

**A Multidimensional Theory of Colonialism:
The Native North American Experience**

Duane Champagne

Theories of colonialism emphasize materialistic domination and analyze from the point of view of the colonizer. The primary focus is on the powerful forms of political, economic and cultural domination, and sometimes the effects of disease. Yet the views of the colonized deserve greater attention. In North America, Native communities survived 500 years of colonialism. How? Why? In what ways? Theories that emphasize colonial domination cannot answer such questions. This article presents a theory and a method that place the colonized at the center and view them as historical actors with pliable cultures and communities. The theory also incorporates the processes of cultural exchange between colonized and colonizer. Such a multidimensional theory provides a more accurate and powerful understanding of the processes of colonization and of social change in general.

The Colonial Context of North America

Political competition, economic incorporation, cultural exchange, and biological resistance are major features of the colonial context. By political competition, I mean the strategic and diplomatic bargaining between nations by which they ensure their own protection, and effect and protect their strategic interests. Geopolitics is the realm of study undertaken by those who study international relations or by historians of diplomatic national policy (Rawlinson i). As to economic incorporation, world systems theorists and economists have long argued for the relative autonomy of markets, or a pattern of relations based largely on material interests, which drives the expansion of markets or explains exchange and market relations. Economists, and many economic anthropologists, believe that the urge to truck and barter is part of human nature (Frank; Wallerstein; Jorgensen). Cultural exchange refers to the transfer and internalization of symbolic codes between colonized and colonizer. Such symbolic codes include language, information, norms, economic ethics, worldviews, religion, and many other aspects of culture (Champagne, "Transsocietal Cultural Exchange within the World Economic and Political System" 120-153; Durkheim; Parsons, *The Evolution of Societies* 25-31).

Biological resistance refers to the capability of the colonized to resist the diseases of the colonizer (Dobyns; Duffy; Thornton).

While there have been colonial systems in many historical periods and in many places, the colonization of North America exhibits several characteristics that can shed some information on processes of colonialism in general. A major distinguishing feature of North American colonialism was the colonial rivalries among European powers. Multiple European powers struggled for control of North America. The British, French, Spanish, Dutch, Swedes, and, to some extent, the Russians struggled for control of land and trade. The situation of competitive rivalries reflected the situation of competing nations in Europe, and these rivalries usually resulted in armed conflicts and wars in North America (Hintze, "Economics and Politics in the Age of Modern Capitalism"; "Military Organization and State Organization" 160-188; Skocpol 19-24). The intense political and economic competition led to treaties of alliance with Native nations, which held important trade, diplomatic, and military assets capable of tipping the balance of European colonial relations. (Native leverage on rival European contenders ended by about 1820.) Europeans made trade and diplomatic agreements and treaties of alliance with Indian nations, and thereby gave these nations international recognition. These early treaties later became the precedent for the treaties negotiated for land by the United States and Canada with their respective Native peoples. There are few other places in the world where colonizing nations negotiated similar treaties.

Like that of many non-European peoples over the past 500 years, the colonization of Native North Americans occurred in association with the rise of capitalism in Europe and with the increasing emergence of world markets. Furthermore, the United States ultimately emerged as a central player among the core capitalist countries. Consequently, Native North Americans were colonized by a major capitalist force in the world system. This proximity to the capitalist core is not the same experience as that of the African nations, the Native peoples of Latin and South America, Australian Aborigines, or the peoples of India, China, Japan and other non-western nations who were forced to respond to the world expansion of capitalism. In some ways the future of non-western peoples, increasingly incorporated into a world capitalist market, can be seen in the experience of Native North Americans.

Cultural exchange in the colonial situation was carried by interpersonal interaction with missionaries, traders, colonial officials, slaves, and other colonists. To varying degrees both the indigenous peoples and colonizers got to know each other's language, culture, economy, political norms, and social relations. Ideas, words, economic techniques, forms of dress, and many other cultural and normative items were selectively appropriated by each group (Weatherford; Grinde and Johansen). In recent years, some cultural theorists have focused on the effects on subject peoples of cultural domination (Findlay 18-32; Foucault; Biolsi). But, it is also critical to understand the extent to which the colonized internalized selected aspects

of the colonizer's culture. The cultural knowledge gained from the colonizer by the colonized was used to build resistance to colonization and/or promote acceptance and participation in the colonizer's new order.

