

“What is Truth?” Farrell Toombs and the National Seminar on Indian Research, 1960

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Introduction

In June 1960 a remarkable seminar, “Research and the Indians of Canada,” was held at Queen’s University in Kingston in conjunction with the annual conference of the Learned Societies.¹ The seminar, sponsored by the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada, brought together many of Canada’s leading scholars on aboriginal issues. There, they presented papers that reviewed the overall status of Indian First Nations and, in essence, examined the success and/or failure of Canadian government assimilation policies directed at them. They also reviewed, in academic terms, theoretical strategies that might further or modify the state’s objectives.

The papers delivered at the seminar are of interest for two reasons. First, with one exception, they represented approaches distinctly rooted in modernism and the project of the enlightenment. In this sense, government assimilation policy – or its more euphemistic term, “integration” – was part of modernism, of the path of liberal progress and of universal truth. Indians – First Nations – could not be ultimately happy or free if they were not on the path of modern enlightenment. At the same time the papers raised questions about why various strategies of assimilation seemed inevitably to fail and offered new ideas for “directed social change” and the “manipulation of forces affecting acculturation.” The exception to the majority of the papers was that of Dr. Farrell Toombs. His paper, “Psychological Aspects of Culture Changes’: An Exercise,” posed an entirely different question. Toombs doubted the whole assimilation project and looked at human oppression and liberation from an entirely different viewpoint. This viewpoint, I shall argue, represented early forays into radical humanism and cultural relativism and might be considered reflective of the beginning tension between modernism and what was to emerge later as postmodernism.

Second, the seminar and its papers underscored a shared doubt about the struggle that surrounded Canada’s relationship with its native peoples. Although the proponents of assimilation searched for better methods, unquestionably the language was less clear. Terms such as “adaptation” and “acculturation” now began to supersede “assimilation” and “integration.” More concern about First Nations’ cultures and their preservation dominated the texts. A certain unease was more evident than in previous literature I had reviewed (Shewell, 2001): the certainty of what social science could ostensibly accomplish was far less clear.

With these thoughts in mind, I turn to the general historical context of the period in order to situate the seminar more clearly.

The General Historical Context

The seminar took place arguably at the height of modernism and nearing the advent of post-structuralism and postmodernism. By this I also mean that the social and political tensions felt nationally and internationally were reflected in academic tensions and, *vice versa*. We know, of course, that a turbulent decade lay ahead. Already, in 1960, there were signs of considerable unrest. The cold war dominated international relations and increasingly the United States was embroiled in Southeast Asia. Khrushchev had begun to develop missile installations in Cuba. The American Civil Rights Movement that had begun about 1955 was gaining considerable momentum and visibility. At the same time, activist academics like Michael Harrington were about to reveal the “other America” characterised by extreme poverty and disenfranchisement. Second wave feminism was on the horizon, inspired in part by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* first published in English in 1953. Finally, following the example of India there was a rise in second wave nationalism (the first wave having occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries). Peoples of colonised nations were either rising up against their occupiers or politely telling them to get lost. Everywhere the signs were apparent of what was to come: new forms of nationalism and identity politics.

In Canada, Québec was about to be transformed through the Quiet Revolution the effects of which remain strong and critical to Canada’s future. This revolution would not be lost on First Nations in Canada. In 1960, they were still relatively politically mute and subjugated by oppressive policies. By 1969 they were radically mobilised and, in stunning fashion, rejected the federal government’s White Paper on Indian Policy stating unequivocally, “We are not and don’t want to be you.”

