them in all decision-making processes, and respecting the unique challenges they face.
8. The community has extensive mutually-beneficial social, political and trade relationships with other communities, and its leaders consistently seek to foster good relations and gain support among other Indigenous peoples and in the international community.

People must reconnect with the terrain and geography of their indigenous heritage if they are to comprehend the teachings and values of their ancestors, if they are to draw strength and sustenance that is independent of colonial power and which is regenerative of an authentic, autonomous, indigenous existence.

> Access must be provided for Indigenous peoples to use, occupy and gain subsistence from their traditional territories.

To this end, where industrial development is continuing within First Nations' traditional territories:

> Provincial governments must make changes to their policies and mandate existing tenure holders

> to accommodate indigenous cultural, spiritual and economic presences on the land. In regard to First Nations people in urban environments, programs to mobilize youth and ensure their ability to interact with natural environments for cultural learning and spiritual purposes are essential.

And for individuals and populations committed to establishing residency and to make economic use of the land, where resources are lacking or where the existing resources in existing First Nations' community land-holdings are not suitable because of pollution or conflicting use by industry of residential development:

> Funding programs should be developed to allow First Nations people access the necessary lands and resources within their traditional territories or in other regions by agreement and arrangement with other First Nations.

The measurable effects of collective community efforts on these objectives should be:

1. The restoration of indigenous presences on the land and the revitalization of land-based practices;
2. An increased reliance on traditional diets among Indigenous people;
3. The transmission of indigenous culture, spiritual teachings and knowledge of the land between Elders and youth;
4. The strengthening of familial activities and re-emergence of indigenous cultural and social institutions as governing authorities within First Nations; and,
5. Short-term and long-term initiatives and improvements in sustainable land-based economies as the primary economies of reserve based First Nations communities and as supplemental economies for urban indigenous communities.

In regards to the health status of Indigenous people and the problem of dependency on the state's health care bureaucracy:

> It is important to educate people as to the significant health and social benefits of a return to traditional diets and the sort of regular, hard, physical labour and exercise involved in land-based cultural practices in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the effects of preventable diseases and dependency on the state's health system.

People must regain the self-sufficient capacity to provide our own food, clothing, shelter, and medicines. Ultimately important to the struggle for freedom is the reconstitution of our own sick and weakened physical bodies and community relationships accomplished through a return to the natural sources of food and the active, hard-working, physical lives lived by our ancestors.

> The return to traditional land and water-based cultural practices must be reconstituted in an indigenous way by revitalizing the mentoring and learning-teaching relationships that foster real and meaningful human development and community solidarity.

And,

> Measureable change on levels beyond the individual will emanate from the start made by physical and psychological transformations in people generated through direct, guided experiences in small, personal groups and one-on-one mentoring.

This approach is most appropriate to the objective of restoring harmed land-based cultural practices because it is a structure and a relationship which allows for the integration of an indigenous learning-teaching approach. This indigenous approach to knowledge transfer and transformative action, still highly valued by First Nations people, has three parts which the apprentice experiences as a learning pattern on each element of overall process: *listening*, or gaining knowledge through direct teaching; *watching*, or gaining knowledge by observing a master's work; and, *doing*, or gaining knowledge by experiencing the work while being guided by a master. The goal of the process over time is to bring the apprentice to a point where he or she possesses the skills of the master and the confidence to assume a teaching role to others.

Such an approach, combined with and taken as a whole with the other aspects of the vision outlined in this paper, has the potential to cause the reconstitution of First Nations communities by restoring the fundamental connections that are necessary to maintain Indigeneity even while being subject to colonial pressures and in close contact to capitalism and settler society. Groups of families among the James Bay Cree in northern Québec, for example, have put into practice the lessons they have learned from their immediate ancestors who first encountered settler society and experienced the disruptions to their former way of life caused by mercantile-capitalist colonialism and the presence

of settler settlements in their territories. The example of the James Bay Cree families provides a working model of a means of cultural survival for today and for the future (Tanner, 2009).

The traditional gathering or seasonal "bush camp" used by the James Bay Cree – and many other nations – provides a solid set of principles for conceptualizing efforts to preserve the crucial linkages between people, and between people and the land, that can sustain and even recreate strong and healthy indigenous identities and ways of living in the world (Tanner, 2009, p. 254). This model has three basic elements:

1. Re-establish family presence on the land in seasonal, ceremonial, or annual cycles;
2. Provide financial support to assist families in maintaining themselves based primarily using traditional land-based practices; and,
3. Restore traditional forms of community and cultural teaching on the land.

The holistic reconnection of people to each other and to the land, affording reserve-based and urban populations the opportunity to engage with each other and their homelands, will be the foundation of individual psychophysical health and community resurgence. Once people have their basic connections re-established, they will have the strength and confidence and support to figure out ways that work for them and their communities to sustain themselves and begin to make empowering decisions that fit the circumstances of their lives and situation vis-á-vis the colonial regime.

> There is no one solution, so a multiplicity of strategies and tactics must be developed with respect to First Nations' particular colonial experiences and situations.

Yet among all First Nations in Canada, it is the very foundation of their existence as Indigenous peoples that has been eroded by colonialism, and it is the rebuilding of this foundation that must be the focus of First Nations organizations and government policy efforts in order for First Nations to overcome the effects of colonization and to begin to engage the wider society and the world as self-sufficient and stable communities again.

> We must realize that government policy cannot solve the problem.

It is crucially important for Indigenous people themselves to take the initiative to begin changing their own lives and to contribute to the rebuilding of their communities. The idea of engagement is an important one. Indigenous people alive today have been successful in surviving physically against the worst abuses of the colonial regime. Survival as nations and communities, though, demands that we act on our deep connections to the land and our sacred heritage of resistance to colonialism. Our ability to do this has been severely affected by the harms and losses we have suffered because of the negative forces brought into our communities by settlers and the colonial regime.

> Finally, the willingness to fight for survival in all sense of the word, and for the right to exist free and healthy and fully as an Indigenous person in one's homeland must be recognized and supported as a means of recovery as well.

It is through political and social action in defence of the land and the political rights of First Nations that many colonized Indigenous people regain knowledge of their history and culture, and the confidence to demand and affect change in their lives and in the larger society. As Kirmayer and Valaskakis surmise, in their review and comparison of various strategies of promoting mental well-being and the psychological recovery from the effects of colonialism:

> Political and social activism can be a path toward healing. Activism shifts the focus from "blame the victim" to recognition of oppressive systematic structures. Engagement with the aspirations of a community or a people offers an immediate sense of purpose and direction. It requires building functional ties to community to develop solidarity and both individual and collective efficacy. If successful, such activism brings great rewards not only in terms of social recognition, power and economic resources but also in terms of a renewed sense of both individual and collective agency (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009, p. 458).

The message from traditional teachings and from the academic research is consistent and clear: return to the land and re-learn how to live as Indigenous people according to the original teachings that sustained people and the earth for thousands of years. Even the Supreme Court of Canada, starting with the *Delgamuukw* decision and in numerous decisions since, has mandated the protection of traditional cultural uses of the land by Indigenous people. This provides the basis in Canadian law for a broad based social, cultural and political movement to re-assert indigenous presences on the land. It is this pathway that will generate a new indigenous reality for First Nations people and communities in Canada.

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