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# Indigenous Cooperatives in Canada: The Complex Relationship Between Cooperatives, Community Economic Development, Colonization, and Culture

**ABSTRACT**

This paper describes the intersection of the cooperative movement and Indigenous communities in Canada. The paper brings a lens of nation and race to an analysis of the cooperative movement in Canada, a perspective that has received limited attention in published literature. Cooperatives have had a dual role in Indigenous communities. The history of Indigenous cooperative development in Canada is inseparable from historical government colonization policies. In the current context, cooperatives have been utilized by Indigenous communities as a tool for economic and social development. Indigenous cooperatives demonstrate innovative combinations of “quadruple bottom line” business approaches, including financial, social, environmental and cultural goals. The extraordinary growth of Indigenous cooperatives in Canada, particularly in Inuit communities in the North, has also been supported by government policy implementation including financial and technical management support. A pan-Arctic comparison of government policies affecting development of cooperatives is provided as counter examples against the hypothesis of “cultural fit” between cooperatives and Indigenous communities. Ultimately, cooperatives are explained as an organizational form that can be co-opted for colonization or decolonization, capitalism or socialism, settler or Indigenous communities for their own specific purposes

**KEY-WORDS**

INDIGENOUS; COOPERATIVES; QUADRUPLE BOTTOM LINE; COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; COLONIZATION; CULTURE; CANADA

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## 1. Introduction

This paper describes historical and current developments of the cooperative movement in the context of Indigenous<sup>1</sup> communities in Canada. The cooperative movement for the purposes of this paper is narrowly defined as the group of organizations formally registered with Canadian federal or provincial governments as a cooperative business. It is acknowledged that in the broader context of the social economy, based on the framework involving the interaction between public sector, private sector, and social economy as described in Quarter, Mook and Armstrong (2009), there are a larger number of Indigenous organizations that exhibit characteristics of cooperatives, but are not formally registered as cooperatives. For example, Indigenous drumming and singing groups, artists collectives and some band-owned businesses (Anderson, Dana and Dana, 2006; Tulk, 2007; Johnstone, 2008) exhibit group based ownership and operation principles similar to cooperatives, but are not incorporated as such.

Formal cooperatives have had a dual role in Indigenous communities and allude to the broader ambivalence of the cooperative model for economic organizing. On the one hand, in the historical context after European settlement, formal cooperatives were a tool of colonization, assimilation of Indigenous labour, and consolidation of European settler control over land and resources. In a similar vein, Mordhorst (2014) critically examines the constructed narrative of the cooperative as a symbol of the virtue of social equality. Vieta (2010), however, explains that, while some cooperatives have been co-opted by the state and capitalocentric interests in different jurisdictions in different time periods, there has been a “new cooperativism” emerging in recent years. Closely linked to the newest social movements against neoliberal values and practices, the new cooperativism is neither tied to state nor capitalocentric interests but strives to move beyond them for an alternative form of community development. On the other hand, and indicative of the cooperative nature of many traditional modes of communal life, Curl (2012: 5) reminds us that “[t]he First North Americans to practice collectivity, cooperation and communalism were, of course, Indigenous”. In the context of contemporary Indigenous communities, cooperatives and cooperative type organizational structures have also been utilized by Indigenous communities as agents of decolonization, self-determination and revitalization of communal Indigenous ways of being.

Grounded in this “dual-nature” understanding of the cooperative form, the narrative that cooperatives in Canada have *always* been a form of socially inclusive organization is questioned in this paper through the lenses of class, nation and race. The paper first posits that the Canadian federal and provincial governments have played integral roles in the development of cooperatives in Indigenous communities; initially as a tool of colonization, and subsequently as a form of local economic development. A “current state” snapshot of Indigenous cooperatives in Canada is then

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<sup>1</sup> The internationally prevalent term “Indigenous” is utilized in the place of literature references to Aboriginal, Indian, and Native, unless a verbatim reference is required.

provided, focusing on differences between its provinces and territories that are a result of government policy. The paper then details cooperative development in Saskatchewan and Nunavut, the province and territory with the highest number of cooperatives per capita respectively. The current state of Indigenous cooperatives is explained in terms of historical development through the lens of nation and race. Here, the paper begins to fill in the gaps in the cooperative studies and economic development literature pointed out by MacPherson (2009) regards the under-researched lessons of northern Canadian and Indigenous cooperative movements. The paper ultimately suggests that the “cooperative difference” for Indigenous communities in Canada has been the ability to utilize cooperatives differently than the purposes for which they were designed by European settlers. Despite their colonial histories, some Indigenous communities have been able to utilize cooperatives as organizational structures that provide an additional tool in a diversified community toolkit to achieve holistic community goals. To explain this beneficial combination of Indigenous and Western knowledge, Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall describes “two-eyed seeing”: “it refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing ... and learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all” (Marshall, 2004: par. 2).

The focus of this paper, then, is to critically examine the interaction between Indigenous communities and the cooperative movement in Canada. The history of Canada is deeply situated in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The organizational history of sectors such as cooperatives is thus inextricably linked to the evolving relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. As described by Lendsay and Wuttunee (1999: 89), Canada is at a crossroads and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities must be moved through conscious effort from one of “displacement and assimilation” to “negotiation and renewal”. This crossroads has been signaled most recently by the process and final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, released during the final days of this writing<sup>2</sup>. The cooperative movement worldwide has also evolved over time to become more inclusive, as illustrated by the most recent version of the cooperative principles adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance in 1995 (ICA, n.d.). At the same time, the cooperative movement in Canada is often described without reference to the role cooperatives have played in the evolving relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. It is essential, then, for the cooperative movement in Canada to learn from a broader history so that both positive and negative lessons of the past are reflected in future development. A conclusion of the paper is that even though the cooperative movement in Canada was firmly rooted in colonial practices, contemporary cooperatives have been re-appropriated by Indigenous communities for developing unique forms of cooperatives that are involved in the resurgence of the cultural and economic

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<sup>2</sup> See the summary of the final report at: [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Exec\\_Summary\\_2015\\_06\\_25\\_web\\_o.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Exec_Summary_2015_06_25_web_o.pdf)

independence of Indigenous people. Canada has thus a pivotal role in the development of the cooperative movement, not only within its own borders, but also as lessons for the implementation of cooperatives in other countries with historically marginalized Indigenous populations.

This paper raises some difficult but pertinent questions for the cooperative movement in Canada, particularly since the primary discourse of how cooperatives have engaged with Indigenous communities remains grounded in mostly class-based reasoning absent of considerations of race and nationality. A socio-economic class based argument utilizes a narrative that Indigenous communities are currently socio-economically disadvantaged, and that cooperatives are a solution for the socio-economic issues faced by Indigenous communities by providing a route to economic development that would bring Indigenous communities on par with the rest of Canadian society. In the Canadian cooperative literature, however, there is limited questioning of how we have arrived at the current state. How did Indigenous communities become economically disadvantaged? Who benefited and gained, and who continues to benefit from the displacement and cultural genocide of Indigenous communities? Were cooperatives an organizational structure that had a role in the displacement of Indigenous communities? Do cooperatives based on Indigenous knowledge have a different value system than cooperatives based on a European knowledge base? In order to work through these difficult questions in relation to Indigenous communities and cooperatives in Canada, this paper utilizes three theoretical frameworks: (i) “settler colonialism” as described by Wolfe (2006) and Veracini (2011); (ii) “Indigenous entrepreneurship” (Dana, 2007) and the closely related concept of “quadruple bottom line” organizations (Scrimgeour and Iremonger, 2004), where Indigenous cooperatives demonstrate unique combinations of economic, social, environmental and *cultural* goals; and (iii) the cooperative principles adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance, particularly the inclusion of “race” as an explicit criteria for the first cooperative principle “voluntary and open membership” (ICA, n.d.).

