Native People and the Social Work Profession: A Critical Exploration of Colonizing Problematics and the Development of Decolonized Thought

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ABSTRACT: This paper reflects a beginning discussion about the relationship between the social work profession and Native Peoples living in the space of colonial Canada. It examines the characteristics of Eurocentrism, historical and ongoing colonial processes, and implicates the profession of social work as a colonizing practice. The reader is cautioned to seriously reflect on the current political context in which Native self-government initiatives are being realized from the standpoint of examining the case of Native Child Welfare. Native people are encouraged to disengage from current neo-colonial and constitutional colonial politics in favor of advocating and working toward decolonized anti-colonial initiatives. Native university programs are viewed as one site for the development of anti-colonial consciousness.

RESUMÉ: Ce papier relate un début de discussion sur la relation entre la profession du travail social et les peuples natifs du Canada colonial. Il analyse les caractéristiques de la colonisation principalement européenne, du colonialisme passé et présent, et implique le travail social comme une pratique colonisatrice. Le lecteur est invité à réfléchir fortement sur le contexte politique actuel dans lequel les initiatives gouvernementales des indiens ont été prises en respectant la Protection de l'Enfance des Natifs. Les natifs sont encouragés à se débarrasser des politiques actuelles néo-coloniale et constitutionnelle et à se diriger plutôt, vers des initiatives anti-coloniales et décolonisées. On considère les programmes universitaires pour indigènes comme des programmes développant la sensibilisation anti-coloniale.

Introduction

This paper is intended to begin a discussion about the social work profession and its relationship to Native Peoples.[1] This is not intended to be an exhaustive inquiry but rather to begin to ask critical questions for the purposes of developing decolonized thought. This discussion does not take place within a vacuum. Any discussion which concerns Native Peoples takes place within the context of a history of

colonialism, imperialism, and the predominance of Eurocentric thought. I will thus speak to this history, to the implications of Eurocentric thought, and to ongoing imposing colonial processes. In so doing, I will be implicating the profession of social work as a colonizing practice. I will be asking Native social workers to seriously reflect on the problematics embedded within the social work profession. Also, I will be asking Native social workers to seriously question whether Native social work practice can work toward the objectives of Native Peoples' Self-Determined Agency based on traditional life-sustaining wisdoms.

The task of writing this paper is a politicized project. Indeed, the late Howard Adams (1999, p. 55) stated that to offer a critique of hegemonic Native practices is not done so without risk. He stated that to offer a critique is a threat to the status quo. Cognizant of the risks I feel that it is imperative that critical questions are raised. The present day situation for many Native people is very grave. Addictions and violence are everyday occurrences. Many of our children do not want to live anymore. They do not see any hope. In many communities there are cluster suicides. We drastically need to affect change. I therefore feel I have an ethical responsibility to play my part toward the development of decolonized consciousness. It is also important to state that I have been trained as a social worker and have worked within the context of Native communities. I am thus implicating my self and my own past professional practices when I implicate the profession of social work as a colonizing practice. I have chosen to make use of my middle class location to help create a space for the many Native voices who have been marginalized and silenced through colonial oppression.

Eurocentrism as Rational for the Colonial Agenda

Battiste and Henderson (2000, p. 21) state that Eurocentric thought informs the theories, the opinions, and the laws that relate to Native Peoples. Eurocentric discourses serve the purpose of justifying the colonial agenda. Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 88) states that there is a direct relationship between the expansion of knowledge, the expansion of trade, and the expansion of the British empire. The colonial objective on Turtle Island was and continues to be that of gaining access and control of the land's resources. The Native populations were a threat and still are a threat to this objective. In the present day context global economic forces continue to exploit the natural resources of this land such as water, oil, gas, and uranium (Adams, 1999, p. 58).