More immediate to the context of the Kingston seminar was the abject state of Canadian Indian policy. Despite the post war optimism and the promise of a new deal for Indians there had been no significant improvement in the social and economic well being of First Nations. Nor had their civic stature been significantly elevated (Leslie, 1999; Miller, 2000; Shewell, 2004; Weaver, 1982). As well, the federal government had failed to set up a land claims commission that had been recommended in 1947 by the Special Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Indian Act (Weaver:1981, 37). These three factors - the overall socio-economic condition of First Nations, their continued disenfranchisement and the lack of progress on land claims - gave rise to considerable criticism of Canada from abroad. This criticism was a source of embarrassment to Prime Minister Diefenbaker - a staunch advocate of human and civil rights – and prompted him to initiate a Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Affairs. The committee began its hearings in 1959 and met periodically before making its final report in

1961. Thus, the seminar was held strategically in the midst of these hearings and, while I have not yet researched its genesis, it can only be surmised that it was intended in some way to provide an external, scientific and expert voice to the more political hearings in Ottawa.

The seminar was sponsored by a voluntary, largely white, liberal organisation, the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada (IEA) (Weaver, 1982: 12). The association had recently become an independent body, having originated as the National Commission on the Indian Canadian (NCIC), a standing committee of the Canadian Association for Adult Education. The executive director of the IEA in 1960 was John Melling who had come from England to assume the post and whose background was firmly rooted in community development and community education (Shewell, 2004: 305-6). Melling's grounding in community education led also to a strong belief in the role of voluntary associations in assisting government to achieve its policy objectives. He was also a committed academic and later taught at McMaster University in Hamilton. It was no accident, I suspect, that he wanted to bring together some of Canada's leading scholars on Indian issues as well as the respected international scholar and advocate of community development, Dr. Margaret Read. These two factors - Melling's articulation of the role of the IEA and his academic bent – are ample evidence for why the IEA sponsored this event and saw itself as being the natural organisation to do so.²

The Papers

The papers were presented over a four-day period from 12-15 June although it is unclear in what order they were presented and what else transpired in relation to the presentations at the seminar. Harry B. Hawthorn was apparently a moderator or recorder of some sort for besides his own paper he also delivered a concluding summary and analysis of the proceedings together with his own thoughts about the role and future of “research on the Indian.” I will present the papers alphabetically by author, although – because of time and constraints placed on length - I will place major emphasis on only four, including Toombs's. Coincidentally, his paper is alphabetically last – this is fitting since his paper is such a counterpoint to the others. I will conclude with a summary analysis of the proceedings with a special emphasis on Toombs and the implications of his ideas.

I.

Professor Walter Baker was a sociologist at the University of Saskatchewan and the first Director of the university's Centre for Community Studies established in 1957. His paper, “Some Observations on the Application of Community Development to the Settlements of Northern Saskatchewan,” was a 14-page discussion of the use of community development as a tool for planned or directed social change. To develop his framework of analysis, Baker drew largely from the

prior work on the Métis by the anthropologist, Dr. Frank Valentine, now Professor Emeritus at Carleton University in Ottawa. Valentine had identified six features of an urban industrial community in the belief that these were the features to which native communities would have to adapt since it was inevitable that northern development would increasingly give rise to such communities. Baker shared Valentine's diagnosis and went on first to define each feature and then to describe salient aspects of "native" culture and social organisation that would seem to run counter to the six features. Thus, there were aspects of Valentine's factors that were "moving" native groups towards urban industrial living and others that "blocked" the movement. Importantly, Baker was concerned about the effects of rapid social change on native communities and whether or not community development could be used effectively by government "as an acculturation process" and as a method for "planned change" to bring about "the rational manipulation of impinging forces." The problem was somehow to find ways to mediate between the forces moving toward urbanisation and those blocking it. While Baker acknowledged that the use of community development as a tool of manipulation had inherent dangers he decided that on balance there was "a fine distinction between manipulation on the basis of special interest and manipulation on the basis of a public interest."

Baker never defined what he meant by special interest – one has to assume he was referring to private and state capital – but he did pose the question from which came his most telling statement. "What is there about community development," he wrote, "which ensures that the manipulation of forces affecting the Indian-Metis will be in the 'public interest'?" His answer was that community development could play a mediating role, could strike a balance between "respect for the integrity of native culture undergoing planned change" and the assimilation and/or accommodation of other cultural attributes to the dominant white culture "to which the native must adapt." In Baker's mind the native populations had no options: change or be destroyed. The reasonable academic now assumed the white man's burden.

