

Comparative models of American Indian economic development: Capitalist versus cooperative in the United States and Canada

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to use a comparative case study method to evaluate the different existing economic development practices of American Indian peoples in the United States and Canada. The basis of comparison is the organizational structure of businesses with the comparison being between capitalist and cooperative forms. The goal is to understand how organizational type (or mode of production) is connected to the production of contemporary culture and social relations. The main conclusion is that, while not equivalent to traditional indigenous economies, cooperative structures are closer than capitalist ones to facilitating and reproducing traditionalist forms of sociality and cultural production.

Keywords

American Indian, mode of production, development, economy, cooperatives

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to compare and evaluate the different existing economic development practices of American Indian peoples in the United States and Canada. I use a comparative case study method of analysis to focus on two main issues: the organizational structure of the businesses, and their relationship to

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traditionalist values and economic practices. These two issues are in fact interrelated, and I try to demonstrate how these practices influence the contemporary society and value systems of indigenous communities. In that sense, I try to understand how the economic principles and values in these societies are mirrored and reproduced in the other aspects of their society. I see this task as following Graeber's (2006) discussion of "modes of production." Instead of understanding modes of production narrowly as the production of material objects in society, Graeber proposes that we understand mode of production more holistically to include the production of people in society and the production of social relations (Graeber, 2006: 69). Thus what I attempt in this article should be understood as a comparison of two of the prominent ideal types of modes of production that exist within modern American Indian societies. I support the position that social relations in a given society need to be understood in context with the organization of production in that society. I demonstrate that the different organizational structures of businesses produce different types of social relations. The goal here is to try to draw out some observable general tendencies for each of the ideal types. An understanding of the production of people and social relations by economic structures is also essential for those who may desire the re-implementation and re-actualization of traditionalist values within contemporary American Indian communities. These issues are understudied in the academic literature and thus by placing our focus on them, this article seeks to address an often overlooked dimension of American Indian economic development.

Two problem areas: Culture and property

In the existing literature on American Indian economic development, it is commonly (see Cornell and Kalt, 1992; Smith, 2000; HPAIED, 2008) said that economic development should be compatible with that community's traditional culture and values. I see that as a radical and profound concept, and it is unfortunate that its profundity and validity are rarely elaborated on or discussed in any depth as to what it would actually mean to base economic development on traditional cultural and economic practices. Instead, rhetoric about traditionalism is often little more than a façade for the adoption of capitalism by American Indians – what David Newhouse (2000) has called "capitalism with a red face." One such example is the approach proposed by Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt, co-founders of The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (HPAIED). In her critique of the Harvard model, Christina Dowling says that "the Harvard model embraces western style economics, underpinned by an individualistic orientation and acceptance of authority based on self-interest." Instead, Dowling advocates what she calls a "building block approach" that is grounded in traditional indigenous economies, rather than the Harvard model which involves "working backwards from the requirements of capitalistic economic activity" (Dowling, 2005: 120). According to Dowling, in capitalism, culture is viewed as something to be adapted to capitalist use – where the best aspects of an indigenous

culture are commonly understood as those most easily adaptable to capitalism. While Cornell and Kalt do include “cultural match” and “culturally appropriate institutions” in their understanding of successful economic development, Dowling says that “the ‘culture’ in Cornell and Kalt’s ‘cultural match’ is nothing more than politically correct rhetoric glossing over very real, perhaps intractable, issues” (Dowling, 2005: 127). One of these is the issue of hierarchical and coercive forms of organization. She states that they “insist that recognition of authority is required” for economic development, and that “where the idea of a ruler does not exist, Cornell and Kalt find (predictably) that the business model has not functioned well” (Dowling, 2005: 124–125). In contrast to this, many indigenous communities have traditionally practiced less hierarchical and non-coercive forms of social, political, and economic organization. Therefore, “traditional First Nations societies (particularly hunter-gatherers) are essentially opposed to the very conditions of industrial development: the accumulation of wealth, growth and Westernized ‘progress’” and that the “acceptability of these ideals, intrinsic to westernized economic success does not dovetail with First Nations ways of life” (Dowling, 2005: 125).

A similar situation exists in discussions of indigenous property, where some have looked back in history and tried to view indigenous understandings of property as comparable to or as an early version of capitalist private property. They tend to problematically conflate the traditional practices in some communities – such as respecting one’s personal possessions and the recognition of usufruct rights to land – with notions of capitalist private property. In that sense, they project capitalism back in time into traditional economies, which then allows them to be viewed as proto-capitalist societies in an early stage of capital accumulation. This, in turn, is used to justify and promote certain contemporary entrepreneurial variants on capitalist strategies of economic development (see Anderson, 1992, 1995; Anderson et al., 2006b).

Through these two problem areas one can see that researchers commonly take a normative capitalist perspective in discussions of strategies for American Indian economic development. It is in contrast to this perspective that we should understand Black’s (1994) and Trosper’s (1995) discussions of indigenous economic development based on traditionalist principles. Likewise, in order to base a community’s contemporary economic development on traditionalist ideas, one must first understand what traditional indigenous values and practices are, and from there take an inclusive and bottom-up approach.

