Indigenous Knowledge and the Struggle against Capitalism

Abstract

Ulukhaktok society, in northern Canada, has changed greatly since its first contact with European explorers in the 19th century. Due to the spread of capitalism, indigenous societies such as Ulukhaktok, continue to have their way of life threatened. Even though capitalism continues to encroach upon the Ulukhaktok community, the fundamental practice of food sharing still thrives. Many theorists around the globe believe that Marxist thought is the way to overcome the ravages of capitalism, yet most Indigenous scholars believe that Marxism will do little to help the plight of Native peoples.

**Key Words**

Neoliberalism, sharing, Marxism, Indigenous peoples

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**Introduction**

 Around the globe, the über rich continue to get richer, the poor are sinking to new depths of poverty, and workers’ rights are being attacked from all sides (Giroux, 2008, 2014; Greaves, Hill, & Maisuria, 2007) due to that fact that “capitalism is the most brutalizing and dehumanizing economic system history has yet known” (Bedford, 1994, p. 105). In order to stop the exploitation of the human being (worker), many are returning to Marxist thought to help find a way to combat globalized neoliberalistic agendas (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). Many theorists would agree that, “In a social universe pock-marked by the ravages of capitalism’s war against the working class and people of color, there are few places in which to retreat that the global market does not already occupy” (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2002, p. 11). Those areas that are yet untouched by capitalism are shrinking every day. Ultimately, while there are those that assert that, “Never before has a Marxian analysis of capitalism been so desperately needed than at this particular juncture in history, especially since the global push towards finance and speculative capital” (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000, p. 25), not all are ready to jump aboard the Marxist bandwagon.

For Indigenous peoples around the world, the fight continues for a culturally responsive education (Annahatak, 1994), the preservation of Indigenous language, religion, history traditions, and culture (Grayshield & Mihecoby, 2010; Shanley & Ryan, 1999), positive, non-stereotypical representation (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008), and the retention of their traditional economic philosophies (Bunten, 2010; Kuokkanen, 2011) and practices all the while choosing to not participate in the reemerging Marxist agenda (Bedford, 1994; Black Elk, 1992). In particular, the Ulukhaktomiut (formerly called Holman Inuit or Copper Inuit) in northern Canada continue to exist relatively free from capitalism’s clutches. In an age when, “Neo-liberal governments take less responsibility for the welfare of the individual; the individual becomes responsible for him or herself” (Hursh, 2005, pp. 4-5), members of the Ulukhaktok community thrive in a system of sharing and distribution for both kin and non-kin (Collings, Wenzel, & Condon, 1998; Condon, Collings, & Wenzel, 1995; Stern, 2005). In this system, especially in the area of hunting, those that have, share. For many Indigenous groups (e.g., the Assiniboine), the interdependent process of sharing amongst family and relatives has been vital for their survival in times of famine (Shanley & Ryan, 1999), and in terms of the Ulukhaktok, this is the case as well. In particular, the Ulukhaktomiut practice of sharing takes many different forms based on distribution amongst elders, extended family, and close friends (Collings, Wenzel, & Condon, 1998). Although money must now be used in Ulukhaktok to purchase select items and materials (e.g., snowmobiles, ATVs), the community continues to function as a cohesive unit through an economy of sharing.

In this article, I am going to address how Indigenous peoples negotiate their personal/communal beliefs and capitalism. I will also analyze the increasing encroachment of capitalism on the Ulukhaktok community and how certain Indigenous groups (e.g., Maoris and Native Alaskans) work within (or without) those boundaries. I am also going to explain how Indigenous scholars, theorists, and activists feel about Marxist thought, and what, if anything, it offers them as Native peoples. Finally, I will explain how the Indigenous peoples of Ulukhaktok continue to successfully negotiate living between two strikingly different worlds – that of capitalism and sharing - and how they continue to prosper despite the ever-increasing presence of capitalism.