Diseases killed millions of Natives throughout the Americas, producing major demographic, political, economic, and social impacts on many Indian nations. The rapid demographic decline of the Aztecs and Latin American Indians enabled the Spanish more easily to subordinate them. In North America, diseases weakened many Indian communities throughout the colonial period and Native health continues to be abysmal to this day (Dobyns; Duffy; Thornton). The diseases lasted throughout much of the colonial period, striking deep into the interior before many Europeans ever visited the people there, and causing extremely large demographic losses as well as undocumented destruction of culture and social institutions.

The Autonomy of Colonial Forces

For purposes of conceptualization and analysis I have identified geopolitics, economy, culture, and biology as major, but relatively autonomous, dimensions of the colonial situation. By this I mean that each operates under an internal logic that is not determined by the forces of any one or all three of the others. By adopting this position, I argue that during the 1690s, the strategic bargaining between France and England, to control North America east of the Mississippi River, is not reducible to their interests in controlling the fur trade in North America, or to their interests in extending their religions over the region, or in assimilating the Native North Americans, or to their interest in controlling or spreading disease. The strategic bargaining relations of the colonial powers had their own primary end: to control territory for the glory, protection, and future political interests of their sovereign nations. Colonial political expansion, economic expansion, and cultural exchange operate at different and relatively independent levels in the colonial situation. In general, none is necessarily the byproduct of the other, and thus each has to be investigated simultaneously in order to understand the overall pattern of colonial actions. By isolating these three arguments, specific historical colonial situations can be described, and certain features of colonialism explained. Taking each argument one-at-a-time will explain only part of the colonial situation. Therefore, the three major dimensions, or four if we now want to reinstate the biological dimension, can be reconstructed by weaving the arguments together over the same historical context. Such a discussion of colonialism in the American Southwest would concentrate on the features of Spanish, then Mexican, and after 1848 American colonial administration, on features of market relations and incorporation, the internalization of Western religion, and as any epidemics that may have had a significant impact on the demography of the Native peoples of the Southwest (Spicer; Hall; Perry). The four analytical dimensions of colonialism provide a model for understanding the historical processes of colonialism. By isolating the patterns of colonial relations through the four dimensions, an

integrated model including all four dimensions helps provide a more holistic explanation for the outcomes of colonial relations.

Colonial Forces and Their Threats to Indigenous Communities

Each of the three dimensions of colonialism, geopolitics, market incorporation, and cultural exchange, presents critical threats to indigenous or colonized communities. In response to geopolitical threats, an indigenous nation seeks to protect its territory and political autonomy. Threats of political domination by one or more colonizing nation are considered undesirable. Indeed, indigenous nations have sought to retain political independence as long as possible. Rights to self-government and control over territory have increasingly become symbols of national, political, and cultural identity. In the pre-contact period, such concepts were not salient, but rather were developed within the context of colonial threats to territory and self-government. During the US period, the increasingly more powerful US government redefined Indian treaties and government so as to ultimately deny Indian tribes status as foreign nations (Pomersheim 37-56). Nevertheless, much law concerning American Indian issues is centrally focused on treaty and legislative acknowledgement of Indian rights to limited self-government. Contemporary Indian reservation communities continue to assert rights to self-government and limited sovereignty based on law and treaty. A primary goal of tribal governments is building stronger government and community institutions as well as protecting land and indigenous rights. Indian communities have not given up their right to preserve a self-governing community. Each community moves to protect its territory and political autonomy from encroachment by colonizing entities. The issue of preserving political independence or some limited powers of self-government is confronted by each indigenous nation. Naturally, the ways in which particular Indian nations try to preserve territory and political autonomy will vary according to the power of the colonizing nation as well as the resources and political organization of the colonized nations. Nevertheless, all indigenous nations are confronted with the same dilemma of preserving political independence, and, therefore, they are comparable in an analytical sense. In other words, although the historical situations and the organization and resources of indigenous nations will vary empirically, the need to preserve land and political independence confronts each nation, and therefore can be a fruitful point of comparison for understanding the range and possibilities of mobilization and change within colonizing political environments (Skocpol xi, xiii, 14, 18).