## **2. Canada’s Indigenous communities and cooperatives: A “current state” snapshot**

### *2.1 Canada’s Indigenous communities*

Indigenous communities in Canada, often referred to as Aboriginal communities, consist of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups. The Indigenous population forms approximately four per cent of the total population of Canada, with First Nations having the highest population, followed by Métis and Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2011). The geographical distribution of Indigenous people in Canada is also relevant to the study of the cooperative movement. Although the province of Ontario has the highest Indigenous population in absolute numbers, the Indigenous population forms only two per cent of the provinces’ total population. Indigenous populations form a higher percentage of the territorial populations of Nunavut (86 per cent), Northwest Territories (52 per cent), and the Yukon (23 per cent), as summarized in Table 1 (also see Statistics Canada, 2011).

**Table 1. Population of Indigenous people and total number of cooperatives by province and territory in Canada**

<i>Province or Territory</i>	<i>Population count (in thousands)*</i>	<i>Population count (percentage)*</i>	<i>Number of cooperatives**</i>
Newfoundland and Labrador	36	7.1	69
Prince Edward Island	2	1.6	105
Nova Scotia	34	3.7	314
New Brunswick	23	3.1	166
Quebec	142	1.8	2,881
Ontario	301	2.4	1,689
Manitoba	196	16.7	369
Saskatchewan	158	15.6	975
Alberta	221	6.2	684
British Columbia	232	5.4	566
Yukon	8	23.1	8
Northwest Territories	21	51.9	9
Nunavut	27	86.3	24
<i>Canada</i>	<i>1,401</i>	<i>4.3</i>	<i>7,865</i>

*Source:* \*Statistics Canada (2011); \*\*Industry Canada (2015).

*Note:* The total number of incorporated cooperatives includes non-Indigenous and Indigenous cooperatives.

As explained in the remaining pages, the experience of colonization in the subsequent development of formal cooperatives in Canada has been different for each province and territory. For example, formal cooperative structures were incorporated in Canada's northern territories a number of years later than the establishment of cooperative organizational structures in Canada's southern provinces. At the same time, however, the emergence of cooperatives per capita has been highest among Inuit communities in the territory of Nunavut (Belhadji, 2001; Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001).

## 2.2 Indigenous cooperatives

The term “Indigenous cooperative” is difficult to define. This is the case because a cooperative can be located in and owned by an Indigenous community, or owned by Indigenous individuals within a non-Indigenous community, or have a primarily Indigenous membership but be managed by non-Indigenous individuals. Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson (2001) completed an in-depth review of Indigenous cooperatives in Canada in the early 2000s, including 13 case studies, and included formally incorporated cooperatives that were located in predominantly Indigenous communities, if the membership base was predominantly indigenous, or if the co-op was owned and/or controlled by Indigenous people. Other studies of Indigenous cooperatives in Canada can be found in broader histories of cooperatives (MacPherson, 1979; Belhadji, 2001; Fairbairn, 2004, 2009; Gibson, Kobluk, and Gould, 2005; Findlay, 2006), including cooperatives in the Arctic (Iglauer, 2000); provincial accounts of cooperatives in Saskatchewan (Fairbairn, 2007), the Yukon (Lionais and Hardy, 2015), and northern Quebec (Tulugak and Murdoch, 2007); and in the history of American cooperatives (Curl, 2012) and of cooperatives in the British Empire (Rhodes, 2012). Case studies of Indigenous co-ops in Canada have included: Great Bear Co-op and Neechi Foods (Findlay and Wuttunee, 2007); Neechi Foods (Loxley, 2002); Northern Saskatchewan fisheries cooperatives and Buffalo Narrows Sawmill Co-operative (Quiring, 2002); Arctic Co-operatives Limited (Mitchell, 1996; Quarter, Mook & Armstrong, 2009); SEED Winnipeg (Craig and Hamilton, 2014); Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Cooperative (Pattison and Findlay, 2010); prison cooperatives (Harris and McLeod Rogers, 2014); and Inuit cooperatives (Stopp, 2014). The general consensus among these studies has been to define Indigenous cooperatives as formally incorporated cooperatives where the majority of members are Indigenous.

In agreement with Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson (2001), an Indigenous cooperative for the purpose of this paper is defined as an organization that is formally incorporated as a cooperative with mostly Indigenous membership. In further agreement with Anderson’s (2011) definition of Indigenous entrepreneurship, in this paper an Indigenous co-op is an organization that additionally implements Indigenous *values* in its long-term strategy and day-to-day operations. As described by Dana (2007), Indigenous entrepreneurship is not simply identifying Indigenous individuals who are entrepreneurs. Similarly, Indigenous cooperatives are not simply cooperatives whose members or leadership is Indigenous. The main characteristics of Indigenous cooperatives, rather, can be identified by the presence of four interrelated dimensions: economic, social, environmental, and *cultural* goals, i.e. the “quadruple bottom line” discussed in greater detail in the theory section.

Formally incorporated Indigenous cooperatives have been described as possessing organizational structures that resemble Indigenous forms of the economic sharing of production and resource distribution (Torgerson, 1981). At the same time, formally incorporated cooperatives in Canada are based on Eurocentric structures that can have narrower goals compared to the broader Indigenous values described by Anderson (2011), which not only include economic and social but also environmental and cultural goals. Wuttunee (2006) describes how Indigenous values are not static

but change over time, incorporating hybrid Western and Indigenous approaches when appropriate. Indigenous communities in Canada have thus integrated into their communities cooperatives and cooperative-like structures as one type of organizational tool in a broad toolkit of organizational tools to manage production and distribution of goods and services.

The first formally incorporated Indigenous cooperative in Canada was established in the province of Saskatchewan in 1945, involving the fishing industry (Belhadji, 2001). The first Inuit cooperatives started at Kangirsualujuaq, Quebec and Killiniq Island, Nunavut (formerly Northwest Territories) in 1959, with significant government assistance (Macpherson, 2009). Belhadji (2001) calculated that by the last years of the 20th century there were 33 cooperatives per 100,000 Canadians, whereas there were 35 cooperatives per 100,000 Indigenous people, thus relatively the same per capita presence. Most significantly, however, Belhadji (2001) calculated there were 144 cooperatives per 100,000 inhabitants of the Northwest Territories<sup>3</sup>, which had a high population of Inuit and Dene communities. Therefore, *on a per capita basis*, the former Northwest Territories had a fourfold implementation of cooperatives compared to the Canadian average.

The form of Indigenous cooperatives in the Canadian North has also been found to be qualitatively different from cooperatives in the South. Northern cooperatives owned by Inuit groups are involved in multiple activities including retail stores, hotels, fuel depots, Cable TV connections, hardware supplies, and arts and crafts (Belhadji, 2001; MacPherson, 2009). In some northern communities, the cooperative is the major and only supplier of goods, as opposed to southern cooperatives owned by First Nations or Métis groups, which tend to be more single purpose organizations. Belhadji (2001) reports that the employment of individuals by cooperatives in six Inuit communities studied was more than 10 per cent of the total community employment. Therefore, we can postulate that cooperatives have become a major socio-economic influence in Inuit communities, although there does not seem to be a direct correlation between a high percentage of Indigenous people in a province or territory and a higher prevalence of cooperatives. Possible causal factors for cooperative development include government policy and historical colonial aims towards Indigenous communities, which is outlined in subsequent sections of the paper.

### 3. Theoretical considerations

This section outlines three strands of theory related to the interaction of Indigenous communities and the cooperative movement in Canada: (i) “settler colonialism” (a structural relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities which included cooperatives as an instrument of colonization), (ii) “quadruple bottom line principles” (an Indigenous strategy of maintaining balance between economic, social, environment and cultural goals within communities

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<sup>3</sup> The Northwest Territories at the time of the Belhadji study included the territory which is now Nunavut.



and community organizations and closely related to “Indigenous entrepreneurship”), and (iii) the International Cooperative Principles and the background to the development of those principles as they relate to Indigenous communities. In reviewing the third theoretical strand particular emphasis is placed on the first cooperative principle of “voluntary and open membership” while attempting to include the notion of “race” as an additional explicit criteria.