Eurocentric theories inform research and policy development concerning Native Peoples. In turn, Eurocentric theories inform the nature of the structures which exist in Native communities. They are based on the biased notion that European Peoples are culturally and politically superior to all other Peoples of the world (Adams, 1999, pp. 22-21). Related to this understanding is the concept of diffusionism. Battiste and Henderson (2000, p. 21) state that diffusionism is based on the premise that most human people are uninventive and those who are inventive should be the permanent centers for cultural change and progress. Eurocentric ideology assumes that Europeans are superior because they are inventive. Conversely this thinking assumes that Native people require the diffusion of European characteristics such as creativity, imagination, invention, innovation, rationality, and a sense of ethics in order for Native Peoples to progress (p. 21). This theorizing justifies a view of Native people as primitive and inferior.

I contend that Eurocentrism dominates the profession of social work and thus social work practices. While there are many paradigms for helping and offering social assistance among various cultures Eurocentrism operates by centering Euro-Western theories and practices as the dominant social work paradigm. Indeed as De Montigny (1995, p. 209) states that the activities of social work are about engaging in the socially organized practices of power from the stand-point of ruling relations. In the following pages I will speak to the colonial context in which the practice of social work with Native Peoples is located. Suffice to say that in spite of Native Peoples having our own historic systems and methods of practice Euro-Western case management models are operative within most of today's Native social welfare systems. Thus, the Eurocentric social work processes of intake, case recording, clinical assessment, clinical treatment such as individual, group, and family therapy, referral, and the termination of case files have become the hegemonic and taken for granted way of managing Native social work practices and Native social welfare systems. Indeed Eurocentric assumptions about what counts as legitimated case recording and accountability procedures are very operative in what has otherwise been defined as a unique Native cultural perspective (Swinomish Tribal Mental Health Project, 1991).

It is also understood that government audits routinely ensure that the dominant paradigm is carried out in social work systems (deMontigny, 1995, p. 210; Parada, 2000). The crude reality is that failure to comply with Eurocentric paradigms and methods of practice can often mean the loss of government funding and thus the failure of

the government-funded initiative. As a result the need to meet the
imposed government objectives can take precedence over meeting the
needs of people the social work profession is intended to serve.
During my work as a social worker within agency settings I have
spent 80% of my time involved in documenting daily activities and
writing reports for the clinical files. De Montigny (1995, p. 212)
states that the socially organized practice of social work case
recording silences the actual voices and lived realities of clients.
Adding to deMontigny's understanding, I also contend that social
work case recording often functions as a dehumanizing and a
colonizing practice. Frustrated by this reality and by the paternalistic
power differential embedded in social work case recording activities
I worked with a Native Elder to create a cultural appropriate method
for conducting clinical assessments based on the medicine wheel
paradigm (see, Nabigon & Waterfall, 1995.) This effort did facilitate
the development of a Native social work practice which respected
Native people's inherent right to Self-Determined Agency. However,
it did little to rupture what was still a dominant Eurocentric systemic
paradigm.

The Problematic of Historic and Ongoing Colonial Imposition

Colonialism in its imperialist form originally meant the direct control
of Native Peoples, Native systems, and Native lands by colonial
officials. After Word War II Native Peoples began resisting this direct
control. A new colonial system was put in place to appease this
resistance. This new system has come to be defined as neo-
colonialism (Adams, 1999, p. 53). Instead of non-Native officials
administering programs for Native people the system of neo-
colonialism enables programs such as income assistance, job training,
health, education, and the maintenance of Indian bands and Métis
villages to be administered by Native people. The major decision
making and the control of finances of these programs remained within
the hands of colonial forces (Adams, 1999, pp. 52-53). New to Native
relations was the bringing of provincial governments in direct
relationship with Native systems. Enforced through the British North
America Act (1867) the areas of Native education, social assistance,
child welfare, and some justice issues[2] came under the direct control
of the provincial governments. Native communities now had to
negotiate with both the federal and provincial governments. Battiste
(1997, p. 7) refers to these new provincial relationships as an example
of how colonialism continues to reformulate itself.