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper is presented through a revolutionary critical pedagogy (RCP) theoretical lens and also places additional emphasis on Indigenous knowledge and their specific way of knowing (Kovach, 2005; 2010). RCP focuses on the fight for equity for all people, assesses how capitalism influences all aspects of modern life, and exposes and critiques the relationship between culture and power (McLaren, 2008, 2010). It has been asserted by McLaren and Jaramillo (2010) that RCP must engage with Marxist thought in order to create a critical educational and social theory. This critique is also accomplished by looking at Indigenous People through a Marxist lens via the work of Frederick Engels and Lewis Morgan. By focusing on the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and their communal society, Indigenous ways of living were beginning to be analyzed through a Marxist framework (Engels, 1884/2010; Morgan, 1877/2004). In addition, by using Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK) or “a praxis that naturally promotes peace, justice, and respect for all life on the planet…[and] naturally considers all things, in all directions in order to make decisions about how to live on the planet with one another” (Grayshield & Mihecoby, 2010, p. 14), the fight against capitalism can be viewed as a collective effort. Instead of the “Whitestream” (Grande, 2003) way of looking at the world, perhaps we can move towards a position of Indigenous knowledge and resistance. Therefore, according to Kovach (2013), “Indigenous resistance is a, maybe *the*, critical element of this response [to marginalization], an insistence on the fact that of the Indigenous-settler relationship, a relationship that can only go forward through meaningful dialogue among all peoples” (p. 122).

**Marxist Thought**

Karl Marx, along with Frederick Engels, firmly believed that the modern worker (or proletariat) was brutally exploited by the capitalist class (or bourgeoisie) for the sole benefit of the bourgeoisie. Marx (1941/2002) asserted that, “Capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society” (p. 15) and, throughout human history, economic exploitation has been prevalent. Therefore, in modern society, there are basically two classes of people - the oppressors and the oppressed (Marx & Engels 1888/2005), and the masses of the oppressed are supposed to create more wealth for the small percentage of oppressors. From a European capitalistic perspective, money is something that we save and value in and of itself (Collings, 2011); therefore, our lives are defined and governed by the jobs we do and the money that we earn for performing them.

In this age of ever-increasing disparity between the wealthy and the poor, theorists continue to look for ways to reframe European American society and find alternative systems which could create a more equitable balance for all people. According to Sipe (1992):

Capitalism is more than a system of economic exploitation; inherent in its development and operation is the ability to destroy non-capitalist cultures, to reshape the dispersed people in its own image, and to engender profound alienation and unhappiness for individuals under its yoke. (p. 110)

For Indigenous peoples in this country, they began to learn this harsh lesson soon after the first Europeans landed on the shores of the “New World.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Indigenous Peoples and the Rejection of Marxism**

Theorists such as Sipe (1992) and Tabb (1992) have asserted that Marxists and Indigenous peoples can learn from each other and possibly assist each other in the fight against economic oppression. Additionally, Menzies (2010) posited that, “In the struggle to take back what is rightfully ours Indigenous peoples have much to gain from appropriating a European intellectual tradition who’s [*sic*] object is to transform and unsettle the power holders of that very society” (6). Yet, contrary to these views, several prominent Indigenous authors, such as Frank Black Elk and Vine Deloria, Jr., have maintained that Marxism is not compatible with their way of life, and therefore, is relatively worthless to them. As stated by Russell Means (1992), an Oglala Lakota, “Marxism is as alien to my culture as capitalism and Christianity” (p. 33). In that same vein, Black Elk (1992), an Oglala Lakota, felt that, since Marxism was framed in a White European perspective, and since “Europe, after all, is the primitive culture, tragically arrested in the course of its development by an anal fixation; a pathetic bully, so to speak” (p. 156), there was no reason for Indigenous Peoples to follow in the path of Marxist thought. According to Deloria, Jr. (1992), a Hunkpapa Lakota:

From the perspective of American Indians, I would argue, Marxism offers yet another group of cowboys riding around the same old rock. It is Western religion dressed in economic clothing, and shabby clothing it is. It accepts uncritically and ahistorically the worldview generated by some ancient Western trauma that our species is alienated from nature and then offers but another version of Messianism as a solution to this artificial problem. (p. 135)

For many Indigenous peoples, it is evident that Marxist theory is just another attempt at shoving Western thought down their collective throats, yet there is nothing really new or palatable about the framework.