### *3.1 Colonialism and settler colonialism*

Veracini (2011) describes both “colonialism” and “settler colonialism” as forms of domination. For our purposes, colonialism involves domination of Indigenous communities as required labour in a colony until the resources of interest are depleted. Settler colonialism, on the other hand, requires removal of Indigenous people from their land and the establishment of sovereignty by settlers who remain. The Canadian historical experience has included both colonialism and settler colonialism at different times and different places. For instance, the Inuit experience with colonialism unfolded for economic purposes when their labour was required in a harsh environment or when the re-settlement of Inuit communities was coerced or forced mostly for Canadian sovereignty issues in otherwise unpopulated regions of the Far North (Tester and Kulchyski, 1994). Differently, Indigenous communities in the prairies and other parts of southern Canada mostly experienced forms of settler colonialism where the policy and objective was to remove Indigenous communities by force and simultaneously subjugate Indigenous culture and knowledge in order to provide land for European settlers. The themes of colonialism and settler colonialism are revisited later in the paper in relation to the role of cooperatives in building the British Empire.

Settler colonialism, the experience of subjugation of the majority of Canada’s Indigenous people, is a structure rather than merely a historic event (Wolfe, 2006). Settler colonialism continues to manifest itself in different ways in the present. Wherever there is oppression there is always resistance and there are a number of different forms of Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism. One form of Indigenous resistance has been called “Indigenous entrepreneurship” (Anderson, Dana and Dana, 2006; Anderson, 2011). Indigenous entrepreneurship can be described as a process of not only changing economic dynamics but also more broadly the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. As described by Anderson (2011), Indigenous entrepreneurship has multiple goals in addition to economic self-sufficiency, including land ownership and use, and strengthening socio-economic circumstances and revitalization of traditional culture. This relates directly to the use of cooperatives for local, Indigenous development or subjugation; as an organizational structure, co-ops can either suppress local forms of entrepreneurship if they are imposed through top-down government policy, or express community values in an entrepreneurial form if they are built bottom-up from the grassroots. Thus, cooperatives developed *for* Indigenous communities by federal and provincial governments can be seen as grounded in settler colonialist values and purposes. Cooperatives that have been developed *by* Indigenous communities, in



contrast, express Indigenous entrepreneurship and often enable expression of Indigenous economic, social, environmental and cultural values.

### *3.2 The quadruple bottom line and indigenous entrepreneurship*

As colonialism and settler colonialism were imposed as structures throughout the British Empire, in conjunction with a separation of Indigenous people from their land, a specialist form of enterprise that pursued primarily economic goals would emerge in Canada hand-in-hand with the evolution of its capitalist system. One of the major consequences of the combination of capitalism and colonization would be the proliferation of strictly economic organizations that divorced themselves from social, environmental or cultural goals<sup>4</sup>. Indigenous entrepreneurial responses to this separation of organizational functions include more holistic reintegration and innovative combinations of social, environmental and cultural goals with economic goals, which can be exemplary for other social economy organizations across the world (Beavon, Voyageur and Newhouse, 2005).

Dana (2007) proposes that Indigenous entrepreneurship has multiple goals in addition to economic self-sufficiency, including protecting land ownership and use, strengthening socio-economic circumstances, and revitalizing traditional culture. These characteristics of Indigenous entrepreneurship differentiate it from mainstream entrepreneurship and are mirrored in the Indigenous community economic development literature. According to Anderson (2011: 339-340), Indigenous entrepreneurship for Aboriginal economic development has the following purposes:

1. Ending dependency through economic self sufficiency
2. Controlling activities on traditional lands
3. Improving the socioeconomic circumstances of Aboriginal people
4. Strengthening traditional culture, values and languages.

Similarly, and deploying a different bottom-up and community based research approach for identifying measures of Indigenous community well-being, Orr and Weir (2013: 139) conclude that well-being indicators identified by community members can be grouped into the following four themes:

1. Economic
2. Environmental
3. Social
4. Cultural/Spiritual.

Related to these indicators, Weir (2007: 48) describes the ideals of Indigenous entrepreneurship as follows: “it will be the socially, culturally, and environmentally responsible entrepreneurs that add

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<sup>4</sup> The gendered separation of organizations in public service, for example, has been described by the influential book *Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration in the Progressive Era* (Stivers, 2002).

to and strengthen sustainable Aboriginal governance and financial independence within and among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, organizations and communities in Canada through their business pursuits”.

And Giovannini (2015) describes the importance of culture as an integral part of all new Indigenous organizations in the Chiapas region of Mexico, including cooperatives, as part of implementation of the philosophy of *buen vivir* (good living).

Finally, a multi-jurisdictional study on “Arctic Social Indicators” developed by the Nordic Council of Ministers (TeamNord, 2014: 17), which includes Canada’s northern territories and regions, has grouped similar indicators under the following six groupings:

1. Health and Population
2. Material Wellbeing
3. Education
4. Cultural Wellbeing
5. Contact with Nature
6. Fate Control.

Anderson’s, Orr and Weir’s, and TeamNord’s categories clearly touch on the broader quadruple bottom line categories of social, financial, cultural and environmental considerations for Indigenous entrepreneurship. They underscore how quadruple bottom line indicators are important across multiple jurisdictions where Indigenous communities are prominent. Scrimgeour and Iremonger (2004), for instance, outline the use of quadruple bottom lines for Maori social enterprise in New Zealand, involving integrated economic, social, environmental and cultural goals. Dalziel, Matunga and Saunders (2006) explain that since 2002, the quadruple bottom line approach has been adopted in the formal devolution of responsibility to local authorities in New Zealand, which has a significant Indigenous population. And Corntassel (2008) describes “sustainable self determination” as the holistic integration of cultural and environmental values and how economic, social, cultural and environmental values are not separable from a holistic worldview for Indigenous communities.

In sum, from community-based measures in Canada, to social indicators for Arctic development policy in the countries of the Far North, to formalized government procurement requirements in New Zealand, the essential components of Indigenous entrepreneurship and community economic development is the quadruple bottom line of financial, social, environmental and cultural goals. Quadruple bottom line organizations can be seen as long-term responses to colonialism via holistically bringing together again organizational functions that were separated through colonialism. With a better understanding of the quadruple bottom line philosophy of Indigenous communities we can now compare it to the cooperative principles.

### 3.3 The international cooperative principles and Indigenous cooperatives

A number of authors have discussed the commonalities between the cooperative principles adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) and Indigenous values (e.g., Craig and Hamilton, 2014; Harris and McLeod 2014). While potentially compatible, we must however proceed cautiously and critically when conflating the two. I suggest three points for consideration.

First, the cooperative principles are very broad and necessarily had to be so in order to resonate with a plurality of world cultures. The argument for a strong relationship between cooperative principles and Indigenous values and culture, however, would be more convincing if there were more formal references to how (and if) Indigenous values were incorporated consciously into the development of the cooperative principles rather than a *post hoc analysis* fitting Indigenous values to previously developed (and Eurocentric) cooperative principles. As an example from a different context, there are documented references of Indigenous (i.e., Iroquois Confederacy) influences on the US constitution<sup>5</sup>. Another example would be the Quechua Indigenous concept of *buen vivir* and how it has been formally incorporated into the national constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador (Gudynas, 2011). Giovannini (2015) also assesses the conscious incorporation of *buen vivir* into Indigenous organizations in the Chiapas region of Mexico. Without a body of evidence referencing at least some Indigenous origins of to the ICA principles, the ICA principles can be seen to be, rather, firmly based on Eurocentric origins and values. As confirmed by MacPherson (2012), the cooperative principles do have a “values inheritance” which are decidedly Eurocentric and he proactively questions the translation of Eurocentric cooperative values to Indigenous contexts. Further, MacPherson concludes that efforts to encourage the development of cooperatives among Indigenous communities have not been examined adequately.