A new Native middle class structure was created through the creation of jobs for administrators and workers within these programs. While a few gained jobs through these programs the rest of the people lived in abject poverty. Today many refer to those Native people who are given jobs in these programs as the Native *middle class elite*[3] (Adams, 1999, p. 56; Alfred, 1999, p. 30; Maracle, 1996, p. 37). This elite class gains economic benefits and social status from these positions. It is thus not surprising that these people are unlikely to develop a critique of the colonial power relations that are embedded within this new neo-colonial schema. Adams (1999, p. 53) and Alfred (1999, p. 28) contend that for the most part the Native elite has come to function as collaborators of what are still imperial structures and policies. From a Native community grass-roots perspective Native people not only have to deal with external colonial imposition but also internal collaborative colonial processes. Alfred (1999, p. 1) helps to explicate this dynamic by stating that there are two value systems at work in Native communities. One value system is rooted in traditional cultural practices while the other has been imposed by the colonial state. He contends that these two value systems create disunity and factionalism in Native communities making it very difficult to affect change.

Adams (1999, p. 58) and Alfred (1999, pp. 53-54) further explicate that the Canadian state has created a more subtle form of colonialism through the constitutional agenda. The modern day practices of "First Nations"[4] treaty negotiations takes place within the context of the Canadian constitution. The objectives of the Canadian constitution are not and have never been about affording a fair deal to the Native Peoples of this land. When Native Peoples signed treaties with the colonial government they did not know the details of what were contained in these legal documents. They were verbally told that they would be given a reserve land base to live on so that they could continue to live their lives without interference from the colonial government. From a Native perspective the word reserve was understood to come from the French word "reservoir." The reserves were perceived as a place where Native people could protect and maintain their traditional Native way of life.[5] The Native people who signed the treaties were not cognizant of the fact that they had signed a legal document which stated that they had agreed "to cede, release, surrender, and yield up to the government of the dominion of Canada, forever, all their rights, titles, and privileges whatsoever" (Adams, 1999, p. 4). They did not know that the reservation system was to be an institutionalized form of apartheid serving imperial and colonial interests.

We are now living in a time when a rhetoric of Native self-government[6] including Native economic development is being realized. Yet these initiatives are couched within the neo-colonial and constitutional colonial agendas. They are designed to not only serve the interests of colonial governments but also the interests of multinational corporations. Today, this translates as multinational corporations gaining access to the natural resources that exist in Native territories. As indicated above the dominant model of self-government applied today merely grants a few Native elites the right to act as puppets for agendas which serve both the colonial state and multinational interests (Adams, 1999, pp. 63-64; Alfred,1999, p. 116). Furthermore, the rhetoric of Native economic development initiatives merely positions Native Peoples as representatives, or stake holders. Foreign industry inevitably controls the strings making the ability to work within a framework based on Native traditional life-sustaining principles impossible to accomplish[7] (Alfred, 1999, pp. 117-119). Alfred (1999, p. 19) states that these supposed self-governing processes do not help Native Peoples in Canada. They merely further embed us deeper into colonial structures.

Colonial Imposition and the Disruption of Native Extended Family Systems

There is a great deal of diversity among the varied Native Nations. However, commonalities do exist. I contend that this is particularly true in relation to child rearing practices. Native people traditionally believe that children represent the means through which a culture can preserve its tradition, heritage, and language (Thomas & Learoyd, 1990, p. 25). Traditionally, Native child rearing was valued as a sacred responsibility. Within this context the abuse of children was not problematic. Children were nurtured in a community sense of belonging. Children were encouraged to develop mastery in skills that were needed for survival. They were also encouraged to develop their own unique sense of autonomy while at the same time being taught the value of generosity (Brokenleg & Brendtro, 1989, pp. 5-10). Punishment was not a concept that was used traditionally by Native Peoples. Rather, techniques such as modeling, group influence, discussion, and positive expectations were employed (Thomas & Learoyd, 1990, p. 29).