Means (1992) showed his skepticism of Marxism when he stated that, “So now we, as American Indian people, are asked to believe that a ‘new’ European revolutionary doctrine such as Marxism will reverse the negative effects of European history on us” (p. 24). Due to the drastic annihilation of the Indigenous peoples in the United States (Churchill, 1997)[[2]](#footnote-2), it is completely understandable that many Native peoples would be dismissive of Marx (Simon, 2011) and feel uneasy about following another European theorist’s lead, no matter the supposed benefits.

According to Bauman (2010), perceived “progress of modernization has reached the furthest lands of the planet and…the processes of the commodification, commercialization and monetarization of human livelihoods have penetrated every nook and cranny of the globe” (p. 6).

Capitalism is like a virus, and it has spread to almost every corner of the earth, and as is true with Indigenous peoples as well as those living in a capitalist society, when there is a large disparity between the rich and the poor, there is always conflict (Shanley & Ryan, 1999). For the Indigenous peoples not yet taken over by capitalism, the fight is just beginning. Tabb (1992) posited that:

Thoughtful whites in increasing numbers share the Indian view of industrial society and its destructiveness of the environment, its spiritual bankruptcy, and its capacity to destroy the ecological possibility of the seventh generation from now knowing the beauty of nature. The question for them is building a revolutionary movement to challenge the existing order. (p. 168)

The question for many theorists is just how to accomplish that goal. Capitalism is deeply engrained in the collective European American psyche, and for many Native peoples, it will not go down without a fight of immense proportions.

Many Indigenous groups across the globe have not shown much interest in Marxist thought because, in order for these peoples to benefit from Marxism, they must first become proletarians. They have no desire to become proletarians (Bedford, 1994; Means, 1992) because in order to do so, they must join an economic system that they have been fighting against since the beginning of European colonization. Furthermore, Indigenous peoples have great difficulty in relating to an oppressed working class that derives from a European colonizing force (Churchill, 1992). Many Indigenous peoples feel that, since their lands will never be returned under Marxism, it is not compatible with their political beliefs; therefore, since Marxism refuses to act on the unjust taking of Indigenous lands by European explorers (Teale, 1998), it serves little function for them.

Another major issue that many Indigenous peoples have with Marxist thought and consumerism is the exploitation and mistreatment of “Mother Earth,” as it is called (“After Recognition,” 2010; Bedford, 1994; Treuquil and Lem Masc, 2010). Teale (1998) asserted that “Both capitalism and Marxism require exploitation of natural resources and industrial development of the earth, and thus, both conflict with the Native American lifeway which holds the earth sacred” (pp. 157-158). It is because of this unheeded exploitation that humans produce so much waste and toxins that we are finding it increasingly difficult to manage the waste and recycle it (Bauman, 2010). This continues to hurt Mother Earth. Bedford (1994) has firmly asserted that, “The appetite of the capitalist market and drive for profit is insatiable. A capitalist economy cannot rest content with exploiting only a fixed amount of land, resources and people. It must grow and expand to prevent stagnation and collapse” (p. 112). Therefore, if capitalism continues to grow and thrive, the earth, in turn, will continue to be damaged beyond repair. For many Indigenous groups, “The goal is not to participate in more of the same but to build something better…[Indigenous peoples] question the primacy of an economic model that values private profit over life and the Mother Earth” (“After Recognition,” 2010, p. 12). Ultimately, for most Indigenous peoples, the connection between oneself, others, and nature is of the utmost importance and a focal point of Native life (Kovach, 2010).