Community development, Baker noted, was essentially a local process, yet the determination of a local public interest was severely impeded by the lack of control native communities had over external governmental and private forces that impinged on their lives and that originated from the remote urban centres in the south. In addition, local government administrators were constrained by the policies they were required to administer – they were agents of the south. Finally, it was clear, from Baker's observations, that a relatively rigid caste system existed in these communities in which whites were dominant and native peoples were on the margins. Community development thus had its work cut out. How then should community development approach this complex conundrum? Because community development "seeks to maximize opportunities for local self-determination," he argued, it must be based on the principle that "native populations must 'inch their way' into strange and unaccustomed cultural habits." Simultaneously it must take "due regard for maintaining a gradual change in the

balance of forces so as to minimize the disruptive influence of ‘marginality’ and cultural ‘ambivalence.’” Local administrators, Baker thought, might be the ones who ought to be prepared to fulfil the community development role (as was the case in British colonial Africa and India) since they might first, mitigate the effects of the external forces and second, create a bridge between the caste divides.

Baker then discussed the problems and practical difficulties associated with confronting the forces that affected the communities noting that an effective approach would have to be based on scientific methods. More research of an economic, social and anthropological nature was required in order to understand the best processes to be used. While Baker acknowledged the importance of “utopian idealism” and “best-risk political judgments” in community development, he stressed that its effectiveness in northern native communities must be based on “scientific social judgment” and “incremental experience.” He concluded his paper with a brief discussion of the organisational requirements needed to mount a community development strategy that included resolving the differing approaches of the federal and provincial governments. As well, he concluded, such a strategic program should be located within a quasi-university setting like the University of Saskatchewan’s Centre for Community Studies. Such settings he wrote, were best equipped for “gearing in’ to the complicated dynamics of the public and private sector” and for sensitising the administrative forces to the “scientific and incremental aspects of cultural management.”

II.

Harry B. Hawthorn was an eminent anthropologist at the University of British Columbia. He had conducted pioneering, comprehensive research into the condition of First Nations in that province and later was the principal researcher for the influential two-volume survey on the status and condition of all Indians in Canada published in 1966-67. Hawthorn’s paper, “The Varieties of Research,” was a critical excursus on research and its uses. Perhaps, in the context of the seminar, it was meant as a focal point for the various uses of research and some of the cautions that must be exercised in research related to human welfare – in this case, the welfare of First Nations peoples. Hawthorn spoke of two types of research: short-range, practical research (generally applied) and long-term research that would yield results important to theory but that may also be of utility with respect to human welfare. Research methodology also varies he opined, depending on the nature of the study itself. In anthropology, for example, researchers might immerse themselves in a society simply for intense observation and “searching inquiry.” Others conduct more empirical inquiries to understand certain patterns of social behaviour, while a third form of anthropological research is one that is intended to devise or adapt “programmes of economic and social betterment.”

What struck me about Hawthorn’s paper was its reflection of what a university primarily was about in 1960, the production of pure knowledge. Thus, he

distinguished between “welfare research” (research that was intended to be put to the use of human betterment) and pure or theoretical research designed simply to produce knowledge for its own sake. While each type was not exclusive of the other, nevertheless he wondered if inducements were necessary to both universities and researchers to get them to engage in practical research when it would not necessarily have the pay off of new knowledge. Hawthorn seemed to think that indeed practical research was worthwhile and that “possibilities of scientific advance may be presumed to exist in...research projects which are primarily practical.” Hawthorn used the example of his study, *The Indians of British Columbia* (1958). It had been conducted for practical purposes to provide baseline information to promote the general welfare of First Nations in that province. However, his team “had to sacrifice many opportunities for scientific gain” and there were “several possibilities of research which was scientifically significant.”