Native communities are made up of extended family systems. Traditionally, families functioned within community systems by being responsible to and for each other. Within this context everyone within the community was responsible for the well-being of the

children. Traditionally, Native societies were based on a preventive medicine that focused on maintaining an intricate balance within an ecology that was constantly in flux or change (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000, pp. 9-10). These societies were based on a cosmology that understood and respected our connectedness and kinship with all of Creation. Problems and issues that arose traditionally in daily life were immediately dealt with through clan systems of governance.[8] Decision making was based on a consensual paradigm. Citing Mi'kmaw traditional thought the welfare of the group was valued over the individual as was the extended family over the immediate family. This ensured that peace and good order would be preserved within Native community life (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000, p. 55). Due to colonial interference the ability to maintain a sense of peace and good order has been difficult to accomplish.

Authorized through the *Indian Act* (1876) Native children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in Christian run residential or day schools. The purpose of these schools was an assimilationist strategy. The children who attended the schools were taught racist ideologies about their own traditional cultures and were encouraged to adopt Euro-western values and practices. Children were forbidden to speak their own Native languages. If they were caught speaking their own languages, they were punished. The use of physical punishment was very severe and was extensively used (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p. 25; Knockwood, 1992, p. 99). Many survivors of residential schools have reported being tortured by staff within these schools.[9] The principal methods of behavior management used in these schools were control, domination, shame, and intimidation. As a result we now see these negative uses of power displayed by Native people within Native community contexts[10] (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p. 49-51).

The curriculum did not support children learning English and other skills that would help them participate as equals among the mainstream societies. Rather, the curriculum focused on Christian teachings. Most of the time spent in these schools was dedicated to prayer and hard physical labor. The children provided most of the labor to maintain the schools such as laundering, cooking, cleaning, and gardening (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p. 17; Knockwood, 1992, pp. 55-58). However, these students did not receive the benefits of their work. It was the staff in these schools who used the cream separated from the milk in their morning porridge. The staff dined well with three course meals while the children were not adequately fed. The typical diet for children in the schools was beans, porridge, rancid meat, and rotten potatoes (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p.

47; Knockwood, 1992, p. 27). The experience of seeing first-hand that some live in luxury while others live meagerly taught these children to accept unequal class relations as a taken for granted way of doing things.[11]

The effects of the residential school system severely disrupted the traditional Native way of life. Imagine waking up to a community whose children have all been taken away. The results of the forced removal of Native children were devastating. The adults left behind fell into feelings of despair and apathy[12] (Waterfall, 1992, p 52). It is not surprising that many of the people turned to alcohol in an effort to cope. In many cases the children in residential schools were only allowed to go home two times during the year. When these children returned to their home communities, they often found family members intoxicated and unable to take care of them. Furthermore, these children were speaking the colonizer's language making it difficult for their communication to be understood. The children no longer felt at home and·safe in their own communities (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, p. 32).

The early-1970s marked the beginning of the end of mandatory residential schooling for Native children in colonial Canada. While these schools are no longer in operation, they remain as vivid memories in the minds of those who attended them. We live with an inter-generational legacy of the residential school. I have not met a Native person alive who has not been affected directly or indirectly by these schools. Traditionally, Native Peoples possessed profound child care wisdom. Thomas and Learoyd (1990, p. 2) documented that the European immigrants might have been better to have adopted this wisdom. Given the distress caused by residential schooling and the interruption of traditional child rearing practices we now see a multitude of child abuse cases in Native communities (Waterfall, 1992, p. 51). This is where the social work profession working within the structures of children's aid societies became involved with Native families and Native communities.