Author Leslie Marmon Silko, a Laguna Pueblo, has stated that capitalists develop the earth while Indigenous peoples take little from the earth without giving back (Teale, 1998). Industries which are greatly damaging to the environment, like “oil, mining, logging, as well as large infrastructure projects and single-crop commercial agriculture, pose the most severe threat in history to indigenous survival” (“After Recognition,” 2010, p. 11). The earth is a living entity and it must be protected for future generations (Treuquil and Lem Masc, 2010). Victor Lem Masc, a Mayan from Guatemala, stated that, “In our culture, balance and equilibrium is…encouraged. We should only consume what is really necessary. In that way we are contributing to the sustainability and equilibrium of the universe” (Treuquil and Lem Masc, 2010, p. 4). The focus for many Indigenous communities is not an exchange of goods for monetary wealth, but rather, the nourishment of the individual, the family, and the community as a whole (Kuokkanen, 2011) since the family unit provides one’s personal identity (Shanley & Ryan, 1999). The bottom line, according to Churchill & Larson (1992), is that "redistribution of the proceeds accruing from a systematic rape of the earth is, at best, an irrelevancy to American Indian tradition" (p. 185). Thus, for many Indigenous groups, any economic process which hurts the earth is incompatible with their way of life.

**Capitalism and Native Participation**

That being said, despite strong opposition to expanding capitalism by many Indigenous groups around the world, there is a growing movement for Native peoples to become active members of capitalistic society. Some Indigenous groups are becoming involved in business activity, on their own terms, in order to improve their “economic, educational, social, cultural and health development” (Robson, 2007, p. 57). As an example, the New Zealand Maori “corporate warriors,” as they are often called, believe that their participation in local and global commerce can support social ends. And, by doing so, they attempt to find middle ground between their personal ethics and business (Bargh, 2007).

There has also been an emergence of Indigenous-owned businesses in the area of tourism, such as in Alaska and New Zealand (Simon, 2011). For these Indigenous peoples, it is a mindset “which puts cultural integrity before the dollar” (Bunten, 2010, p. 296). For groups like the Maoris and Native Alaskans, the earth is used but not exploited; it is respected and left as untouched as possible. Additionally, Indigenous tourism is directly linked to the Indigenous communities, with accumulated wealth being redistributed within those same communities (e.g., by creating jobs, educational programs) (Bunten, 2010). The earnings from these companies do not go directly into the pockets of the select few; they are shared amongst their peoples.

There is great debate as to whether Indigenous peoples should embrace capitalism or continue to fight against it, with everything from violent resistance (Fenelon & Hall, 2008) to cultural resistance using modern-day hip-hop music (Navarro, 2014). As will soon be discussed, “While many continue to resist the forces of colonization, it remains evident to all that such ‘resistance’ comes at tremendous cost to both the individual and the community” (Grande, 2004, pp. 84-85).

**The Philosophy of Sharing**

In 1844-1845, a small group of Indigenous men and women, called the Paxoche, traveled to England for a cultural exchange. The Paxoche were shocked to witness the great disparity of wealth between the rich and the poor, and that in a land of such immense wealth, there were beggars in the streets as well as the homeless (Stevenson, 1993). Seeing such immense poverty firsthand, “the Paxoche were very critical of British inequities, greed, and lack of charity…their socioeconomic constructs were far less rigid, and tribal members were expected to share” (Stevenson, 1993, p. 10). It is this process of sharing food and goods that separate many Indigenous peoples from their capitalistic, European American counterparts. Means (1992) affirmed that:

Traditionally, American Indians have always attempted to *be* the best people they could. Part of that spiritual process was and is to give away wealth, to discard wealth in order *not* to gain. Material gain is an indicator of false status among traditional people while it is ‘proof that the system works’ to Europeans. (pp. 21-22) (italics in original text)

It appears that, for many Indigenous peoples, capitalism is diametrically opposed to their ways of thinking. In the Lakota culture, people continually accumulate goods, but with the only intent of giving them away (Kuokkanen, 2011). Another example of this theory is Kenneth Ryan (Tashunga Saba), an Assiniboine, who described how a basic rule of his people is to share what you have. He stated that, “as people, we have always been economically interdependent upon each other…Be it buffalo, gold, meat, food, money, hides – whatever the currency, someone will always have a surplus, and some will be without” (Shanley & Ryan, 1999, p. 15). Therefore, they share so that everyone has something. Depending on the situation, they might all be poor, but at least they will all have enough to survive; they will not turn their backs on those in their own community. Freddy Treuquil, a Mapuche in Chile, stated that “some indigenous cultures would hunt certain animals only for eating, not to accumulate wealth. They hunt to share. In Indigenous communities the ones who share the most are the most appreciated, the most important” (Treuquil and Lem Masc, 2010, p. 2).