Next, Hawthorn focused on the role of the researcher. Here he discussed the various attributes of good – and bad – researchers as well as the appropriate role of students. It is important to keep in mind that much of what he said was in the context of his own research in First Nations’ communities. Based on his own orientation to anthropological research he first addressed the qualities of good team researchers especially those whose work took them to isolated locations for long periods. Tough-mindedness was also an admirable quality. By this he meant that a good researcher was one who could “get on with the job in spite of distractions, even such a distraction as...a situation which may appeal...to personal sympathies and call for stopping research and engaging in ameliorative action.” This led Hawthorn into what today would be, with respect to ethical conduct, highly questionable territory. To maintain this detachment and perseverance in the cause of the research, the collection of data often might require running “counter to full respect for individual privacy.” As well, the importance of the research “overrides immediate, personal, human values” and, in some types of research might require the researcher “to continue ringing doorbells even when he is told he is not a welcome visitor.”

Detachment, persistence and objectivity, Hawthorn argued, were instilled primarily through rigorous academic training. To illustrate this point he briefly presented the case of two visiting undergraduate “girls” in their senior year who wished to study an Indian community. Hawthorn was able to place them but discovered that by the end of the summer they had gone over, meaning they had succumbed to the community and lost their discipline and objectivity. This example of how not to do it was interesting not simply because of its sexist connotations – Hawthorn, like most male academics of his time consistently referred to the researcher as “he” – but because it assumed that science had little or no qualitative nature to it. The experiences of these young women apparently were of no value in understanding the life of the Indian village. While Hawthorn recognised that researchers might not be wholly objective, might carry some biases that would be preferable to a “flat neutrality” or “a distaste for the

subjects of their studies,” he nevertheless emphasised the overarching importance of objectivity and distance from the subject matter.

I want now to move on to the concluding section of his paper fittingly titled, “How to arrive at a conclusion.” In this section Hawthorn discussed the challenges and difficulties of observing and interpreting human phenomena. Understanding the complexities of societies, social structures and cultures is no easy task, nor is it easy to understand them when two societies interface. Hawthorn was especially anxious to point out that no society “is an amorphous mass.” By this he meant that First Nations’ societies, like industrial societies, have roles and institutional arrangements that are not always as they seem – that actors play roles and meet role expectations in Indian societies that do not necessarily coincide with their private beliefs and opinions. For the social scientist knowing this is essential and developing the skills to understand these complexities are crucial. “Unless we are determinedly keen social scientists we cannot keep on recognizing that the way Indians see us and what they say to us is determined in part by the interaction of two social structures. But unless we do recognize this we may not gain an even partially correct interpretation of facts which literally stare us in the face.”

To illustrate this point, Hawthorn provided an anecdote from one of his early visits to a First Nation community in British Columbia.

One of the chiefs invited me into his house and I began to ask him questions about traditional life. He spoke so well on kinship, descent and inheritance that I could not forbear from asking him if he minded if I wrote down what he said. He hesitated a minute. It is a different matter when our words are given such formal status. But he assented and we went on. When I was tired from questioning and writing I closed my notebook, thanked him and prepared to talk on any subject of his choosing.

He said: “There’s one thing we have always wanted to know. The minister has spoken of this and from what you have told me, the university might have something to say also. We want to know: how did the world and life begin?”

I marshalled my wits and began on a five-minute summary. He stopped me and sent another man to fetch something, saying “This is just what we wanted to hear. Do you mind if we write this down?”

Hawthorn interpreted this encounter and why the chief posed his question by noting the interface between the roles of chief and professor, the expectation of the chief’s community that he not lose face in dealing with a white man and “other factors of social organization in the village.” What Hawthorn seems to miss is any sense of history and of how the interface is deeply affected by the context of the historical relationships that have shaped it – that is, by the very nature of colonial domination, oppression and dispossession. Another way of interpreting the chief’s response then, is to see it as a subtle act of resistance, as a mocking rebuke of western knowledge and its implicit assumption that the chief’s culture had no explanation for the origins of the world. In short, to paraphrase Eric Wolf, the chief’s world, according to Hawthorn, was without history.