Theories of traditional American Indian development

Ronald L. Trosper (1995) identifies “respect” as the core component of his conceptualization of economic development based in traditional values, and as the central tenant of indigenous worldviews. For him, this respect is actualized through four key concepts. These include community, connectedness, the seventh generation, and humility. Trosper describes community as involving human-to-human interactions as well as the community of all living things. Connectedness serves as a

description for the functional nature of the world, and the seventh generation concept involves the moral obligation to the future. For him, humility involves recognition of the powerful forces in the natural world. Sherry Salway Black (1994) states that her framework is based on two assumptions. The first is that development must go beyond economics and include the development of people holistically. She identifies “balance” as an important concept in indigenous worldviews, and she sees holistic development as a manifestation of this concept. The second is that development must come from within a community. For Black, economic development should be connected with other forms of development, and, likewise, in order for an economic development strategy to work in a particular indigenous community it must be compatible with that population’s cultural traditions (Black, 1994). She says that development must incorporate the components of indigenous worldviews such as the belief that all things are alive, related and interconnected. Likewise, development must consider the impact on future generations, and the need to live within the natural environment. Also, it should be based in concepts of sharing and reciprocity involving leadership that is non-hierarchical. Black considers indigenous worldviews to be inconsistent with most of Western thought, especially economics (Black, 1994).

Black and Trosper both see indigenous worldviews as the primary foundation for traditional economic practices. Instead of placing capitalism first and then attempting to adapt culture to capitalist norms, they place indigenous culture and worldview as primary and economics as secondary. In that sense, economic development and economic policy must emerge out of traditional cultural values and perspectives, rather than alter or supplant them. To try to translate these perspectives into the language of modes of production, it seems fair to conclude that, in their own way, Black and Trosper are both approaching this idea that the mode of economic organization should be chosen based on the type of people and social relations that it produces.

Neotribal capitalism

A conceptual framework that is crucial for understanding the historical development of American Indian economies in the Twentieth Century is “neotribal capitalism.” Elizabeth Rata (2000: 33) defined neotribal capitalism as the “articulation of exploitative class social relations of production and a neotribalist ideology of revived communal relations within a social formation structured by the capitalist regime of accumulation” and that “neotribal capitalism shares the fundamental features of capitalism, such as exploitative class relations, the commodity exchange relation and the accumulation of capital.” Neotribal capitalism differs from Western capitalism in two ways

Firstly, Neotribal Capitalism is characterized by the absence of privatized ownership of the means of production. The corporate tribe, rather than the individual, is the legal owner of the lands, waters and knowledge. Economic control of tribal resources is

located in the groups who use the resources for commodity production. Secondly, class relations of production are reified as communal social relations within a neo-traditionalist ideology. (Rata, 2000: 33)

Ingo W. Schroder adds that

under the conditions of neotribal capitalist accumulation, tribal elites use their position as intermediaries between the state and the tribal population to appropriate the majority of the profits derived from tribally owned resources and tribally operated businesses for the benefit of themselves and their constituents, thus establishing a system of local inequality not unlike a class system. (Schroder, 2003: 437)

According to Schroder, two groups of people had emerged within North American indigenous communities that became more prominent and powerful through the promotion of neotribal capitalism. These included an elite economic class that had adapted to the rules of capitalist economy, and an educated bureaucratic elite. Control over tribal resources meant that the expanding class of bureaucrats could monopolize local employment, revenue collection, financial aid, cultural production, etc. (Schroder, 2003: 441). This conceptual framework is necessary for understanding contemporary American Indian political economy, and especially for understanding how the concentration of political and economic power has altered social relations in those communities.

Methodology

A comparative case study method is best suited to addressing these issues because it allows us to understand unique experiences and draw out commonalities, which is necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of the social effects of these two types of modes of production. In terms of data collection, these cases were chosen through an extensive review of the existing literature on American Indian economic development in both the United States and Canada. Each was chosen because it presents a unique angle or experience that is not found in the other cases, and because they each have commonalities with the cases that share their typology. In the case study selection, I also tried to select for diversity in geographic location and in the economic sectors in which the businesses operated. A total of six case studies are used. Three of them are classified as capitalist and the other three cases are classified as cooperative. Likewise, they are split evenly at three each from the United States and Canada.

There are two main limitations with using a case study methodology. The first is the potential for selection bias. Because the source material for the cases comes from the existing academic literature, there is the potential that the more unique or extreme cases are written about and discussed the most, which might distort and problematize any comparison. However, I have intentionally chosen well-known cases as well as lesser-known ones. Similarly, the intentional selection for

geographic and sector diversity should mitigate some of these selection bias concerns. The second limitation is sample size. There is always the possibility that any observations made are just isolated to these specific cases and are not relevant to understanding broader trends. The ideal way of getting around this limitation would be to thoroughly examine every case in existence – meaning that one would write about every indigenous business in the United States and Canada. Obviously this would be impractical, but with six cases, I think the observations and conclusions made by this comparison can safely be understood as relevant to our broader understandings of the social dimension of American Indian economic development. Another issue affecting selection bias and sample size is the relative scarcity of ethnographic and other detailed examinations of modern American Indian economies at all, and even fewer that readily allow one to observe connections to social relations. To this, Horn and Halseth (2011: 115) state that “the literature on urban Aboriginal peoples seems reluctant to develop ‘thick description’—of the kind Geertz imagined—of the actual relationships between economic activities and the cultural, political, and social domains of urban community life.” Obviously they are speaking of urban economic development specifically, however the statement would hold true for non-urban American Indian economies as well.