Similarly, the increasing economic globalization of the world and the penetration of markets and trade confront each nation. If indigenous peoples are going to engage in trade, and if they are to achieve any comparative advantage in that trade, the price they must pay is increased economic dependency and loss of self-sufficiency. The movement from relative self-sufficiency to market dependency implies that Natives will need to compete or at least participate in the marketplace. Global

market incorporation is a new form of economic relations for indigenous nations, and, once involved, each nation is confronted with the issues of producing for exchange, which often involves economic specialization of labor, production, and entrepreneurship. Native nations that cannot reorganize social and economic relations according to the demands of the marketplace will be forced into impoverishment. The observed result over the past several centuries has been the economic marginalization of many indigenous nations. Thus, once captured in the trade and market networks, and dependent on market relations for basic goods, each indigenous nation is confronted with the requirement to maintain production for the market and to change economic output according to its demands. The possibility that any indigenous nation is able economically to survive within the world market system is not only partly dependent upon available local markets, but also upon the organization of labor, skills, resources, and the economic culture of the indigenous group. The possibilities of change or marginalization are not wholly contained within the colonial situation of market relations and resulting dependency.

A third requirement faced by indigenous nations within a colonial context is cultural pluralism. Through cultural exchange, new values, norms, political models, economic ethics, religious worldviews, language and other cultural aspects will be transferred and internalized by some members of the indigenous nation. These new forms of cultural understanding may be compatible with indigenous culture, may be tolerated, or may lead to division as well as to cultural and political factionalism. The Christian-pagan conflicts of the Iroquois since the 1820s are a major example of Western religious and political models leading to internal political and cultural strife (Berkhofer 99-112). Other nations have tolerated new cultural elements, for example, the Northern Cheyenne who practice a variety of religions such as Catholicism and that of the Native American Church, and hold traditional ceremonies such as the Sun Dance (personal communication, 1983). Others may reject Western influences, as did many Creeks such as the Red Sticks, or followers of the Shawnee Prophet (Champagne, "Transsocietal Cultural Exchange Within the World Economic and Political System" 143-146). Nevertheless, many nations have incorporated Western political models, such as the constitutional governments of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Creek, and the Tlingit Alaska Native Brotherhood. And some among the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Creek became agrarian capitalists with strong market orientations for profit-making during the 1820s and later. The economic ethic of market profit-making did not come from indigenous cultures, but from the interactions and transfer of market orientations to members of indigenous nations by members of colonizing nations. Every colonized nation confronts the dilemma of how to manage multiculturalism. The response of community members of colonized nations may depend on the organization and exclusiveness of the indigenous worldview, the compatibility of indigenous cultural elements with the culture of the colonizers, the degree of indigenous control over the socialization of children and other elements.

In the colonial situation, each indigenous nation is confronted with protecting self-government, economic viability, and cultural continuity. If the biological dimension is added, then protection of physical health is yet another responsibility for colonized communities. Given the situation of colonial expansion, each indigenous nation must develop, from within its own institutional order, a strategy that will ensure meaningful survival, despite drastic change and unfavorable situations. Since each nation confronts similar issues of maintaining self-government, economic viability, and preserving cultural communities, it is possible to make systematic comparative empirical descriptions and historical analyses of the ways in which indigenous nations have tried to solve the demands of colonization (Skocpol 33-40).

Toward a Multidimensional Theory of Colonialism

The four major dimensions of colonial domination have been described as having a single impact on colonized nations. Such a view gives only a limited understanding of colonial relations, as none of the dimensions by itself provides a complete explanation of the outcome of colonized nations in terms of institutional change and survival. The geopolitical context or state domination of a colonized nation can explain much about the political possibilities of a colonized nation, but an argument based on power and strategic relations tells us little about the processes of change in a colonized nation, other than those forced upon the colonized. For example, the expansionary political pressures of the US set the context for the Handsome Lake Movement (1799-1815), a religious revitalization movement among the Iroquois, while at roughly the same time the Cherokee formed a constitutional government (1805-1828) (Wallace; Champagne, *Social Order and Political Change* 128-143). The geopolitical context cannot explain the different forms of institutional change among the Iroquois and Cherokee. The geopolitical argument, however, does explain the increasing political subordination of both the Cherokee and Iroquois during the early American period.

Similarly, the argument of global market incorporation does not explain why in the South only a small number of Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek took up producing cotton for profit, while over 95 percent did not. The opportunity of the cotton market was a precondition to participation in the market, but not a sufficient condition. Nevertheless, market incorporation can explain many changes in Indian labor patterns and processes of economic marginalization. To illustrate, the rise of agrarian capitalists is better explained with the two arguments of transfer of market values through trader families and the cotton-market opportunity. Thus, the dimension of cultural exchange is critical to understanding the rise of southern Indian agrarian capitalism (Champagne, *Social Order and Political Change* 128, 283-85).