III.

Walter M. Hlady was an archaeologist who, at the time, was also at Saskatchewan's Centre for Community Studies. By 1961, however, he was working for the federal government and conducted his research primarily in Manitoba. His paper, written on short notice and titled, "Directed Social Change and the Agencies Involved," was more a descriptive summary of the various social institutions involved in promoting social change among First Nations. In this sense, he gives us a quick picture of the period and of the roles assumed by various Euro-Canadian agencies in pressing the agenda of social change and adaptation to the dominant social, economic and political systems.

Hlady identified five key institutions: the federal government, provincial governments, churches, volunteer organisations and business. He excluded "native organizations and individuals" because they represent the "hurdle which must be overcome before proposed changes can be successful." Before we assume that Hlady's bias was against these organisations and thus their resistance, it is important to point out that his paper had a continuing thread of scepticism about the whole project to foist change upon native peoples. Perhaps his experience as an archaeologist, of digging up remnants of an extraordinarily long past and of witnessing a continued presence, had already convinced him that native peoples were quite capable of adaptation and change on their own terms. Hlady was everywhere critical of the agencies involved and of the problems they assumed to exist. He began by stating that the "change-agents working with our native groups are attempting in diverse ways to change the way of life of our native groups into something culturally (in the change-agent's view) which is more acceptable and 'natural.' Looking at efforts historically, the past century has been a period in Canada in which the Indian has been put in a crucible in an attempt to recast him in the white man's image." Hlady noted that these efforts were hardly ever successful and that the reasons were obvious.

The attempted changes were not the result of direct native needs; the native was not involved generally in the decision-making; the processes were not keyed to adaptation by the native cultures; and the efforts from outside their culture tended only to confuse. What the White thought the Indian was agreeing to, and what the Indian knew he was agreeing to, rarely co-incided (sic).

Hlady commented on the rise of community development as a method for effecting change in "under-developed areas" and thought it useful and more progressive than imposing change and maintaining control outside the group.

The remainder of his paper was devoted to describing and assessing the roles of the five sectors already mentioned. He was critical of the federal government noting that its programs were based primarily on Euro-Canadian needs and were reflective of those values. Provincial governments' efforts were not significantly more successful, he thought, but they were seemingly more flexible than the federal government's and pilots in community development were being initiated

or contemplated in several provincial jurisdictions. Other initiatives in “directed social change” such as trapping programs and the federal Family Allowance were affecting traditional cultural patterns and inducing more sedentary lifestyles. Whether he thought these good or bad was not clear. Similarly, modern education was having mixed results and Hlady was not convinced that First Nations placed much value on education since it did not seem to produce discernible social or economic benefits for them. Of the churches Hlady had little to say. Historically their role had been very influential especially in altering traditional religious beliefs but their role was now diminishing as the federal government took on more of what the churches used to provide. Voluntary organisations, he thought, were in the main meddling and misdirected in their efforts as “do-gooders.” They often had no understanding of the real problems faced by native peoples and consequently ended up “making the situation more complex than it was to begin with.” He acknowledged that some learned from their experiences and had begun to be more constructive in their interventions. Finally, of private enterprise he identified the long history of its impact on First Nations. The Hudson’s Bay Company and its trading practices especially had influenced their cultures. Nevertheless, Hlady implied that despite some positive effects of commercial enterprise, business was not involved with native cultures out of the goodness of its heart. “The primary purpose is to make a profit,” he explained, and to mold the needs of the people to the aims of the business. In occasional instances, the attitude is healthy and even quite paternal, but the need remains to make a profit or go bankrupt.” Hlady concluded with four questions to be considered for discussion.