**Ulukhaktok Background**

 The Ulukhaktomiut, previously referred to as the Holman Inuit (by the non-Indigenous Canadian peoples), live in a remote area on the western coast of Victoria island, about 300 miles north of the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories of Canada (Collings, 2000; 2009). Because of their extreme isolation, they were among the last of the Canadian Inuit groups to be contacted by White Europeans (Condon, 1996) and therefore, be subjected to colonial rule. According to Betsy Annahatak (1994), an Inuk, there are approximately 28,000 Canadian Inuit alive today.

The Holman (Ulukhaktok) community was founded in 1939 when the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) moved into the region. It was then that the HBC established a trading post (Condon, Collings, & Wenzel, 1995). In the 1950s and 1960s, the Canadian government encouraged the Inuit to take up full-time residence in Holman because of education, health, welfare, and housing needs (Damas, 2002). The government provided public housing and other services to achieve that end (Collings, 2000). Despite the belief by some that the Inuit were coerced by the Canadian government into discontinuing their more nomadic lifestyle, research by Damas, posited that the (now) Ulukhaktomiut were never forced to settle in government-funded camps; it was largely voluntary, even though the process of “Centralization was part and parcel of the [Canadian] Welfare State Policy” (Damas, 2002, p. 131). Although the settlement of Ulukhaktok is not the focus of this paper, it appears that this issue is still heavily questionable and needs to be further investigated. Be that as it may, Ulukhaktok is now a small but growing community of approximately 430 residents. The Ulukhaktomiut have everything from a Co-operative with a hotel and retail outlet, to an indoor hockey arena, a nine-hole golf course (Collings, 2000), the internet, and satellite television (Stern, 1999).

The Ulukhaktomiut live in the arctic tundra, where temperatures can dip to – 50 F during the winter months and can reach the 40s during the summer (Condon, 1996). The amount of sunlight also varies depending on the time of year. In the Ulukhaktok community, they are in almost complete darkness from late November until mid-January, and during “these two months, there is only a brief daily period of twilight at midday” (Condon, 1996, p. 68). On the other hand, during the summer months, they are exposed to almost complete sunlight, which allows them the ability to hunt, fish, and travel (Condon, 1996).

**The Ulukhaktok Community and Sharing**

Hunting and fur trading have always been important in Ulukhaktok society, and according to Stern (2005), “[Ulukhaktok] women and men are enmeshed in sharing networks, made up of primarily of extended kin, that regularly exchange money, clothing, household equipment, prepared foods, childcare, and other labor along with meat and fish” (p. 68). Subsistence hunting and fishing continues to play an important role in the economic and social life of the Ulukhaktomiut, but with the advent of the snowmobile, hunting and fishing has become easier and less time consuming (Condon, Collings, & Wenzel, p. 1995). Although caribou is the favored meat hunted by members of the Ulukhaktok community, the hunting of muskox has increased due to declining numbers of caribou. Ringed seals are also an important source of food for the Ulukhaktomiut, and they continue to hunt for other animals, such as polar bear, arctic char, and ducks (Condon, Collings, & Wenzel, 1995).

Although those at Ulukhaktok are now able to live off of imported, store bought foods from the two general stores in town (Collings, 2009), due to the perceived high cost, relatively poor taste, and low quality of the food, few families will do so (Collings, Wenzel, and Condon, 1998). Therefore, food sharing from the hunt takes on increasing importance. It appears that the elders of the family are responsible for a predominance of the food sharing amongst extended family and the community (Condon, Collings, & Wenzel, 1995). Traditionally, after a successful hunt, the hunters give much of their catch to their parents and extended kin, but they often keep a freezer of their own (Collings, 2011). The meat is either stored in the community freezer or in the parent’s porch freezer (Collings, 2009); whenever the adult children in the family want food, they either borrow the community freezer key from their parents and take what they wish, or they take meat from the parents’ porch freezer with them when they leave their house (Collings, 2009). Typically, for large animals such as caribou, it is “butchered at the parents’ house, with the parents directing the hunter to carry particular packages of meat to specific households in the settlement” (Collings, 2009, p. 369), such as community elders, grandparents, extended family members, and so on.