Since the comparison is based on the organizational differences between capitalist and cooperative forms of business organization, it is necessary to define each of these ideal types and explain the differences between them. I use “capitalism” to describe organizational principles that are similar to those described by Rata (2000) and Schroder (2003). The capitalist cases are classified as such because they involve the corporatized tribe that is organized hierarchically (with power concentrated at the top), operates in a for-profit manner (capital accumulation), and utilizes wage labor (exploitative class relations). In contrast to this, the cooperative cases are characterized by a more decentralized and horizontal organizational style (though each is in different ways). They are also commonly, though not necessarily, non-profit organizations, and tend to not use wage labor as each member usually operates as either a co-owner or a co-manager.

One issue that arises with this typology is where to place the various development strategies that are based on entrepreneurial ideas. Entrepreneurial strategies have become somewhat fashionable in the American Indian economic development literature especially since the 1990s (e.g., Anderson, 2001, 2002; Anderson et al., 2006a; Cornell et al., 2007; Oppenheimer et al., 2001). However, they are difficult to classify in the manner described above because entrepreneurialism has little to do with organizational structure per se. Entrepreneurs can organize their firms on hierarchical principles similar to those of a corporation and operate in a for-profit manner and utilize wage labor. Entrepreneurs can also organize their firms on principles similar to those of a cooperative and intentionally operate the business in the public interest and as a non-profit organization; this is often called “social entrepreneurship.” Because entrepreneurialism has little to do with organizational principles, I have generally avoided the supposed entrepreneurial examples; however, this is also true because they tend to be smaller companies. If the

reader desires, they may view this as an instance of selection bias on the part of the author in favor of larger companies. Larger companies more readily allow for an examination of the social effects of an organizational structure than do smaller companies simply because there is more of that organization to examine and their influence on a given community is likely to be greater.

Capitalist cases

White Bear First Nation (Saskatchewan)

The White Bear First Nation has had success with their White Bear Oil and Gas (WBOG) company. WBOG's success is due to an agreement they signed in December 1993 with Tri Link Resources Ltd., a Calgary-based company, wherein "the agreement allows Tri Link to drill for oil on the reserve and enables WBOG to take part in oil production by sharing the costs and profits and benefitting from the employment opportunities and economic spin-offs" (Anderson, 1999: 122). Through this partnership, as of 1997 "1,700 barrels of oil per day are produced on the approximately 12,000 hectare (30,000 acre) reserve" in Saskatchewan (Anderson, 1999: 122). Additionally, "the agreement provides WBOG with a base royalty as well as options to participate in the oil production" and that "by taking advantage of these options to participate WBOG has more than tripled their revenue." And as Anderson says, "this revenue is either put back into oil production or used to help the community by, for example, assisting youth groups and Elders" (Anderson, 1999: 122–123).

The leaders have described their relationship as a genuine partnership. According to Gary Burns, the President and CEO of Tri Link, "part of this agreement between Tri Link and the White Bear people outlines a moral commitment by Tri Link to help create longer-term employment, to encourage education and to be proactive on certain social issues" (quoted in Anderson, 1999: 123). Part of this partnership and understanding can be seen in the treatment of drill sites. Anderson says that "sacred heritage sites are declared no-drill zones" and that

because preserving the natural beauty of White Bear Lake and the surrounding country is important to the First Nation on spiritual, environmental and economic levels, WBOG asks that abandoned well sites be restored to an environmental standard higher than oil industry standards. (Anderson, 1999: 123)

However, despite these stronger environmental standards, there are questions and uncertainties about the nature of the project even among White Bear business leaders. WBOG President Terry Littlechief has said that "there are benefits to having oil revenue, but there is also a down side" and that

we deal with weighing this balance everyday; whether the damage done to our land will be worth it in the end. For this reason we feel very strongly that the revenue has to

be spent properly so that it can benefit us and our grandchildren down the road.
(quoted in Anderson, 1999: 124)

Oneida Indian Nation of New York

In the 1980s, the New York Oneidas consisted of roughly 1000 people living on or near their 32 acre reservation in Central New York. By the early 1990s, Ray Halbritter had become the sole representative of the nation following the deaths of the other two representatives. After their deaths,

Halbritter created a body calling itself the “Men’s Council”, whose members served at his pleasure, much like a corporation’s board of directors. Halbritter then created a corporate body that he called “The Oneida Indian Nation of New York”. This government disregarded the traditional clan-based leadership structure of the Oneidas (Johansen, 2004: 102).