A multidimensional theory of colonialism should include an integrated argument of geopolitics, transsocietal economy and cultural exchange. Each dimension provides powerful, but fragmentary explanation on its own, yet yields more powerful explanatory possibilities in an integrated argument. One way to develop such an integrated argument is to analyze colonial situations in terms of geopolitical, market, and cultural exchange over the same historical period and region. In one sense, a theory prescribes where to look, and this theory prescribes to look at geopolitical, market, and cultural exchange relations in order to explain processes of political subordination, economic dependency, and cultural change. For example, in the southeast, the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek were subject to similar political and land pressures from the United States, and were incorporated into the same sequence of markets on the world-system, the fur trade, and after 1810 the cotton market, and a small portion of members of each nation took up producing cotton for the market. During the period from 1828 to 1867, all four of the southern nations adopted constitutional governments. The constitutional model for the government came from US agents and was internalized by members of the entrepreneurial planter classes in each Indian nation. Thus, mere force of geopolitical pressures did not induce the southern nations to adopt constitutional governments, since similar pressures were placed upon the northern nations such as the Iroquois, Delaware, and Ojibway, yet no enduring constitutional governments emerged among them over the same period. The rise of the cotton market in the South helps explain the rise of entrepreneurial Indians. In the northern country, on the other hand, although there were intermarriages as well as cultural transfer of trader skills and values, no capitalist class structure developed among the Indian nations. Consequently, the southern Indian capitalists are a product of the cotton market opportunity and market organization as well as the new market values imported by trader families. The integrated argument of geopolitical pressures from the United States and the entrepreneurial, pro-constitutional classes of the southern Indian nations helps explain the rise of constitutional governments among the southern nations. The southern Indian nations moved to preserve self-government through political centralization and constitutional governments; remained economically viable through plantation production and subsistence farming; and incorporated many elements of the colonizers' culture-constitutional government, market values, some Christianity-to reorganize their political, economic, and cultural institutions in order to enhance their overall goal of national survival within the colonial context.

The South is only one of many geopolitical, economic, and cultural localities within North America. Other regions may well be analyzed in similar ways, although there will be considerable variation in geopolitical pressures, market relations, and the form and content of cultural exchange. Such regions as the Northeast, the Plains, the Pacific Northwest, the Arctic, the Subarctic, California, the Great Basin, and the Southwest. Even finer local or sub-regional areas might be defined. However, in the end, each nation confronts a unique set of geopolitical, economic and cultural colonialism.

Nevertheless, even the integrated argument of geopolitical, market and colonial cultural relations provides an incomplete picture of the colonial process. All such arguments are external to the organization and culture of indigenous nations, and unless these arguments are so powerful as to forcibly determine the response of the colonized nations, attention must be given to the institutional and cultural organization of the indigenous nations themselves.

Beyond an External Model of Colonialism

Focusing on geopolitics, world economy, cultural exchange, and biology does not provide a complete model of colonial processes. Desperately missing from most interpretations of colonialism are the communities of the colonized and the colonizer as actors. A more complete model should take into account the normative, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the Indian communities themselves (Alexander; Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*). Furthermore, the heavy reliance on analytical features of the colonizers and the colonized can take an argument only so far. At some point, more precise understanding has to be gained by analyzing historical contingent processes within the context of the relations between colonizer and colonized. Thus, the geopolitical, economic, cultural and biological features of colonialism, set in context with the normative, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of colonized communities, create the situational context that informs actors and communities in specific historical situations. Such a position is consistent with Habermas's view of "system" and "lifeworld," although the lifeworld concept does not help to explain the individual possibilities of survival and change among indigenous communities. Colonized actors will adhere to the normative, political, economic and cultural imperatives set out by their societal institutions and relations; while the political, economic and cultural features of the colonial context will constrain and inform group and individual decisions. The resulting patterns of action, whether processes of institutionalized change or adherence to tradition, are not reducible to political competition, economic incorporation, cultural exchange, or biological resistance.