Modern food sharing in the Ulukhaktok community takes a variety of forms depending on the persons involved and their closeness, ranging from the informal sharing of already prepared meals to specific gift giving (Collings, Wenzel, & Condon, 1998). It appears that *payuktuq* is the most common form of food sharing amongst the citizens of Ulukhaktok. *Payuktuq* is the distribution of seal meat, caribou, and/or fish to other households based on the symbiotic relationship of two Ulukhaktok males, both kin and non-kin (Collings, Wenzel, & Condon, 1998). Condon, Collings, and Wenzel (1995) stated that:

Sharing of meat and fish is ubiquitous in [Ulukhaktok], as it is in most northern communities. It is unheard of for a hunter to hoard food for just his immediate household. Rather, meat is distributed to relatives, friends, and unrelated elders…It is also common for neighbors and close relatives to visit a hunter’s house to watch or even help with the butchering of the animal. (p. 41)

In modern times, due to working at wage-paying jobs, many Ulukhaktok men do not have the time to go hunting as often as they would like (Collings, 2011); therefore, the pattern of food sharing and distribution becomes all the more important. It appears that sharing is “a form of Inuit social interaction that binds people together and acts as a powerful symbol of those ties” (Stern, 2005, p. 68). The Ulukhaktomiut have several variations of sharing patterns, such as the *piqatigiit*, which is based on seal sharing (Collings, Wenzel, & Condon, 1998), and by the continuation of this practice, the people of Ulukhaktok are bound together in trusting and caring relationships. Kuokkanen (2011) concurred with the importance of sharing as binding agent when she stated that, “besides an economic occupation, subsistence activities are an expression of one’s identity, culture, and values. They are also a means by which social networks are maintained and reinforced” (p. 218). For Indigenous people, such as the Ulukhaktok, a person’s well-being is based on the proper balance of many facets of life - economy, spirituality, social life, physical and mental health, work, self-determination, and closeness to the earth (Bunten, 2010; Treuquil and Lem Masc, 2010). Food sharing is not essential for survival anymore for the Ulukhaktomiut, but it is a process which connects individuals together as a community. It serves many functions, with sustenance being just one.

**Ulukhaktok and Currency**

For members of the Ulukhaktok community, money appears to have been first introduced during the late 1950s/early 1960s, after the Canadian government began urging the Ulukhaktomiut to settle in (then) Holman (Condon, Collings, & Wenzel, 1995). For the Ulukhaktomiut, money is becoming increasingly important in order to help buy supplies and maintain their snowmobiles, ATVs, etc. (Collings, 2009). According to Kuokkanen (2011):

Wage labor and money play a growing role also in indigenous communities characterized by mixed economies. Cash income is required more and more to purchase goods, including those needed for subsistence activities such as hunting and fishing equipment and material for beading, sewing, quilting, and other activities. However, in mixed economies cash is often regarded as important only insofar as it enables the continuance of subsistence activities. (p. 224)

The exchange of money appears to occur most often between members of the nuclear family and between parents and their children (Collings, 2011). In his study, Collings (2009) found that, “Cash in Ulukhaktok tends to be viewed…on a par with other tools, rather than an end in and of itself. Just as screwdrivers, power saws, and meat grinders are…loaned between households, cash seems to be borrowed in a similar manner” (p. 366).

Due to the limited use of money, more as a tool and not to be valued in and of itself, there are those that consider the Ulukhaktok community to be “pre-capitalist,” but the terminology of “pre-capitalist” is arrogant and Eurocentric (Bedford, 1994). Becoming a capitalistic society does not make a society more valuable or important; a society is important because of its people, not its bank accounts.