With this change in the political organization of the Oneidas came a decision by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in August 1993 to end federal recognition of the Halbritter government. However, despite opposition by Oneida traditionalists and the Iroquois Grand Council, New York congressman Sherwood Boehlert – a supporter of Indian gaming – was able to persuade the Clinton administration to reverse its decision and recognize the Halbritter government (Johansen, 2004: 102). In 1993, Halbritter signed a casino compact with New York Governor Mario Cuomo. Shortly thereafter, the Halbritter government created the Turning Stone Casino, which in the early 1990s produced 1900 jobs. By 1997, the casino and other Oneida businesses were employing 2600 people, which made the Oneida Nation the second largest employer in central New York (Johansen, 2004: 99). Johansen adds that the Oneida Nation has

used some of its gambling profits to start other businesses, such as the Oneida Textile Printing Facility in Canastota . . . A 285-room luxury hotel was opened in September 1997, adding 450 jobs . . . a council house; a health services center; a cultural center and museum; a recreational center; scholarship programs; medical, dental, and optical facilities; job training; legal assistance; Oneida language and music classes; meals for elders; and day care (2004: 99).

They also own *Indian Country Today*, which is a nation-wide Native American newspaper, and by 2002 they were able to repurchase 16,000 acres of land (Johansen, 2004: 96).

This reorganization of the Oneida government and creation of the casino-based economy has intensified factional divisions within the Oneida community.

Johansen says that “a substantial dissident movement exists” and that “this group, centered in the Shenandoah family” views the Halbritter government as illegitimate. Vicky Shenandoah has said that “our nation is run like a corporation.” Likewise, as Johansen states

Many Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) traditionalists believe that Halbritter is operating under self-assumed authority, in defiant opposition to the structure of the thousand-year-old confederacy, as well as the 200-year-old beliefs of the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake, who abhorred four things that he said would doom his people: whisky, the Bible, the fiddle, and gambling (2004: 101).

In May 1995, Oneida traditionalists held a “March for Democracy” opposing the Halbritter government. In response, “many Oneidas lost all tribal benefits, including health insurance, tribal stipends, access to all tribal buildings and events, as well as their tribal jobs, for expressing opposition to Halbritter openly by taking part in this march” (Johansen, 2004: 102). In the year 2000, the Men’s Council “enacted a housing code and then began using its provisions to evict from their homes several of the corporate structure’s most severe critics.” Johansen continues by saying that “the housing code and bulldozing of homes was presented not as an attempt to silence his opponents, but as a way to ‘beautify’ the reservation” (Johansen, 2004: 103). However, “most of the twenty-two families who were living on the thirty-two-acre territory in the spring of 2000 agreed to inspections” and “every home entered by the Oneida Nation Police was condemned and subsequently bulldozed.” And “by the mid-February 2002, only eight traditional families remained on the thirty-two acres” despite that according to their owners “many of the homes previously demolished were in excellent condition” (Johansen, 2004: 104, 111). Some, like Danielle Patterson, confronted the police and were able to resist and delay the demolitions; however, they were ultimately unsuccessful and even Patterson’s trailer home was demolished on 22 October 2002.

Johansen notes that “the story of the New York Oneidas is a particularly raw example of conflicts that beset many Native American nations that have attempted to address problems of persistent poverty and economic marginalization by opening casinos” (Johansen, 2004: 96). And in concluding his discussion, Johansen (2004: 129) poignantly says that

The Oneida Nation of New York under the leadership of Ray Halbritter has created a powerful economic motor, but one that has left many traditionalists feeling like strangers in their own land, as they have been evicted from their homes, watched by non-Indian police, and cut off from tribal benefits because they exercised their rights to dissent. Many of them have come to ask: “What kind of sovereignty is this?”

Seminole Tribe of Florida

The Seminole Tribe of Florida is one of the first entrants into the world of Indian gaming, and is one of the more well known and easily one of the most successful.

On December 14, 1979, the Seminole Tribe of Florida opened Hollywood Seminole Bingo on the Hollywood reservation, which is located just a few sprawling suburban miles west of Interstate 95 between Miami and Fort Lauderdale (Cattelino, 2008: 1).

Since that time “the spectacular financial success of their casinos (numbering seven in 2006) has altered the lives of the approximately 3,300 Seminoles who live on or near six reservations scattered across the swamps and the suburbs of South Florida” (Cattelino, 2008: 2). In 2006, the Seminole Tribe of Florida acquired Hard Rock International and all of its cafes, hotels, and casinos in a \$965 million deal that gave the Seminoles a presence in forty-four countries around the world (Cattelino, 2008: 5). While the development of casinos by tribal governments has been rather common (Antell et al., 2000), few of them are as successful as the Seminole casinos. According to Cattelino, “Seminole casinos are unusually lucrative” and they have benefitted “from a large consumer base in booming Florida and from the region’s massive global tourism industry” (2008: 5–6). Although Seminole gaming originated in the late 1970s, it was not until the early 1990s and the installation of electronic games that made the Tribe profits sufficient to generate significant household wealth and dramatically expand tribal programs, and that “by 2006 . . . tribal net income from gaming surpassed \$600 million, and gaming operations added thousands of employees” (Cattelino, 2008: 8–9).