It must be underscored that the fact that the cooperative principles have Eurocentric origins is not problematic in itself. For Indigenous communities, problematic issues arise when they are implemented for justifying cooperatives as vehicles for local development when other organizational forms based on Indigenous knowledge and principles are simultaneously devalued, discounted, suppressed, or not even considered as foundations for Indigenous cooperative organizations. This has been historically in evidence in Papua New Guinea, for instance, in the context of colonialism where institutions such as cooperatives which were established to facilitate temporary extraction of resources by non-permanent European settlers declined after the colonizers left (Mugambwa, 2005).

Second, the development of the ICA’s cooperative principles was a contested process, particularly around the inclusion of race and gender in the first principle, “voluntary and open membership”. The discussion of race, colour, caste, nationality, culture, and language as a cause of

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, the US Senate’s resolution 331, from the 100th Congress in 1988, acknowledges “the confederation of the original thirteen colonies into one republic was influenced ... by the Iroquois Confederacy, as were many of the democratic principles which were incorporated into the constitution itself” (Indian Country Today Media Networks, 2012).

conflict in the development of the cooperative principles has been documented in the *Report of the ICA Commission on Co-operative Principles (1966)* (International Co-operative Information Centre, 2015a). Macpherson (2012: 119) specifically discusses race as a contested space of discussion in the revision of cooperative principles and states that “[s]imilarly, the idea that race should not count was not always easily accepted in places where it demonstrably and historically did”. Moreover, in a chapter on Indigenous people and their communities in the document *Coops & the Implementation of UN Agenda 21* particularly discusses the incompatibility between Aboriginal culture and cooperative principles in the context of fragile ecosystems in Australia (International Co-operative Information Centre, 2015b). To the credit of the ICA, in addition to incorporating gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination in voluntary and open membership the ICA has set a priority aim on auto-determination, applying the UN declaration regarding the rights and well-being of Indigenous people (International Co-operative Information Centre, 2015c).

In Canada, other major social economy apex organizations have specifically tried to directly address Indigenous issues in their policies. The Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet), an apex organization representing cooperatives and other social enterprises, has, for instance, recommended adoption of a resolution approving the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. And the apex Canadian cooperative organization, Cooperatives and Mutuals Canada, has also highlighted and financially supported development of Indigenous cooperatives.

Third, cooperatives continue to have a troubled relationship with race in practice. For instance, in highly racially segregated cities such as New York, predominantly white housing cooperatives continue to exclude primarily black applicants as evidenced by published court cases (Malpeli, 1999; Lattman and Haughney, 2011; Yaniv, 2012). According to one columnist, increasing the number of housing cooperatives potentially leads to increased discrimination based on race (Peterson, 1990). These discriminatory housing cooperatives could be seen as following all the international cooperative principles and yet still discriminating based on race. Zitcer (2015) similarly describes exclusivity in food cooperatives in Philadelphia based on race and class distinctions. And Gordon Nembhard (2014) has convincingly shown the historical separation of Black and White cooperatives in the US, and the intentional suppression of Black cooperatives including the use of deadly violence and destruction of property. The US, in particular, has continuing issues with race, and cooperatives reflect this situation as do other organizational structures. In the field of international development related to cooperatives, Burke (2010: 30) is highly critical of cooperative development in an Indigenous community in Brazil, describing how the cooperative “made indigenous people more vulnerable and dependent, failed to promote participatory development, masked the effects of unfavourable state policies, and perpetuated discriminatory distinctions among indigenous people”.

In Canada, we need to challenge the notion that cooperatives are and have always been socially inclusive organizations by learning from the discriminatory experiences in other jurisdictions.

These three critical points of reflection dovetail into key issues faced by Indigenous cooperatives in Canada. However, *the* key differences between the ICA principles and Indigenous entrepreneurship in the context of Canada have been the absence of explicit cultural and environmental considerations in the cooperative principles, while Indigenous entrepreneurship as described earlier does include these two crucial elements. While the first principle of “voluntary and open membership” can be interpreted as implicitly including cultural diversity, its weakness for Indigenous cooperatives is that it does not explicitly refer to culture. As explained through quadruple bottom line theory, culture is a salient feature of Indigenous socio-economic organizations, is related to individual and group identity, and has been a major site of oppression in settler colonialism. And, equally, while the last ICA principle, “concern for community,” explicitly refers to “sustainable development,” it does not mention members’ relationship to land, an additional vital notion for Indigenous people. Indigenous people’s relationship to the interlinked communities of humans, flora and fauna is centrally mediated through relationship to land, and is different from non-Indigenous conceptualization of environmental sustainability (Trask, 1991). Therefore, a significant gap exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous concepts of relationship to land and sustainable development in the ICA principles. In sum, the differences between Indigenous entrepreneurship and cooperative principles are significant in terms of the importance of placed on culture and relationship to land and should be considered as vital additions to future iterations of the ICA’s cooperative principles.

#### **4. Historical considerations**

##### *4.1 Cooperatives as an instrument of the British Empire*

As has been suggested so far, historically cooperatives are not separable from colonial empire building activities. Pollet and Develtere (2004), for example, outline how colonial officers of different colonizing nations created hundreds of cooperatives in almost every country under colonial control. As opposed to the voluntary and open cooperative membership principles today, membership in these colonial cooperatives was often not free but compulsory (Pollet and Develtere, 2004). In the thoroughly researched book, *Empire and Cooperation: How the British Empire Used Cooperatives in its Development Strategies 1900-1970*, Rhodes (2012) shows how the British Empire was diverse in ideology and therefore enabled both capitalist and socialist organizational forms as part of its development strategies in its colonies. Cooperatives in particular were a more socialist, labour oriented form of organization instrumental in establishing trade across the British Empire, from North America to Africa to Asia, and were thus an instrument of economic development for the broader colonial project of empire building. It is important to establish, however, that it is not the organizational form of cooperatives that is inherently colonial, but rather that cooperatives were utilized as an instrument of colonialism. On the other hand, as this paper will show in the

case studies, the cooperative form of organization has also been utilized as an effective tool of decolonization by Indigenous communities in the contemporary context.

An early conclusion by Rhodes (2012) is that in the growth of early British cooperatives involved in international trade, moral issues including the exploitation of Indigenous people in the colonies were secondary to the imperatives of trade. British and colonial cooperatives might have had different structures and different class-based rationales from other businesses, but they were primarily businesses that engaged in trade as an integral part of the British Empire's trading system. Hence, the primary imperative of trade of early British colonial cooperatives is in clear contrast with the contemporary definition of cooperatives as social economy businesses that balance social goals with financial goals (Quarter, Mook and Armstrong, 2009).

Moreover, the benefits and advantages of early cooperatives in North America accrued to European settlers and non-Indigenous communities (Fairbairn, 2004). Rhodes (2012) has further argued that across the British Empire the relationship between European settler-led cooperatives and non-Europeans was not one of simple exclusion of membership, it was primarily an oppressive relationship of ethnicity and race. Cooperative sugar factories in Barbados, for example, relied on indentured labour from India working on West Indian sugar plantations. In Canada Scottish and Finnish immigrants setup cooperatives as ethnic groups (MacPherson, 1979). Although these early Canadian cooperatives set up along ethnic lines were intended to strengthen each community's power and economic position versus the mainly British-born elite, they also excluded Indigenous communities (Fairbairn, 2009). Therefore cooperatives were being utilized simultaneously to counter and to implement different forms of ethno-racial oppression. The early British cooperatives, particularly those involved with international trade, did not thus have social equity motivations that included racial diversity, and intentionally were not inclusive of racially different Indigenous people in the British colonies.