- How effective has the Indian Affairs Branch been in achieving directed social change in the past century?
- How flexible does a program of directed change have to be in order to achieve reasonable change?
- Where has “directed change” ever been “directed change?”
- Can we solve the “Indian Problem” by developing (sic) the Indian as one or more ethnic groups?³

Hlady’s scepticism notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that he did not mention the role of academics in intervening in native cultures and social institutions. Whether he thought it was positive or not, the fact that he failed to identify it revealed, I thought, a certain blindness to the increasing role of social science in supporting and developing a knowledge base for state policy.

IV.

Dr. Margaret Read, the internationally renowned English social anthropologist famous for her community development work in “developing” countries presented a paper based on her experiences with tribal peoples in India. Read had earlier retired from the University of London and was influential in British post-colonial policy. Her paper (untitled) reported on an evaluative study of community development in India that she and others had conducted in 1958-9 for the United Nations. Read’s paper, essentially explanatory and didactic not discursive, was

intended I think to illuminate the possibilities of community development, if properly applied, in promoting “culture change” and adaptation to “modern cultural forces” among Canada’s native peoples. Drawing parallels between the treatment and administration of tribal peoples in India and the Indians and Eskimos of Canada Read advocated methods of a practical, applied anthropology and proposed four basic elements in any curriculum designed to train community development workers.

First, it was important to relate the “social organization of the people and their economic activities to their behavior patterns in communities and to their value systems.” Here, she meant that it would make little sense, for example, to introduce programs that involved gender-specific roles if the people traditionally organised themselves around gender-neutral role distribution. Second, it was important to understand the specific governing structures of the people in question, their formal decision-making processes and so on, if a community development program was to gain real acceptance and support. Read did not think it made any sense to expect indigenous peoples to accept alternate forms of governance as though theirs were inferior, nor to have programs patronisingly imposed on them as though it was a given that such programs were in their own best interests. She noted that recent welfare state measures in India tacitly expected indigenous people to become a part of the political and socio-economic life of the country and accorded them an uncivilised image if they did not do so. Learning “how to communicate ideas in an inter-cultural situation” was Read’s third basic element. She was concerned that programs usually were initiated by central or state governments, were generally communicated in culturally insensitive ways and often were inappropriate. Finally, Read noted that the “elements of continuity in a tribal culture need relating to the nature and extent of culture change.” Here she was less clear, but in essence she seemed to be saying that culture change is most effective when tribal peoples choose those changes that they see as benefiting their cultures and thus seem naturally progressive and consistent with their cultures. It is difficult to speculate on the extent to which Read’s ideas had any impact on future Canadian Indian policy. It might be argued that elements of her ideas were present in the Community Development Program launched about three years later although most of the tenets governing it were drawn from the work of T.R. Batten (Shewell, 2002). Still, in Read’s work can be seen the tendency towards a universal and universalising interpretation of community development.

V.

The final paper of those I have depicted in the mainstream of thought was by André Renaud. Renaud was a renowned Oblate scholar and educator among First Nations peoples and at the time, General Director of the Oblate Fathers’ Indian and Eskimo Commission in Ottawa. His paper, “Indians of Canada as an Ethnic Minority,” fits with the emerging field of ethnic studies in sociology at the time. His paper was a fine example of sociological and deductive reasoning and

yet it also had missed opportunities that, I thought, even at the time ought to have occurred to him. Renaud began by setting forth his argument. He noted the failure of assimilation policies and strategies and astutely observed that Indians were regarded as individuals and, as such, “were assumed to belong to one and the same race and Canadian society was understood as a homogenous whole. The solution to the ‘Indian problem’ was to assimilate individuals in the non-Indian entity.” Now – meaning 1960 – he thought, there was a greater emphasis on trying to re-think the problem in terms of cultural difference. To situate Indian peoples in the Canadian fabric, Renaud posited, it was necessary to compare their situation with other cultural groups that made up Canada. Thus, he set out first to show that Indians conformed to the definition of an ethnic group and second – and more importantly - that they conformed to the definition of an ethnic minority group.