The Profession of Social Work and
Native Social Work Practice

The profession of social work primarily became involved with Native Peoples and Native communities through the child welfare system[13] (Alcoze & Mawhiney, 1988, p. 4; Yellow Bird & Chenault, 1999, pp. 209-209). The prevalence of Eurocentric discourses about Native peoples prevented a critique of colonialism and a discussion of the adverse effects that colonization had on Native Peoples and Native

family systems. Of particular significance was the effect of the
imposed residential school system. Influenced by Eurocentrism and
diffusionism Native people were presumed by the social workers to
be unfit to raise their children. A disproportionate number of Native
children were apprehended by social workers working within
children's aid societies and were placed in foster homes with white
families (Johnston, 1983, p. 124). The social workers failed to
recognize the effects of residential schools on Native families and to
respond fairly and appropriately by encouraging the teaching of
Native traditional child care practices. Instead, the social workers
intervened when incidences of child abuse were reported by taking
children from their families and their communities. Many of these
children did not return to their home communities and were adopted
into white families (Waterfall, 1992, p. 15).

In the literature this time period is referred to as the "sixties
scoop" as it predominantly took place during the 1960s (Johnston,
1983). At the time Native residential schools were closing. Native
children had returned to their families. It is not surprising thus that
there was an increase in the number of reported cases of child abuse
in Native communities. This time it was not the federal government,
nor the Christian churches who intervened by taking children from
their homes. The provincial governments intervened through the legal
apparatus of child protection legislation. We thus see another example
of how colonization keeps reformulating itself. Indeed Hudson and
McKenzie (1980) argued that the child welfare system was an active
agent in the colonization of Native Peoples. Maracle (1996, p. 38)
stated that the act of apprehending children from their homes is
tantamount to kidnaping and inflicts terror upon children. It is a
violent act and one must wonder how this can be justified in the name
of child safety? A social worker who did this dirty work of kidnaping
was not well received within Native communities. Indeed, this is still
the case. A social worker armed with a child protection mandate from
the state is both feared and hated.[13]

One would assume therefore that Native people would not be
motivated to pursue the practice of social work as a profession, or be
specifically interested in working in agencies with a child protection
mandate. However, one only needs to look at the predominant neo-
colonial context and realize that there are very limited options
available. One can readily believe that a Native person practicing
social work is a lesser evil than a person who comes from the
dominant society. One can also be deluded into thinking that
positioned as a social worker one can do some good. While I do admit
that Native social workers do a great deal of good for individuals,

groups, and families fundamentally the profession is problematic for
two reasons. These reasons relate to what I have discussed earlier.
That is, the characteristics of Eurocentrism and diffusionism make it
difficult to bring Native methodologies to the center of a social work
practice. Furthermore, the actual practices of Native social work are
embedded within a neo-colonial context. I will speak to the case of
Native Child Welfare to explicate my point.

Neo-Colonialism and Native Self-Government

Examining the Case of Native Child Welfare Initiatives

In the 1980s Native leaders in the form of elected chiefs, Elders,
lawyers, administrators, and social workers were concerned by the
interference and devastating impact that the child welfare system had
in their communities (Assembly of First Nations, 1989; Native
Council of Canada, 1989; Ontario Native Women's Association,
1982). They were primarily concerned with finding ways to control
of the problem of Native children being apprehended from their
communities. A not so surprising correlation existed at this time. That
is, provincial governments were changing their legislation enabling
Native people to inform the direction of foster-care placements for
children who were band members within their communities. In the
1980s an Ontario Bill (Bill 77) was passed enabling this to take place.
Using the Native traditional discourse of "customary care"[14] the
Ontario Child Protection Act was amended enabling the provision for
Native children at risk to be placed with extended family members
within their own communities.[15]

This new provision in the Child Protection Act was perceived by
Native leaders as a window of opportunity to prevent the further
interference of children's aid societies in Native communities
(Soloman, 1999). In response, some Native territories developed their
own child protection agencies. From a Native grass-roots perspective
these agencies are often viewed as "brown" children's aid societies.
Many of these agencies' began with a vision of offering programs
based on Native traditional values.[16] Yet, the explicit focus of these
agencies was not about ridding Native people of colonial imposition.
Nor was the focus concerned with revitalizing our Native languages,
laws, systems, and cultural practices.[17] Rather, the inevitability of
colonial imposition was assumed. Part of the baggage of assuming, or
accepting the inevitability of colonial imposition was that of
accepting Eurocentric social welfare practices.