The casino economy has brought about a dramatic increase in the Seminole material standard of living. As characterized by Cattelino (2008: 9), this economic success has translated into real benefits for Seminole individuals and families. She says that all tribal members who desire employment can work for the tribal government, “and entrepreneurs can obtain small business loans”. Likewise, “all Seminole citizens enjoy free lifelong educational access and universal health insurance.” Elders can receive services including the provision of hot meals, grocery bill payment, recreation and educational travel. Individuals also benefit from the economic success through the direct bimonthly cash distributions to all tribal citizens. The Seminole government has also invested in reservation infrastructure projects to rebuild sewers, roads, housing, schools, and administrative buildings (Cattelino, 2008: 9). While these business ventures have seen success in the last few decades, the changes in Seminole society actually go back a few decades earlier. Cattelino states that “the Tribe’s 1957 reorganization had generated increased contact with federal officials and provided new jobs”; and that “at the same time, the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc., the business wing, was chartered as a corporation” (2008: 64, 132).

While the development of casino-based capitalism by American Indians is generally portrayed in mainstream discourses as evidence of their loss of traditional culture, many Seminoles view it differently. According to Cattelino, Seminoles

“frequently link midcentury cultural loss to poverty and powerlessness, emphasizing that material constraints discouraged distinctive Seminole ways of life,” and thus “they considered poverty, more than wealth, to undermine tradition and nationalism” (2008: 64–65). However, they do recognize that wealth has brought its own challenges to maintaining and producing culture and that this transition from poverty to wealth has altered their cultural production (Cattelino, 2004). Cattelino notes that “parents struggle to interest children in cultural knowledge against the press of television, video games, and the Internet” and that “one response to concerns about competing cultural messages has been for Seminoles to make their own media” (2008: 65). Likewise, the casino economy has “facilitated changes in the institutional location of culture and the recognition of cultural authority” (Cattelino, 2008: 68). She adds that “the casino era brought an increasing bureaucratization of culture, and with this came new modes of cultural production: work-based (rather than family-based) cultural transmission, codified curricula . . . and paid cultural experts” (Cattelino, 2008: 66).

This new wealth has also facilitated new forms of conspicuous consumption by Seminole members and influenced their ideas about the disposability of possessions. Cattelino observes that

expensive new vehicles fill tribal parking lots and driveways, some young people wear designer clothing, plastic surgery is on the rise, household renovations are underway, and it is not uncommon to see tribal members with Rolex watches or high-end electronics. (2008: 80)

Likewise, some are worried that “young people who had not known poverty would not appreciate gaming wealth and might squander it” (Cattelino, 2008: 83). This has led to intratribal criticism about the use and display of wealth. For some Seminoles “conspicuous displays of wealth were not very ‘Seminole’” and in their view “it was fine for people to enjoy their money, but they shouldn’t show it off.” This is also intertwined with narratives about waste. She observed that Seminoles “complained about other Seminoles who repeatedly took out tribal loans to remodel their homes, each time throwing away perfectly good used furniture” and that “the trope of waste pervaded morality tales about abandoned furniture, vehicles, and electronics, as Seminoles worried not that they owned too much, but rather that they did not value what they owned, or that they bought the ‘wrong’ things” (Cattelino, 2008: 82). These concerns by tribal members are “less about consumption per se than about how to maintain a vibrant Seminole sociality under new material conditions” (Cattelino, 2008: 87). While overall the Seminoles have enjoyed their new found wealth; many Seminoles have criticisms of and uncertainties about their government and the direction their nation is going. Cattelino noted that “some Seminoles worry that corporate interests and world-views unduly guide tribal governance in the casino era” (2008: 123) and that “some Seminoles complain that former dependence on the federal government simply has been shifted to the tribal government” (2008: 154).

Cooperative cases

Oomingmak Musk Ox Producers' Co-operative (Alaska)

According to Bruce and Robertson, “the Musk Ox Producers’ Co-operative began as an offshoot to John J. Teal Jr.’s and INAR’s (the Institute of Northern Agricultural Research) efforts to domesticate the muskox” and that “the aims of the Co-operative are essentially the same as the aims of the original Musk Ox Project” (1994: 39). The initial reasons for domesticating muskoxen were “to improve the economic and social conditions of the native peoples of the Arctic, and to do so using an indigenous rather than exotic species of plants and animals” (Bruce and Robertson, 1994: 40). Teal thought that through this project of domestication,

Native Alaskans could benefit in two ways: 1) villages would have individual herds of muskoxen and reap the benefits of herding, and 2) the muskox qiviut [underwool] could be harvested and used to support a cottage knitting industry, where trained Eskimo knitters could produce garments for sale to the public. (Bruce and Robertson, p. 40)

While the village owned herds component has not been realized, the garment production component has.