Explaining Processes of Institutionalized Change

The proposed argument is designed to explain the patterns of institutional change and continuity. Institutionalized change occurs when an innovation becomes an enduring feature of the normative and cultural order of a community or society (Parsons, *The Social System* 39-45). For example, most Hopi in the American Southwest rejected the Catholicism offered by Spanish missionaries, and thus Catholicism did not become a permanent or major feature of Hopi society. The adoption of a constitutional government by the Cherokee in 1828 is an example of major political institutional change. Aspects of Cherokee political centralization probably started as early as 1751, and other features, such as the abolition of the

blood revenge in favor of courts, emerged over the 1799 to 1810 period. Between 1819 and 1828 the Cherokee increasingly centralized their government and formed a constitution that lasted until 1907, when it was abolished by the US government. The Cherokee constitution was institutionalized. The large majority of Cherokee accepted the new form of government and most adhered to it until the end of the Cherokee state. The Choctaw and Chickasaw also formed constitutional governments that were ultimately accepted and preserved by their societal members. Other examples of institutionalized change are the cultural and economic features of the Handsome Lake Movement (1799-1815) among the Iroquois, the Native American Church, the Shaker Church, and the community and cultural changes of the Kickapoo Prophet (Herring; Stewart; Champagne, "Transsocietal Cultural Exchange Within the World Economic and Political System" 146-148).

Institutionalization requires sustained normative, political, economic and cultural support within the community (Smelser 7-49; Alexander and Colomy 13-16; Colomy and Rhoades 547-583). The more the colonized accept, or internalize, and use cultural items borrowed from the colonizing regime, the greater the likelihood the colonized society will have to struggle with the emergence of multicultural views and consider issues of change based on views borrowed from the colonized society. Carriers of new cultural values, worldviews, economic ethos, and/or political models will often advocate change in colonized communities. Whether the carriers of the new cultural values will succeed in carrying out their new cultural imperatives will depend on their political influence or power, their leadership, and ability to organize and mobilize others in favor of change. The ability to mobilize groups for change will depend also on the form of community and political solidarity as well as on the specific modes and relations of differentiation among major societal institutions such as polity, community, economy, and culture. In general, more institutionally differentiated and well integrated communities will be more capable of adopting consensual change than less differentiated and less socially and politically integrated societies or communities. Indigenous communities with institutional relations and cultural orientations similar to those of the colonizer will have greater possibilities for change in the direction of the colonizer's institutional and cultural order than those indigenous communities with greater institutional differences from the colonizing culture.

Significant cultural exchange with colonizers can have serious consequences for the continuity and survival of the communities and cultures of colonized peoples. Cultural exchange and impact take place in the struggle over defining the basic orientations and ground rules of the social order. The struggle for the preservation of religion and values, as well as of institutional, normative and community order is threatened by the introduction of potentially competing values, institutional models, religion, and ideals of community order and personal conduct. The cultural-exchange aspects of colonialism can be very profound, and either provide new cultural resources for the institutional change that will enhance community survival

in the colonial context, or, in some cases, lead to internal cultural cleavages and community conflict.

Innovations are often introduced into communities during the turbulent colonial period, but if they do not receive significant support from societal members, they are rejected, or left unsupported. For example, the religions of the Shawnee Prophet, the Winnebago Prophet, the 1890 Ghost Dance, the Cherokee movement of 1812-13, and many others did not generate cultural, normative, political or economic change. Some movements, such as the 1990 Ghost Dance, after a brief period of attention were left to small and scattered adherents. Why movements or innovations fail to take hold can be an interesting question in many colonial situations where political, economic, cultural and biological pressures may press heavily and seem to indicate that change is likely.

Conclusion

Colonialism is a complex phenomenon in which geopolitical relations, market incorporation, and cultural exchange vary considerably over historical periods and regional context. Analyzing the major dimensions of colonial relations as relatively autonomous forces will provide better and more complete understanding of the impact of colonial forces on colonized nations. Each nation is forced to seek means of preserving cultural values, political self-government, and economic viability within the changing context of colonial relations. By focusing on the issues and strategies of the colonized nations, and understanding the colonial context through the cultural, political, and economic requirements of self-preservation forced upon the colonized by the colonizer's power and interests, the present theory avoids the deterministic and coercive explanations usually given to colonial contexts and the view that the colonized are helpless victims of the inevitable domination. The external forces of colonization have a significant but incomplete capability for explaining the historical and institutional strategies of indigenous cultural, political, and economic survival. A theory that focuses on the forces external to the institutional organization of colonized nations can provide only limited explanatory power for understanding institutional change and historical action. Theories of colonization must move in the direction of detailed conceptualization of the institutional-political, economic, community, cultural-order of indigenous nations, and analyze their counter-movements of institutional change and historically contingent strategic action in order to develop a more complete and balanced understanding of the complexities of life among the colonized.

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