I speak from my own experience as a Native social worker and to
a dynamic that appeared to be very apparent in the Native contexts
where I was employed. That is, many Native people who worked
within these Native agencies, including myself, often accepted the
Eurocentric and hegemonic assumption that Native parenting was
problematic within Native communities. Native people were thus the
problem and the ones who needed to be fixed. Furthermore, the
funding criteria for these agencies ensured that standard provincial
guidelines were followed. The result was that Native people were now
doing the dirty work of apprehending Native children from their
families. Even though it was now called "customary care" Native
children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in other
settings. Furthermore, through time Native workers began placing
Native children within white foster homes as they were deemed to be
the most appropriate placements.[18] We can see how, although well
intentioned, we as Native people can inadvertently end up
perpetuating an assimilationist agenda.

It is at this juncture that I believe we must ask a critical question.
That is, how can we presume to say that we are offering culturally
relevant or appropriate services under a child protection mandate?
Being reminded of Maracle's (1996, p. 38) understanding pertaining
to apprehension, where in our Native traditions, laws, or values was
the terrorizing or kidnaping of children acceptable? We need to
seriously reflect on this question. This is not to say that Native people
who work within these Native agencies do not offer some culturally
appropriate services. Indeed Native Healers and Elders are being
recruited and funded to offer "culturally appropriate" services such
as sweat lodge ceremonies, healing circles, and other Native
traditional practices. However, our Native Healers and Elders are
usually not positioned as full-time staff within these agencies.
Furthermore, there is often a severe discrepancy between what
Eurocentric practitioners are paid within these agencies and that of
our own traditional Native experts and specialists. That is, the
Eurocentric practitioners are given much greater salaries. The
prominence of Eurocentrism justifies and ensures that this is so.
Therefore, while we may see some "culturally appropriate" programs
they are embedded within a neo-colonial bureaucracy where Euro-
western values and methods of practice predominate. I thus contend
that we need to take a serious look at what we have been calling
Native Self-Determined Child Welfare programs.

I also believe that we need to interrogate our current objectives
toward the devolution or transfer of services to Native communities.
Indeed we live in a political climate where buzz terms such as

devolution and transfer of services are being readily utilized
(Browning & van de Sande, 1999, p. 161; Timpson & Semple, 1997,
p. 99). However, I contend that we need to seriously interrogate how
these buzz terms are really being taken up and by whom? That is, we
need to question whether we are merely moving what is an essentially
Eurocentric service from a main office model to a decentralized
Native context? Are we allowing the few Native elites such as the
elected leadership to be responsible for the administering of these
programs while the majority of the people living within the
community are alienated from the processes of decision making? If
this is indeed the case, we are only changing the players of what are
still bureaucracies.

Alfred (1999, p. 31) states that the terms "brown" and
"bureaucrat" are not compatible. While appearing to be moving
toward the objectives of Native Peoples' Self-Determined Agency, I
contend that these modern day initiatives are re-formulations of neo-
colonial structures. I also contend that Native initiatives will remain
essentially colonized structures as long as they are couched within the
parameters of the constitutional colonial agenda. In the case of Native
child welfare initiatives the provincial governments still ultimately
wield the power. The change means decentralizing services. It does
not change the nature of the services. Native people are still
positioned to carry out the child protection mandate of the colonial
state. We thus must not delude ourselves by what appears to be
encouraging discourses about Native self-government, devolution, or
the transfer of services.

We also need to seriously reflect upon the positioning of Native
social workers within neo-colonial schemas. I contend that being
positioned as a Native social worker within these contexts presents
itself with a very specific and difficult dilemma. If we have accepted
Eurocentric practices as a taken for granted way of doing things, we
may not feel the dilemma. However, if we are traditionally sensitized
to see the great value in our own Native knowledges and
methodological practices we find ourselves in a very difficult
position. That is, we are being asked to bridge the perspectives,
values, and methods used and recommended by their Elders and
Healers with the demands imposed by Eurocentric discourses, and
Eurocentric social work processes. For Native social workers who
have been positioned as full time staff within these contexts we are
automatically put in this position. I contend that Native people
positioned as social workers within these contexts have been given an
impossible task. Let us remember that bridges get walked on and big
Mack trucks drive across them. Native people positioned as social

workers have been presently set up to become very frustrated and angry. Small wonder that there is a high rate of Native social workers burning out in Native communities.