The cooperative was officially started in 1969 “as an organization to oversee the design, production, marketing and sale of garments made of qiviut collected from the domesticated muskox herd” (Bruce and Robertson, 1994: 40). As of 1994, the cooperative’s knitters ranged in age from 11 to 81 years old with an average of 37.5 years, and were 99% women and 98% Alaska Natives. The majority of members are friends or relatives of each other, and this has actually been the main source of new members (Bruce and Robertson, 1994). The cooperative currently has roughly 250 contributing members, with over 70% living in villages in rural Alaska (Oomingmak, 2013). For Teal, the cooperative was not intended to be a primary means of employment, but rather as a way of providing additional income to Alaska Natives. In providing some extra income when it was needed, Teal’s “hope was that people would then have the *choice* of staying in their village homes and maintaining a more traditional way of life, rather than being forced by economic necessity to leave the village and way of life” (emphasis in original, Bruce and Robertson, 1994: 43). Bruce and Robertson state that “knitting can be greatly affected by changes in the village job market as well as changes in the success of subsistence,” and that “knitters will earn money someplace else and come back to knitting when they need to” (1994: 43). While the cooperative is not necessarily lucrative, individual knitters have been known to earn over \$4000 in a year. They state that the cooperative “is really a delicate balance between three variables: the animals, the knitters and the customers” (1994: 43). Despite these limitations on productive capacity and profitability, Bruce and Robertson conclude that “the success of the Co-op can be judged

in part by the fact that most knitters who join it stay in it,” which would tend to imply that the cooperative is working to meet their needs; and that the cooperative “provides a way for many villagers to continue living in the way that they prefer, and makes it a little easier to survive” (1994: 44).

Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Co-operative

Pattison and Findlay (2010: 2) state that “nearly forty years after being established, the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association transformed its organizational structure” and “incorporated as a not-for-profit co-operative at the beginning of 2007.” There were two major motivations for this change. The Canadian government was the primary funder of the organization, and from their perspective “the restructuring enhances and formalizes the NSTAC’s operational accountability and transparency”; whereas internally “the restructuring is also a commitment to becoming self-determining, entrepreneurial, and sustainable in order to increase its membership and bring enhanced opportunities to current and future membership” (Pattison and Findlay, 2010: 2). The NSTAC “is the representative body for about twenty-four hundred registered trappers (numbers that showed a 50 percent increase in 2006 alone) residing in the northern part of the province,” with a membership that is majority Aboriginal including Cree, Dene, and Metis peoples (Pattison and Findlay, 2010: 19).

There were a few reasons for why the members wanted to incorporate specifically as a cooperative. Incorporation as a cooperative gave them the external legitimacy that they needed as an organization, while also allowing for flexibility of “funding and partnership opportunities” and flexibility in program development. Pattison and Findlay (2010: 20) state that “members selected the co-operative model because the structure has had some success in fisheries in the northern part of the province” and that “NSTAC members are familiar with co-operatives as many of them also belong to fishery co-ops in the region.” In that sense, the flexibility of the organizational model, and the relative knowledge and familiarity by the membership about the organizational model greatly encouraged and facilitated this transition.

Another major reason for their incorporation as a cooperative was their desire to maintain the Aboriginal and regional heritage of trapping as an economic pursuit, as well as the Aboriginal values about sustainability (both economic and ecological) and consensus decision making with the idea that “traditional Aboriginal and co-operative values can be mutually reinforcing” (Pattison and Findlay, 2010: 36). Pattison and Findlay (2010: 21) state that “new initiatives with partners, including trapper education in schools and a Justice Trapline rehabilitation program, are emerging” with the idea that “the practices passed onto youth preserve the cultural wisdom that sustains the welfare and spirit of Aboriginal communities.” They add that “the story of the NSTAC is also the story of Aboriginal people in Northern Saskatchewan” and “the culture and traditions of First Nations people are interwoven into the NSTAC’s development.”

Additionally, “the interaction of Aboriginal and mainstream values is particularly prominent as the NSTAC looks to become more accountable and legitimate in the eyes of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders” (Pattison and Findlay, 2010: 27). They see that “trapping culture has the potential to teach people their place in the world, their roles and responsibilities in communities, the means for maintaining community-welfare and spirit, and living in healthy, sustainable ways” (Pattison and Findlay, 2010: 37).

Arctic Co-operatives Limited (Canada)

Arctic Co-operatives Limited is a cooperative federation that was formed in 1982 through the union of two cooperative organizations: Canadian Arctic Producers and the Canadian Arctic Federation of Co-operatives. The federation is made up of individual cooperatives of two primary types, and many of these cooperatives have their origins and founding dates back in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001). These include artisan cooperatives, wherein artisans and craftspeople band together to sell their work. Ketilson and MacPherson note that “by 1999, more than a thousand northern artists in Nunavut and the two territories were selling their work through the co-operatives” and that art “had become one of the most important sources of income for the region’s Aboriginal peoples” (2001: 274). The other main type is retail cooperatives, wherein individuals and communities create their own general stores that are used to supply locals with imported food, tools, and other equipment and material goods. Ketilson and MacPherson say that the

co-operative stores contributed significantly to the development of the social capital of the region. By the time they reached a steady state of about forty-five stores, they were involving some 250 people annually on their board of directors. They have also been for many years significant employers... Today they employ directly 750 people and they have developed training programmes that... have educated thousands of northerners (2001: 275).