Rhodes (2012) also describes how the International Co-operative Alliance was initially built by the British liberal elite. Key members of the British liberal elite who were influential to the overall cooperative movement included Henry Wolff, who was heavily influenced by German cooperative thought and who directly influenced Alphonse Desjardins in setting up cooperative credit in Quebec, and Sir Albert Henry George Grey, 4th Earl Grey (governor general of Canada from 1904 to 1911 and previously administrator of Rhodesia between 1896 and 1898). These and other British liberal elites who led the diffusion of the European cooperative movement from continent to continent also brought along with them colonial and racist belief systems which led to either outright exclusion, often coerced, or restricted labour use of Indigenous populations by cooperatives. Earl Grey, as one example, had Christian beliefs that extended to virtues of cooperative production for poorer sections of society both in Britain and for White colonial settlers, virtues that however did not extend to local Indigenous populations whom he considered to be "savages".

And most pertinent to this study, Rhodes (2012) points out how early British cooperatives included vertical integration of consumer oriented wholesale societies in Britain with producer

cooperatives in its dominions and colonies<sup>6</sup>. While these vertically integrated cooperatives performed an important function in meeting local demands for low-priced food (since local British agriculture had an inability to feed Great Britain's growing population) they also had devastating effects on Indigenous populations. Trading patterns established with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa required increasing development of land for farmland, which required clearing Indigenous people from their land. Therefore, although British consumer cooperatives in imperial times were successful in keeping the price of imported food low enough to meet the demands of member consumers throughout Great Britain, the social and economic costs to Indigenous populations in the colonies were extremely high. While environmentalists today, including many associated with the cooperative movement, encourage consumers to consider not only the nominal purchase cost but also the social and environmental costs of uneven North-South value chains and excess carbon emissions utilized in growing and transporting food, the cooperative-promoting socialists of the British Empire did not encourage British consumers and cooperative members to consider the social costs of food and consumer goods imported from the colonies (MacPherson, 2007).

#### *4.2. Omissions and revisions in the history of the cooperative movement in Canada*

The original inhabitants of North America were the first people on the continent to implement collective, cooperative and communal practices (Curl, 2012). In Canada, the first organizations with European cooperative characteristics, emerging at first in the historical and political economic context of settler colonialism described thus far, were set up in English Canada in the mid 1800s and early 1900s (Macpherson, 1979). As Fairbairn (2004) outlines in his essay *History of Cooperatives*, formal co-ops were an integral part of the process of colonization in Canada and what was to become the Continental US. Initially, formal cooperatives were an economic class-based response by newly arrived European immigrants to monopolies established by the ruling class and political elites. Thus, initial formal cooperative development in Canada and in most of North America was not inclusive of nor intended for the benefit of Indigenous communities (Fairbairn, 2004). And while Indigenous communities had been practicing cooperative forms of organization for centuries before European contact, the first *incorporated* Indigenous cooperative in Canada would only emerge in the province of Saskatchewan in 1945. This paper argues an analysis of cooperative history in Canada solely based on class dynamics detached from race dynamics is therefore insufficient, for explaining the development of Indigenous cooperatives.

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly, MacPherson (2007: 224) describes the colonial origins of cooperatives involved in food trading: "More commonly, though, organized co-operative movements outside Europe were started through the direct action of imperial and colonial governments. Such imperial powers as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany generally encouraged the formation of co-operatives for many reasons. In some instances, they wanted to develop colonial economies, especially for the export of staple commodities, like sugar, tea, cacao, and grains: creating marketing co-operatives was often a very useful way to do so".



The mainstream cooperative movement narrative in Canada tends to focus on a linear, Eurocentric sequence of events that is eviscerated from the broader context of the relationship between Indigenous and settler communities including the colonization of North America. It situates the first documented formal Canadian cooperative as a fire insurance organization established in 1852 in Nova Scotia and the first co-op store in Stellarton, Nova Scotia in 1861. Cooperative creameries and fruit-growers co-ops established by farmers to free them from exploitative middlemen in the 1890s then generally follows, with the addition of the first Knights of Labour worker cooperatives in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the emergence of Desjardin's *caisse populaire* in Quebec, and later on by the 1930s the Antigonish movement's co-op stores and its fishery and mining sector co-ops (MacPherson, 2009). Usually as a footnote, the first Indigenous cooperatives in Canada are included as having been incorporated in the province of Saskatchewan in 1945, involving the fishing industry, while the first Inuit cooperatives are pointed out as having started in Kangirsualujaq, Quebec and Killiniq Island, now Nunavut, in 1959, with significant government assistance.

The history of cooperatives in Canada presented as such is incomplete, however, without the historical context of concurrent colonization activities. When we add in the historical context of simultaneous colonial projects, the history of cooperatives in Canada can be seen to fit, in its founding stages at least, with the larger colonial project. Two additional historical dimensions relevant to the intersection of Indigenous people and cooperatives in Canada must thus be brought into the historical record—nation and race. Their consideration offers an alternative history of cooperative development in Canada.

While the economic, class-related struggles of European settlers marking the establishment of formal cooperatives across the prairies was occurring, a more lethal form of race warfare was simultaneously taking place in the reduction of land use and food sources for Indigenous communities. On the whole, the population of Indigenous communities in the prairies was greatly reduced due to epidemics from diseases brought by Europeans, such as smallpox. The major epidemics, recorded in 1780, 1819, 1838 and 1869, caused half of the population to die during each epidemic (Stonechild, 2014). The reduction of the Indigenous population through disease was not effective, however, in removing communities from use of land required by settlers. Stonechild (2014) provides a description of how the Saskatchewan region had been inhabited by Indigenous people since 9000 BCE, as determined by archaeological evidence of hunters using spears to hunt buffalo. The buffalo which roamed through a large area of the Canadian and American prairies provided the primary needs of the plains First Nations, including meat for food, hides for shelter and clothing, and bones for tools. In *The Destruction of the Bison*, Isenberg (2000) explains the human-led decline of the North American bison population from an estimated 30 million in the year 1800 to fewer than 1000 by the late 1800s. It was during this manufactured food crisis for Indigenous communities that the original treaties were negotiated across Saskatchewan between 1869 and 1907. Therefore, at the same time that cooperatives were being utilized to secure land usage and food for a growing number of European settlers, Indigenous communities were being

simultaneously decimated through multilevel strategies including reduction of their food sources and traditional lands to clear “new” land for the settlers<sup>7</sup>. Thus, it is no exaggeration to claim that the first cooperatives established by settlers on traditional Indigenous lands were simultaneously instruments of class liberation and eventual nation-building for European settlers and instruments of oppression for Indigenous communities, limiting economic opportunities for Indigenous communities and displacing the cultural knowledge of Indigenous populations in the process.

## **5. Canada’s Indigenous cooperatives: Contexts and case studies**

This section begins to fill in the alternative history and contemporary situation of Indigenous cooperatives in Canada. Since Saskatchewan was the province where the first incorporated Indigenous cooperative was established, this section details Saskatchewan government policies regards cooperatives and its historical relationship with Indigenous communities.

### *5.1 Settler and Indigenous relationships in the province of Saskatchewan*

As described by Fairbairn (2009), Saskatchewan’s formal cooperatives started with European settlement paralleling similar developments in Australia, Kenya and South Africa, where British Empire colonization activities were integrated with cooperative development. In Canada, the British and subsequently Canadian governments created the possibility of Eurocentric cooperatives by introducing legislation, market economies, and cleared land for thousands of settlers with European experience and ideas. To further develop a nationally focused economy, Canadian governments historically provided agricultural cooperatives with subsidies for seed and machinery, assisted in the shipment of livestock, and provided market intelligence (Rhodes, 2012). By the 1920s, the province of Saskatchewan had formed a cooperative branch and in the 1940s established Canada’s first Department of Co-operatives. These historical developments enabled Saskatchewan to be the province with the highest number of cooperatives per capita today.

Fairbairn (2009) astutely observes that settlers who came to Saskatchewan, however, did not necessarily come with an initial desire to create cooperative communities. Settlers found what Indigenous communities had known for thousands of years: that it takes cooperation to deal with the prairie geography, climate and sparse population. Settlers did not have existing community mechanisms for cooperation as the Indigenous communities did, and the settlers had to build cooperative mechanisms and organizations in a non-linear process that involved both successes and failures (Fairbairn, 2009).