We need to seriously ask ourselves whether when positioned as Native social workers within neo-colonial structures it is possible to work toward the objectives of Native peoples' Self-Determined Agency based upon traditional Native ·life-sustaining wisdoms? I contend that we will never be able to work toward that Self-Determined objective without a vision of Native life without colonial imposition. I contend thus that we must envision decolonized possibilities. This means disengaging ourselves with what deceivingly appears to look like benefits from both neo-colonial and constitutional colonial agendas. As Alfred stated (1999, p. 118) neo-colonial structures and processes will not help Native people. I contend thus that we must dream big dreams and reach for what today may seem impossible. We must understand that decolonization is a process. We must also recognize that the road toward decolonization is not an easy journey. However, I believe that it is a road we must embark upon. We must stridently work toward the objectives of decolonization and Native Self-Determined Agency.

Conclusion

Alfred (1999, p. 46) states that the primary problem with the profession of social work is that Native Peoples' lives continue to be controlled by others. The sad fact is that many Native people who have been trained in Eurocentric universities have not been given a chance to adequately define what Native helping consists of outside of the parameters of mainstream theories. It became important for me to interrogate my own practice as a Native social worker. I believe that the success of our efforts wherever we are positioned as Native Peoples must be informed by an anti-colonial consciousness. That is, we must not assume that colonial imposition is inevitable. We must recognize that decolonization is a process and must work toward the absence of colonial imposition. We must also work from the standpoint of Native Peoples having the agency to govern our own lives. We must also assert such agency based on Native foundational life-sustaining wisdoms. My thinking on this has been influenced by Adams (1999, p. i); Alfred (1999, p. 119); Anderson (2000, p. 34); Dei (2000, pp. 5-7); Fanon (1995, p. 154); Maracle (1996, p. 92); Puja (2001); and Trask (1991, p.164). Alfred (1999, p. 79) states that colonialism is not an abstract notion. It is a real set of people, relationships, and structures that can be resisted and combated by

placing our respect and trust where it belongs in Native Peoples, relationships, and structures.

I view Native university programs as a site for the development of anti-colonial thought. I also believe that such work carried out within the context of the academy can compliment, and support the efforts of traditional Native grass-roots activities. We need to critically analyze the impact of Eurocentric discourses on our lives. From this perspective we can critique colonialism in its many changing guises and develop effective strategies to counter the continued colonial interference upon the lives of Native Peoples. Given the present circumstances of living situations in Native communities, it is imperative that we as Native Peoples interrogate our own practices and systems that are colonized. We must learn to challenge hegemonic assumptions that we have taken for granted. This is one important step in decolonizing our minds, our methods, and the systems that with live and work in. The very survival of Native Peoples is at stake.

NOTES
1. I am using the term Peoples here as intended by Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 114) to acknowledge Native Peoples rights to Self-Determination and also to acknowledge the reality of Native Peoples as diverse.
2. Within the structures of colonial Canada the provincial governments are responsible for judicial convictions and sentencing of two years less a day. Other sentences are within the jurisdiction of the federal justice system.
3. The author acknowledges that she is part of the middle class within Native societies.
4. The term "First Nations" is prominently used by treaty chiefs to refer to Native communities that fall under the jurisdiction of the Indian Act. People such as Adams (1999) contend that it is an exclusionary term that serves a constitutional colonial agenda where non-status Indians and Metis have been left out of the politic. Adams (1999, p. 64) refers to this as a problematic which serves colonial interests of dividing and conquering Native peoples. For this reason I am not using the term First Nations in this text in favor of using the inclusive term of Native Peoples.
5. As told by a very respected Anishnabe Elder. Due to Anishnabe protocol and the expressed wishes of this Elder I will not cite his name. Many Anishnabec who read this text will easily be able to identify the origins of this statement.
6. I am specifically using lower case when referring to Native self-government as I contend that the present day usage of the term merely constitutes as rhetoric.
7. This is a very sad reality given the nature of how Native people feel about the land. Traditionally, the land is understood to be our Mother. As indigenous peoples of this land we believe that we have been given the responsibility from the Creator of Life to be stewards and thus caretakers of the land. Multinational interests will prevent us from being able to continue