They also add that the

northern co-operatives became a considerable engine of growth for the Arctic region. In many communities they were the only private business; in others they were significant competitors in the retail trades, the only protection from gouging by private companies. The co-ops were... entrepreneurial as they became engaged in whatever kinds of businesses made economic sense: they operated repair shops for the skidoos they sold, ran hotels, organized charters for southern tourists, provided mail service, delivered fuel, opened video shops, built houses, and operated cable television services. They became remarkable testimonies to the capacity of... Aboriginal northerners, to tailor business activities to whatever economic opportunities existed (2001: 275).

The individual cooperatives commonly have memberships that are 90–97% Aboriginal, “and their elected boards were almost universally made up of Inuit, Inuvialut, and Dene” peoples (Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001: 272).

According to Ketilson and MacPherson, the most important step for increased autonomy for the organization from the Canadian government came with the creation of the Arctic Co-operative Development Fund (ACDF) in 1986. Arctic Co-operatives Limited was able to acquire \$10.5 million in government money that went into the ACDF, which was “a revolving fund that created a permanent capital pool and meant that local co-operatives did not have to borrow significant funds from other financial institutions” (Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001: 278). Additionally, “since 1985, the northern co-operatives and Arctic Co-operatives have enjoyed almost uninterrupted success” and the “ACDF has grown to nearly \$28 million, making it one of the most successful Aboriginal funds in Canada” (Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001: 278). They add that

Between 1985 and 1999, more than \$15 million were returned to local co-operatives—money that otherwise would have gone outside the region to investors in other stores in the North. The trajectory of dividends has also been almost consistently upward and the amount returned in the last few years has been approaching \$2 million. The consolidated asset base has grown from \$15.5 million in 1982 to more than \$82 million in 2000. Membership has increased to over fifteen thousand... The art programme sells the work of more than a thousand people (Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001: 278).

However, despite these successes, the organization has a single recurring problem involving “the continual demand for well-trained people.” Ketilson and MacPherson state that “the main problem has been at the managerial level, where most of the managers... are typically southerners” and “the co-operatives have long stated a desire to develop more Aboriginal managers, not only to provide more opportunities for northern youth, but also to ensure that the most public face of the co-operatives reflects the realities of the memberships” (2001: 279).

Evaluation and discussion

There are a number of common themes that can be drawn from these cases by organizational type. For the capitalist cases, there was an increase in the material standard of living of the different indigenous communities, and broadly speaking this should probably be understood as a positive, since economic development was conducted in order to decrease poverty and increase economic opportunities for community members. In each of these cases, the revenue derived from their capitalist economic ventures was in some manner reincorporated into the community so that both individuals and the community as a whole could benefit. Some of these included not simply new jobs, but also various social welfare programs, healthcare, cultural heritage and revitalization programs, etc. (Antell et al., 2000).

However, each of these communities was not entirely satisfied with the results of their capitalist ventures. In each case, the community either chose to give up, or was made to sacrifice some characteristic that was of value to the community. For the Seminoles and the Oneidas, it was their social integration, their sense of peoplehood, and their traditional forms of sociocultural and sociopolitical organization. For the Seminoles, this was seen in complaints by adults about waste, conspicuous consumption, a lack of interest by the youth in their culture and history, and the "bureaucratization of culture." For the Oneidas, this social disintegration is perhaps more obvious and more violent. Halbritter intentionally reorganized the Oneida government away from traditionalist principles and used the power of that centralized government to suppress dissent. Also, in both the Seminole and Oneida cases, community members complained about the hierarchical organization of the government and in particular the idea that they were no longer in control of their own government. For the White Bear First Nation, the sacrifice was local ecology and natural resources. While they took some steps to mitigate the negative impacts of resource extraction, Terry Littlechief even admitted that oil extraction was damaging the land, which is why he emphasized putting that money into social welfare programs so that at least there would be some benefit to the community.

As consistent with their classification in this ideal type, the components of neotribal capitalism can be seen in these examples. For the Seminoles, the tribal government reorganized in the 1950s as an IRA (Indian Reorganization Act) style government and immediately created the business wing of the government. Thus, with the Seminole case we can see the creation and development over time of the corporatized tribe that manages tribally-owned businesses. Likewise, elements within the Seminole populace observed that instead of creating economic independence, individual citizens were now just dependant on the tribal government rather than the federal government. In that way, the tribal government also serves as that centralized intermediary between the federal government and individual tribal members. For the Oneidas, the tribal government was reorganized away from traditionalist principles and towards an oligarchic system led by Halbritter and the Men's Council. Likewise, the reorganization of the tribal government was quickly followed by the creation of tribally-owned businesses and the monopolization of power and access to resources by the Halbritter government. With White Bear First Nation, the creation of WBOG as a tribally-owned business allowed for the partnership with a Canadian corporation for oil drilling on their lands. All three of these cases involve the corporatized tribe that concentrates power and places decision-making authority in the hands a smaller group of people, and that places tribal elites as intermediaries between outside entities and the tribal population. The corporatized tribe then dominates (if not monopolizes) economic, social, and cultural activity and access to tribal resources, utilizes wage labor (a form of exploitative class relations), and operates tribally-owned businesses for the purpose of commodity production and capital accumulation.