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<sup>7</sup> The settlement of North American prairies that went hand-in-hand with removal of Indigenous populations from the land has been described in chilling detail by Daschuk (2013) in the book *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*.

### 5.1.1 Indigenous food systems and the Saskatchewan agricultural economy

In the book *Lost Harvests*, Carter (1990) details the experience of Indigenous farmers on the prairies. Carter is careful to point out how not all Indigenous people were farmers. Additional forms of obtaining food such as hunting and fishing were prevalent, but a significant proportion of Indigenous people on the prairies had long-term farming experience. Indigenous farming practices were often related to nomadic practices that involved moving with the seasons and food sources, and were environmentally sustainable by leaving minimal long-term impact on land. Prior to European contact, 75 per cent of food consumed by Indigenous communities on the prairies consisted of agricultural products including Indian corn, maize, beans and squash. Indigenous knowledge of local agriculture included: awareness of vegetation in the local environment; when and how to harvest it; patterns of rainfall, snow and frost, and the seasonal availability of water; and knowledge of soil varieties and suitability of different crops. However, Indigenous knowledge of local conditions was not utilized in Eurocentric cooperatives, and Indigenous communities on the prairies were prevented in many ways from developing their own formal organizations utilizing Indigenous knowledge. Indeed, given the food crisis manufactured by the slaughter of the buffalo and restrictions on land use, Indigenous knowledge of local agriculture could have alleviated conditions of poverty and starvation in the mid-to-late 1800s.

The government of Canada implemented discriminatory farming policies for Indigenous communities for two purposes. The primary purpose was to restrict the use of land by Indigenous communities to small areas in order to open up land for settlers (Carter, 1990). The secondary purpose was to create experienced farm labour to be utilized on a temporary basis on settler farms when required rather than as permanent full-fledged members of producer organizations set up by settlers, including cooperatives. At the same time, reserves were set up in geographical locations that would not interfere with European settlement of land, and often this meant reserves were setup on land areas not suitable for farming (Carter, 1990). Moreover, railway lines and other forms of transportation were often distant from reserves, preventing Indigenous farmers from selling surpluses to markets, which was vastly different from the access to transportation provided to European settler farmers. Therefore at the macro-economic level, government policy was not supportive of Indigenous farming as a form of economic development. As a result, most Indigenous communities resisted by maintaining their way of life involving hunting and fishing, rather than permanent agriculture.

Meanwhile, successive governments failed to fulfil treaty promises of agricultural equipment and land and only minimal agricultural supports were provided, which served to maintain restrictions on use of land by Indigenous communities. At the micro-economic level, local government appointed "Indian agents" implemented a restrictive "pass system" to limit the movement of Indigenous farmers to leave the reserve and sell goods and services. In the market based agricultural economy that was developed by the early 1900s, Indigenous farmers were seen as competitors by settlers rather than

collaborators, and thus were also not seen as possible cooperative members. Consequently, the Canadian agricultural cooperatives that became firmly established by the early 1900s were enabled by government policies which also negatively affected Indigenous communities, essentially removing Indigenous communities from land in order to enable free and cheap land and limit competition for settler farmers. At the local level, cooperatives enabled settler farmers to jointly market and purchase required goods, but purposefully excluded Indigenous farmers from participating in these organizations as full-fledged producer members. Government policy interaction with Indigenous agriculture, therefore, was markedly different from policies towards settler agriculture. Whereas settler farmers were being encouraged to cultivate more land, use their surpluses to feed the rest of the continent and to export additional surpluses to other parts of the Empire, Indigenous farmers were being restricted to use less land, and grow food for local consumption but not for export.

Given this colonial history of the cooperative movement, this paper argues that the euphemistic slogan used by the cooperative movement in the early 1900s, “Each for all and all for each” (MacPherson, 1979), is incomplete without a deeper analysis through the lens of race. The government policies and conditions that enabled European settler cooperatives to grow during the early 1900s were only one side of the same coin that involved corresponding enclosure of Indigenous land and already-established traditional communitarian and cultural ways of life<sup>8</sup>. Historically, therefore, the incorporation of the first Indigenous cooperatives in Saskatchewan in 1945 must also be seen in the light of settler colonialism and government intentions of assimilating Indigenous communities, rather as a part an Indigenous community-led movement.

But the more recent history of Indigenous cooperatives has seen a resurgence of Indigenous culture and knowledge today. In order to more fully account for this relationship, new developments, and as an extension of cooperative history as filtered by the traditionally missing dimensions of nation and race, in what follows I present two different case studies of Indigenous co-ops—a top-down, government initiated cooperative at Kinoosao, and the second more recent case study of a bottom-up Indigenous community-led cooperative, namely the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Cooperative (NSTAC).

### *5.1.2 Case study 1: Kinoosao Cooperative<sup>9</sup>*

Saskatchewan is known as “Canada’s cooperative province” since it has the highest number of cooperatives per capita (Fairbairn, 2007). Saskatchewan’s cooperative economy was based on the

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<sup>8</sup> Compounding the hardships lived by Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan (as in the rest of Canada), governments and churches played a major role in establishing residential schools, such as Regina Indian Industrial School in 1890 which involved removing children from their families and training them as labor for settler enterprises (Stonechild, 2014). The legacy of residential schools with last residential school being closed in Saskatchewan, in Duck Lake, in 1996 continues to affect Indigenous communities today (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Summarized from the thesis by Quiring (2006).

agricultural cooperatives setup by European settlers. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party led government of Saskatchewan between 1944 and 1964 and was particularly instrumental in enabling cooperatives, and developing the first incorporated Indigenous cooperative in Canada. The CCF Government of Saskatchewan and the leadership of Tommy Douglas is well known in Canada for its socially progressive policies, the most famous being Medicare. In social economy circles, the CCF Government of Saskatchewan is also known as a progressive supporter of the cooperative movement. The CCF Government of Saskatchewan is less well known for its assimilationist policies implemented on Indigenous communities (Quiring, 2002). This major policy inconsistency is based on philosophies of socialism and of European dominance which assumed that Indigenous people would be better off if they were assimilated into Euro-Canadian society. Successive CCF governments were opposed to fulfilling Indigenous rights as laid out in treaties and even federal Canadian legislation such as the *Indian Act*. To implement a policy of assimilation for Indigenous communities, some of which maintained a seminomadic lifestyle, the CCF founded new villages in newly cleared areas of the Boreal forest in northern Saskatchewan. Instead of enabling Indigenous community-based, organic pattern of settlement, the CCF concentrated education, health, and social services in fewer and larger Indigenous settlements. This provided the government with the ability to limit service provision costs under the guise of efficiency and effective monitoring and regulation of Indigenous communities.

Quiring (2006) describes a specific example of cooperative development in Northern Saskatchewan that is illustrative of this top-down, government-led approach. In the 1950s, the CCF established a brand new village of Kinoosao to assimilate the Indigenous population around Reindeer Lake and for commercial exploitation of the lake's fish stock. A fish processing plant, school, and a post office were set up by the provincial government at Kinoosao, subsequently becoming popularly known as "Co-op Point". The fish processing plant required both labour from the local Indigenous population and fish supplies, which required legislation limiting sales of fish to the province. The province of Saskatchewan and the non-Indigenous settlers organized the fishing operations and fish processing plant on cooperative principles. A top-down government-driven initiative from the beginning, the operations failed to involve any substantial consultation with the local Indigenous communities. The pattern of setting up towns, with stores, government offices and fish processing plants was repeated in a number of Northern Saskatchewan locations (Quiring, 2006). While the CCF government had a socialist agenda, the establishment of these government-led towns serves to demonstrate that a socialist agenda does not necessarily mean class liberation for all and that racial oppressions have continued to exist hand-in-hand with progressive policies. A combination of legislation, directed investment, and cooperatives were utilized by the province of Saskatchewan to settle Indigenous communities and replace Indigenous practices and food economies in both agriculture and fishing. And, in the process, cooperatives were a "cornerstone" strategy for the development of Northern Saskatchewan by the CCF. Moreover, just as cooperatives were integral to the British Empire and global colonization, they were important to Canada's federal

and provincial governments in local colonization of Indigenous communities. As a result of top-down government policy implementation rather than grassroots community development, by 1975 the highest number of Indigenous cooperatives was located in the Prairie provinces (Mitchell, 1996).