**Conclusion**

In Ulukhaktok society, loyalty and the nurturing of the extended family has played a vital role in their survival (Lyons et al., 2010). Condon (1996) found that, “Through flexible social relations, an emphasis on cooperation and mutual support, and a sophisticated material technology, the Copper Inuit [Ulukhaktok] were able to survive and develop a viable and dynamic culture” (p. 89). The Ulukhaktomiut continue to thrive in their economic system of sharing between family members, community elders, and friends while the influence of capitalism plays a relatively small role in their lives.

Ulukhaktok society has changed greatly since its first contact with White explorers (Collings, 2009), and as with other societies, it continues to change due to the emergence of a wage-based economy (Stern, 2005). Unfortunately, for the members of the Ulukhaktok community:

sharing and those webs of sociality are under pressure from growing economic disparity and by modernistic bureaucratic and administrative practices which treat individual households, and particularly nuclear family households, as social and economic isolates. The transition to cash-based wage labor and state welfare economy has complicated sharing and placed the cultural values for sharing in tension with modernist desires for individual accumulation and self-determination. (Stern, 2005, p. 70)

But despite these changes in the Ulukhaktok community and other Indigenous communities around the world, becoming a part of a new Marxist revolution is still not really a question for debate. Means (1992) asserted that Native peoples refuse to follow another White European due to their violent, intolerant, and ultimately, genocidal actions against Indigenous peoples, which began almost as soon as they first set foot on North American soil. Furthermore, many believe that Marxism will do little to help the plight of Indigenous peoples, such as return their stolen land (Teale, 1998). Despite some Indigenous peoples using capitalism for the betterment of their own people, it appears that they refuse to engage with Marxist thought and any revolution therein.

**Implications**

With an increasing number of people in Canada and the US becoming frustrated with the unequal distribution of wealth and questionable business practices of those in positions of economic power, as shown by the “Occupy Canada” protests (Habib, 2011), I firmly believe that Marxists and critical pedagogists can learn something from those in Ulukhaktok. Since the relationship between Native peoples and Marxism has been long and uncertain (Simon, 2001), it is time that critical pedagogists begin to look to Native groups in the world and their Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK) (Grayshield & Mihecoby, 2010) as examples as to how to live our lives free from the shackles of capitalism. Although many Americans see Indigenous peoples as still being “frozen-in-time” (Kovach, 2013, p. 114), that is far from the truth.

For over 500 years, the European (and now, European American) has dismissed Indigenous thought and culture as being barbaric and uncivilized (Adams, 1995) because of his “cultural blindness and self-righteous sense of cultural superiority” (Tinker, 1993, p. 112). In that same vein, Churchill and Larson (1992) have asserted that, "Europe has exported the faith of its core ideology under the mantles of Christianity, capitalism, and Marxism *at the expense of knowledge* throughout its history" (p. 75). Indigenous peoples have a wealth of untapped knowledge that has been disregarded by colonialism; that is, “a multidimensional force underwritten by Western Christianity, defined by white supremacy, and fueled by global capitalism” (Grande, 2003, p. 329). Therefore, as a society, maybe it is time for Marxists to accept that Indigenous Peoples have their own form of knowledge about the economy that is much more equitable and caring than our current brand of neoliberal capitalism.

As is shown by the success of the Ulukhaktomiut, an adjusted form of sharing is a viable option for the socioeconomic future of this country. The only real question is, are we, as adherents of neoliberalism, willing to learn from Indigenous ways of living and reverse our repeated history of arrogant, Eurocentric, close-minded, deafness? It is certainly worth exploring; our failed economic system of capitalism, which leaves most people behind, has ravaged our planet, and its people, for long enough.

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1. The term “New World” is Eurocentric in nature. When America was “discovered” by Columbus, Indigenous peoples had already been living in North America for thousands of years. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is estimated that there were about 100 million Indigenous peoples in the Western hemisphere before the arrival of Columbus, and in the US, the Indigenous population dropped to about 237,000 by the 1890s, which is almost a 98% reduction (Churchill, 1997) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)