to act in this capacity. Alfred (1999, p. 97) contends that the choices for Native people today are two-fold. Either they are about gaining immediate economic benefits, or refusing to comply with imposed corporate and neo-colonial structures in favor of preserving the long term goal of Native Self-Determination on terms which are based on our own cultural values. This is not an easy choice given the nature and extent of poverty in Native communities.

8. This information has been obtained through our Native oral tradition. It has been precisely passed down to me through my associations with many respected Native Elders and traditional teachers.

9. I became aware of this through my practice as a social worker in Native communities.

10. Traditionally the notion of power over was never used. Rather the model of power traditionally used is that of power from within. One gains power and holds power through life experience and from directed learning from Elders. If a convincing argument needs to be employed it can be achieved by way of oration or verbal persuasion (Alfred, 1999, pp. 48-51; Maracle, 1992, p. 87).

11. I contend that this is one reason why the Native middle class does not speak about in outrage concerning the deplorable conditions that the majority of Native people live in.

12. This information was obtained by interviewing survivors of residential schools.

13. I am aware of this perception from my own experience of working as a social worker in a Native agency that had a child protection mandate. While the work that I did was essentially clinical my clients were very aware that I carried a big stick and could report child abuse cases to the investigation unit within this agency.

14. The term customary care refers to the extended family as the locus of support for children within the community. It was thus not unusual for children to live with extended family members. This notion does not equate easily within the context of the Eurocentric nuclear family system where one would go to live with extended family members in times of extreme need. Traditionally everyone within the community was responsible for the care giving of all the children in the community (Thomas & Learoyd, 1990, pp. 21-22). Colonial interference through residential schools and the imposition of Christian marriages changed the fabric of Native community life (Allen, 1986, pp. 41-42). Based on my own observations of Native communities I can see that today there is the hegemonic assumption that if children go to live with extended family members it is defined as symptomatic of there being a problem.

15. My thinking about this has been influenced by Dennis McPherson, a Native lawyer who was one of the people whose work enabled the term "customary care" to be included in the amended Ontario Child Protection Act. From a Native perspective the motivation to have the provision of customary care included in the Act was for the purpose of enabling Native communities to deal with incidences of child abuse in a traditional Native, or a customary fashion. In practice, the new provision provided an opportunity to place Native children at risk in other Native homes. It did not enable Native people to deal with the problem of child abuse in Native communities according to their own traditional laws, cultures, and values. That is, the area of Native child welfare was still bound by the legislation of the Eurocentric Child Protection Act.

16. I have purposefully not included the names of these agencies for the following reasons. That is, I do not have the expressed permission of the agencies nor do I intend to create any kind of harm for these agencies, or for the people who work within them.

17. In fairness I must say that the interventions used in a Native agency where I was employed were very much leading edge in terms of going beyond the surface of the observable dysfunctional behaviors by dealing with internalized pain and trauma.

18. Provincial foster care guidelines found many Native homes unfit for foster care placements. One reason was that a foster home could not contain firearms. Yet hunting is a very common practice in Native communities. Thus guns are often found in Native homes. Another issue was that the impoverished conditions that Native people lived in were deemed to be unacceptable for foster care placements.

19. Another description of the history and philosophy of Eurocentrism and Eurocentric thought is portrayed in Dussell, E. (1995), *The Invention of the Americas: The Eclipse of the Other and the Myth of Modernity.* Continuum Press.

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