### 5.1.3 Case study 2: Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Cooperative (NSTAC)<sup>10</sup>

In a contrasting case study to Kinoosao, the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Cooperative (NSTAC) was incorporated in 2007 as a non-profit cooperative established by Indigenous trappers in northern Saskatchewan, although the organization existed for fifty years prior to incorporation as a non-profit. The NSTAC enables cooperative socio-economic activities among Indigenous individuals who are geographically separated by large distances, and that from different socio-historic backgrounds. Trapping is a traditional Indigenous activity related to livelihood and is treated by NSTAC members not as a form of resource extraction but, rather, as a form of stewardship of the land, implementing sustainable practices over multiple generations. The cooperative structure enables the practice of traditional Indigenous governance within a formal organizational structure. Most significantly, the NSTAC has ensured as a main objective the transfer of Indigenous knowledge and culture from one generation to the next through further involvement in the local school curriculum: “Trapper education is an important goal of the NSTAC on many levels. It serves as a way of decolonizing education by providing a place of indigenous science and knowledge in the school curriculum” (Pattison and Findlay, 2010: 33).

In addition to increasing the use of Indigenous knowledge in schools, the NSTAC has enabled continuity of cultural knowledge through families working together. The NSTAC also enables Aboriginal women to take part in providing family livelihood. In short, the NSTAC demonstrates quadruple bottom line organizational characteristics by combining social, financial, environmental, and cultural goals.

The effect of government policy has not been consistently positive with NSTAC, however. NSTAC incorporated as a cooperative to increase its legitimacy in the eyes of external stakeholders, which includes the Saskatchewan provincial government as a major funder. Moreover, the Canadian federal government signed an *Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards* (AIHTS) with European countries to enable continued access for animal fur based products for European markets. The cost of new traps that meet the AIHTS requirements was three to four times the cost of the older traps, and was identified as the most pressing issue for NSTAC when Pattison and Findlay’s (2010) research project was completed. Although the federal government signed the agreement, no corresponding financial support was provided to NSTAC to mitigate the higher cost of the new required traps. Therefore, NSTAC not only provides an example of successful integration of Indigenous knowledge in a cooperative organization, it also demonstrates the continued tensions with changing government policy and even international market pressures.

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<sup>10</sup> Summarized from the cases study published by Pattison and Findlay (2010).



## **6. Cooperative development in the Canada's North**

The history of colonization and cooperative development in Canada's North was different from the history of cooperative development in the Prairies and East Coast. As the Inuit communities were nomadic and moved with the seasons and resource availability, the government followed a policy of coerced settlement of Inuit populations in northern Canada. Forced re-settlement of traditionally nomadic Inuit communities enabled establishment of sovereignty over land and resources through permanent habitation in the harsh climates of the Arctic and subarctic regions; centralization of health, education and other government services provision; and ultimately development of the Inuit as labour in a wage economy rather than a traditional sustainable subsistence economy. Tester and Kulchyski (1994) documented the hardships brought on by the forced migration of 19 Inuit families between 1953 and 1955, from Inukjuak (Port Harrison) and from Pond Inlet to Grise Fiord and to Resolute Bay, 1,200 kilometres away. In the process, the Inuit were left to fend for themselves in an unfamiliar ecosystem with different wildlife and different day and night cycles than they were used to. Some Inuit families eventually survived by their own ingenuity while the government achieved its goal of permanent settlements in the northernmost reaches of the country, but at an extremely high human cost of shortened life expectancy and permanent physical and psychological damage. MacPherson (2009) describes the setup of cooperatives in Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay as being of particular interest to the Canadian government in achieving its goals of territorial sovereignty. Tester and Kulchyski (1994) indicate that the Canadian government initially setup stores in settlements involving relocated Inuit but, unable to keep them adequately supplied, later converted them into cooperatives. Thus, the Canadian government first created a dependent population, and then handed over the responsibility for basic needs, in the form of cooperatives, back to the Indigenous population when the operation became financially unsustainable. On August 18, 2010, the Government of Canada formally apologized for the forced relocation of Inuit between 1953 and 1955.

Tester and Kulchyski (1994) describe the settlement process as part of "totalization" where the state becomes the central agent for all social relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The setup of cooperatives by the government played an important role in the establishment of social relations between the government and Inuit communities. MacPherson (2009: 61) succinctly describes and sums up the development of cooperatives in the North: "The government of Canada was particularly interested in establishing permanent communities (in the North) because it was concerned about sovereignty issues. The development of cooperatives can also be seen at least partly as a way that the federal government encouraged southern forms of stability in the Arctic regions. That is why the government, often working with priests and police officers, helped establish co-ops in nearly all the Arctic communities".



### *6.1 Long term effects of settlement policies in Canada's North*

The government's policy of Inuit settlement has had a number of long-term effects. Tester and Kulchyski (1994) indicate that over time the government imperative for investing heavily in cooperatives in Inuit communities, while they may have had liberal social, economic, and political values, were still colonial in function and failed to consider Indigenous values. Mitchell (1996) describes how Arctic cooperatives created hierarchical income-based class structures within Indigenous societies, which were less hierarchical before wage-based economies were imposed on them. The resulting increase in hierarchical class formation within Inuit communities is in opposition to the intentional roots of the European cooperative movement, which was to be a counterbalance to class hierarchy and where the intention of the cooperative movement was to reduce class differences in economic opportunity.

The witnesses of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (2010)<sup>11</sup> provide further evidence of the overall effects of colonization and transformation to a waged economy for the Inuit, indicating that overall, the Inuit have been worse off in settlements, facing new forms of poverty and new issues of physical and mental health. Similarly, the Arctic Social Indicators from the broad ranging study across different countries in the Arctic indicate that for Arctic Indigenous populations: "Access to a waged job and its benefits was frequently less valuable than was time to spend on the land, harvesting country foods and materials, even when wages would cover more commodities" (Larsen, 2010: 12).

More significantly, there has been a movement to shift the focus of what is important for measuring quality of life in the Arctic by both Arctic people and outside experts. As explained when discussing the quadruple bottom line (Section 3.2), the most recent iteration of the Arctic Social Indicators includes the additional measures of health and population, material wellbeing, education, cultural wellbeing, which are measures based on feedback from Arctic Indigenous communities themselves (TeamNord, 2014).

The example of Indigenous cooperative development in the Yukon provides an example of differential government policies for cooperative development in Canada's North. The Yukon became a territory of Canada in 1898, and has an Indigenous population that consists of 23 per cent of the total population. Canadian federal government policy, starting from the legendary Klondike Gold rush of 1898 has been to enable private investment in the Yukon in extractive non-renewable resource industries, focusing on oil, gas and minerals. The resource development industries with high capital requirements have not been amenable to cooperative development. Historically, the resource development sector is more amenable to investor-owned private businesses rather than community-centred or cooperative businesses. A robust cooperative sector has thus not been part of government

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<sup>11</sup> Formed in 2007 by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association in order "to create a more accurate history of the decisions and events that affected Inuit living in the Baffin Region from 1950-1975, and to document their impact on Inuit life" (see <http://www.qtccommission.com/>).

policy for the Yukon and Indigenous economic development has not received significant support in the territory. Lionais and Hardy (2015) completed one of the few published research projects on cooperatives in the Yukon, and concluded that although a number of attempts had been made to grow a cooperative sector, the factors necessary for a robust cooperative sector—government support, cooperative advocacy, financing, and Indigenous self-determination—were not present in the Yukon as they have been in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The relative failure of the cooperative movement in the Yukon compared to the rapid growth of the cooperative movement in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut demonstrates the differential effects that government policy can have on the growth of cooperatives. In short, the territorial government of the Yukon did not need cooperative development projects to settle Indigenous populations and assert control and sovereignty; this was accomplished by the economic projects of the Gold Rush and subsequent infrastructural projects.