For the cooperative cases, they too brought an increase in the standard of living for the members of their respective indigenous communities though this increase

was less dramatic. Additionally, there is evidence that people were able to maintain traditional values, though this was only in modified ways due to the fact that cooperatives usually exist within a market system rather than based around subsistence. In the capitalist cases, they were able to maintain and promote certain cultural practices (e.g., language) through government funding, but their cultural production was taken over and transformed by government bureaucracies. In contrast, the cooperatives allowed people to increase their material well-being without having to bureaucratize culture. Cultural values and social relations could be maintained and were in fact reinforced by the cooperatives. Additionally, the cooperative cases did not have the drastic negative social consequences that were seen in the capitalist cases in terms of the rise of materialism and alienation in its various forms (from the product of their labor, from the land, from each other, from their government, from their own history, etc.).

For John Teal and the knitters of the Oomingmak Musk Ox Co-operative, the cooperative allowed them to gain revenue through harvesting the fur of an animal that was indigenous to Alaska. The cooperative allowed for an increase in their material well-being in the production of a marketable product, while also allowing them to remain in their rural villages. For the members of the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Co-operative, their reorganization as a cooperative gave them the flexibility to control their own lives, and to reproduce trapping not simply as an economic pursuit but as a way of life. The members viewed trapping as intertwined with their understanding of themselves as indigenous peoples. The case of Arctic Co-operatives Limited is important in two different ways. For one, the artisan and craft cooperatives allowed for the continuation of and innovation on indigenous forms of artistic expression, and gave them a way to make money from their art while also being able to influence and control the entities that sold their art, which makes their experiences similar to that of the Oomingmak Musk Ox Producers Co-operative. Secondly, the retail stores allowed indigenous peoples to provide for their own material wants and needs without having to depend on outsiders, which meant that money could be retained and reinvested in the community and that the stores could be responsive to their needs and desires for either new products or associated services.

Conclusion

From all of this, one can conclude that while they are not equivalent to older forms of indigenous economic activity (i.e., subsistence-based) in that they do involve commodity production; cooperative forms of business organization (what we might call a cooperative mode of production) would seem to be closer than capitalist firms to reproducing traditionalist forms of sociality. Similar to how Dowling emphasized the non-hierarchical social, economic, and political relations that characterized many indigenous communities, cooperative organizational structures produce less hierarchical social relations because they are less hierarchical entities. This dispersion of organizational power allows for the empowerment of the average

person and their connection to other people and to the land. In that sense, the relative concentration of political and economic power (as in neotribal capitalism) can be seen to create the tendency for top-down and authority-based forms of sociality and cultural production. In contrast, the relative dispersion of economic and political power (as in a cooperative mode of production) can be seen to create the tendency for more egalitarian social relations and more community-based or family-based forms of cultural production. In the capitalist cases, because of their neotribal capitalist components, there was a substantial disconnect between the people and the management of the economy. With cooperatives, that disconnect and alienation is greatly reduced.

Likewise, cooperative business structures seem more in line with Trosper's and Black's views on indigenous economic development grounded in traditionalist principles. With cooperatives their understandings of "respect" and "balance" can be implemented so as to mean not simply respect and balance between human beings, but also respect and balance between humans and the land, and humans and other forms of life. Having said this, it would seem that a fruitful topic for future study would be to see how cooperative forms compare to a more subsistence-based economic modality. This would likely draw out more of the differences between market-oriented and non-market-oriented forms of organization within this context of indigenous values and worldviews.

More studies focused on the organizational structure of businesses and the connection to indigenous sociality and the reproduction of traditional culture and worldviews (incorporating Graeber's expanded understanding of modes of production) are greatly needed. Additionally, the cooperative sector in both the United States and Canada is understudied, especially where this involves indigenous cooperatives. Some research has been done on indigenous cooperatives in Canada (e.g., Findlay, 2006; Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001), and it would appear that the cooperative sector is significantly more developed in Canada amongst indigenous peoples. However, in both countries, capitalist models of economic development are more common. The promise of cooperative forms of ownership and management is significant for indigenous communities in the United States and Canada in their ability to increase the material well-being of indigenous people in a just and equitable manner, and in their ability to enhance and support traditional values, worldviews, and modes of sociality and expression. A critical understanding of that second part is essential for understanding why capitalist models of economic development and hierarchical forms of organization have failed to meet the holistic needs of indigenous peoples. While they have increased the standard of living and been able to "preserve" and "revitalize" some aspects of indigenous cultures, they have done so by bureaucratizing and institutionalizing them. They have transformed them into things that are learned from an authority, rather than lived and expressed with others. They have removed culture from its social and community basis and made it superficial, so that culture is now thought of as separate from economics and governance and even separate from the people themselves. By placing our focus on the intersection of organizational principles

with social values and social interactions, one gains a greater understanding of the need to consider how economic practices are themselves related to and intertwined with culture.

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