More recently, and in contrast to the Yukon, Nunavut was separated officially from the Northwest Territories on April 1, 1999, via the *Nunavut Act* and the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act*. This historic land claims agreement has enabled Indigenous control of local organizations including cooperatives. As an example of how indigenous communities have re-appropriated cooperative organizations to meet their quadruple bottom line needs, the following section describes the Arctic Co-operatives Limited case study. It illustrates clearly how Indigenous communities in Canada have been able to, despite their troubled history with the cooperative movement, transform cooperatives into organizations that supply local needs as well as provide community economic development through exports.

### 6.2 Case study 3: Arctic Co-operatives Limited

Arctic Co-operatives Limited (ACL) provides an example of a network of cooperatives that now serve Indigenous economic interests through Indigenous control and management. ACL is a federation of 32 community-based cooperative business enterprises that are located in Canada's three territories, Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon, and in northern Manitoba. The 32 Inuit and Dene co-ops in the ACL network operate a broad range of businesses including retail facilities, hotels, cable operations, construction, outfitting, arts and crafts production and property rentals (Arctic Co-operatives Limited, 2015). Incorporated as the ACL in 1981 with the merger of the older Canadian Arctic Producers Co-operative Limited and the Canadian Arctic Co-operative Federation Limited (established in 1972), the ACL cooperative network had combined revenues of approximately 187.6 million CAD in 2014, employing 1,000 individuals (Arctic Co-operatives Limited, n.d.). Following the historical Nunavut land claims agreement in 1999, cooperatives in Canada's newest territory have become an additional organizational tool for enabling Indigenous goals of self determination. Throughout the North today, the cooperatives which were originally setup by Canadian governments to settle Indigenous populations are now utilized for locally based

economic development. This transformation of a historically oppositional force for Inuit self-determination and well-being has, in recent, been transformed into an unexpected advantage by the Indigenous people of Canada's North, described as a "judo strategy" by Yoffie and Kwak (2001). The change in goals are demonstrated in the current objectives of the ACL, including:

- To improve the economic well-being of Co-op members by providing the highest long-term return for arts and crafts through the promotion and marketing of member produced products at the wholesale and retail levels.
- To provide merchandise services in a most economical and efficient way ... and improve ... market share by providing top quality products and services to their member/owners and their communities.
- To improve the understanding and effectiveness of the Co-op Movement, by providing Co-operative training and education programs to inform Co-op members, their elected officials and their employees of their roles and responsibilities.
- To promote the orderly growth and financial success of the Co-operative Movement through the development and implementation of policies and practices that will generate adequate levels of earnings, members' equity and other financial strengths to enable the Co-op Movement to improve the economic well being of their member owners.
- To provide an environment to promote the recruitment, development and training of northern people in employment and management positions within the Co-operative Movement ...
- To provide an environment for our human resources that will enable them to achieve their personal objectives while working to maximize their potential and meeting the economic and social objectives of the organization ...
- To represent the Co-operative Movement of Canada's north with government, aboriginal organizations and other agencies.
- To conduct our affairs in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, ensuring compliance with the law and with due recognition given to the unique cultures and customs of Canada's north (Arctic Co-operatives Limited, n.d.).

These objectives demonstrate a clear quadruple bottom line focus on financial, social, environmental and cultural goals of most relevance to Inuit and Dene Indigenous communities in the North via the ACL network. Moreover, ACL demonstrates that cooperatives can be and are being increasingly utilized contemporaneously in Canada as tools of self-determination rather than colonization. In the case of ACL, Indigenous co-ops did not replace existing cooperatives. Rather, existing cooperatives management and control was taken over by Indigenous communities and over time the mission, vision, goals and operational structures were aligned to reflect Indigenous values.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the historical arc of the cooperative movement in Canada and its intersection with Indigenous communities. It is intended to provide a broader theoretical and historical context of British, Canadian and provincial government policies that enabled and at times restricted the development of Indigenous cooperatives. The role of cooperatives in Canada, and particularly the role of the federal government in supporting or restricting the cooperative movement as a whole, remains a contested discussion. A formal report of the *Status of Cooperatives in Canada* by the Special Committee on Cooperatives (Richards, 2012) included different and opposing viewpoints on the role of the federal government from members of parliament for the government and for the opposition. One conclusion of the paper is that although early cooperatives were firmly integrated with colonial projects, contemporary cooperatives that are community led have enabled Indigenous communities to develop organizational forms that reflect Indigenous values. The first comprehensive study of Indigenous cooperatives in Canada by Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson (2001) began to suggest that there is a cooperative advantage in community development for Indigenous communities. The study concluded that cooperatives do provide suitable organizational structures for achieving some of the goals associated with Indigenous self-determination. At the same time, the Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson study pointed out that the knowledge base and value system that is important to the development of Indigenous cooperatives in Canada is different from the Eurocentric knowledge base that is described in the historical development of cooperatives based on the history of colonialism by and industrialization of European countries and the subsequent and related development of cooperatives in North America. It is the uniqueness of Indigenous values when compared to Eurocentric value systems, especially the formers' focus on culture that grounded the subjugation of Indigenous knowledge during the development of the cooperative movement in Canada.

Academic literature on social economy organizations serving Indigenous communities often caters to a "deficit" point of view rather than an "asset-based" approach (Battiste and Henderson, 2000). The main trajectory of academic literature on the social economy and social innovation assumes a Eurocentric characteristic of economic growth, while social innovation from Indigenous communities is implicitly assumed to have an imitative character. In other words, the *useful* social innovation is assumed to be of the Eurocentric variety, while simultaneously existing Indigenous knowledge is presumed to be of significantly lesser value or at best an imitation of Eurocentric knowledge and innovation. Common notions of the history of Canada's cooperative movement evolve from a Eurocentric lineage in German, Nordic, English and Irish co-ops. What is required, as argued throughout this article, especially for effective bottom-up cooperatives, is a new theory of cooperative development that combines Eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge. After all, Indigenous communities have been practicing sustainable collective, cooperative and communal forms of socio-economic organizing for thousands of years. It would serve the Canadian cooperative

movement well to understand this history not only for the continuing and inclusive development of the movement in the country, but also in its leadership role as an international cooperative developer. In so called “developing” countries with Indigenous populations, Canada’s approach to developing cooperatives needs to take up local Indigenous knowledge and local Indigenous knowledge from Canada could serve as the bridge with its own Indigenous people’s inclusion of self determination, cultural integrity and relationship to nature. While the cooperative movement tends to be bullish with regard to the cooperative advantage, it also needs to ensure that cooperative solutions to complex problems are deeply aware of and examined through the lenses of oppression, including class, race, and gender, in order to ensure that a cooperative solution to a problem for one group of people does not adversely impact another group of people.

Battiste and Henderson (2000: 87) convincingly argue that there is a high level of “benefit the Western world can derive from [Indigenous] knowledge and heritage”. The authors explain how important Indigenous knowledge is to the survival of our world, in terms of the relationship with nature and community well-being. In the face of the myriad environmental, social, and economic problems we are facing on a global scale, Indigenous knowledge and cooperative practices could provide a number of solutions that have sustained Indigenous communities over thousands of years. In combining European-based cooperative principles with Indigenous values, Indigenous communities have been developing cooperatives with quadruple bottom line characteristics, integrating financial, social, environmental and cultural values that are demonstrative to cooperatives across different contexts. Indeed, our understanding of cooperatives and their fit with sustainable community development can be positively enriched and broadened by a better understanding of the knowledge base of Indigenous cooperativism and entrepreneurship. At the same time, increased awareness among cooperative and community development practitioners of the troubled history of cooperatives in the lives of Indigenous people can help prevent repeating some of the historical injustices outlined in this paper.

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