Renaud explained that Canada was born of three founding groups, The Indians, the French and the English. The French, he noted, made up the largest and most homogenous ethnic group in Canada and had retained their distinct ethnic identity. As well, he contended, constitutionally they enjoyed a certain equality of status with English Canada. Descendants of the original English while still present were no longer dominant. Thus, the English in Canada were not a homogenous group in that most immigrants to Canada became English-speaking. Thus, English had become the dominant linguistic group and English-speaking Canadians tended to see themselves simply as Canadians. Having already identified Indians as founding peoples Renaud neglected at this juncture to describe their subsequent status in Canada or to explain why they were now insignificant in popular Canadian historiography. Instead, he had already decided that, to fit his hypothesis and to begin to grapple with their situation, it was more useful to think of them as an ethnic group.

To this end, he defined four characteristics of ethnic groups: communality of culture, a certain degree of residential concentration, predominance of certain occupations for the members of the group, and perseverance within the group of the original culture. This last characteristic he thought was key to how a group integrated into the larger society. It was a functional argument. Depending upon the degree of control a group had over preserving its culture “those traits are preserved which do not interfere with successful integration or which possibly favour it in some ways.” Drawing on Carleton anthropologist, F.G. Vallee’s 1958 article, “Ethnic Integration in Canada,”⁴ Renaud argued that ethnic groups functioned both to protect identity and to provide a secure network through which members could begin to negotiate the broader society. Ethnic institutions established and supported by ethnic groups also serve to promote cultural heritage, to enrich the cultural life of the country and to protect their members from prejudice, discrimination, unfair labour practices, and so on.

Having defined and described the functions of ethnic groups Renaud next turned his attention to the particular problem of ethnic minority status in Canada. Here

he turned to Louis Wirth's "The Problem of Minority Groups" (n.d.) who provided the following definition:

We may define a minority as a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. The existence of a minority in a society implies the existence of a corresponding dominant group enjoying higher social status and greater privileges. Minority status carries with it the exclusion from full participation in the life of the society. Though not necessarily an alien group the minority is treated and regards itself as a people apart.

In addition to Wirth, Renaud also drew on Linton's⁵ objective characteristics of a minority's position in society. Among these objective markers were debarment from economic, social and political opportunities, circumscriptions to freedom of choice and self-development, being held in lower esteem by the dominant society, social and spatial isolation and unequal access to educational and vocational opportunities. In the most severe cases minorities might also be subjected to restricted property rights as well as denial of the right to vote. With these general statements in mind Renaud then went on to show that to greater and lesser degrees there were both ethnic groups in Canada and disadvantaged ethnic minorities.

Well, it is clear where he was headed. Renaud set out to show that First Nations peoples were, by definition, both an ethnic group and an ethnic minority. "No one can question," Renaud stated, "that Canadians of Indian descent make up numerous ethnic entities in Canada. Their ethnicity is partly based on racial traits...still...identifiable though not identical...across the country, partly on their traditional cultures and partly on their particular 'legal status' and relationship with the Federal government." How then did they meet the four key characteristics of an ethnic group? The majority of Indians resided in communities of their own nearly all of which were "in marginal situations" and in which the individuals maintained "residual cultures in various degrees of acculturation." Renaud failed to mention that these communities – the reserves and the bands located on them – were legal entities often forced upon First Nations. Many were not of original band or tribal groupings but were creations of the federal government for administrative purposes. Thus, they were not exactly "ethnic communities" of voluntary association.

With respect to "communality of culture" this characteristic was certainly evident in First Nations' communities but unlike other ethnic groups in Canada with the exception of the French these cultures had "a relatively low potential for integration." This was because, like the French, "the home-communities of Indian individuals are in Canada" and "'Going back home' for them is far easier than with new-Canadians, thus decreasing the need to adjust to the new environment." Here is the absurdity of this argument. Once Renaud had ascribed ethnic status to First Nations he confused and demeaned – not intentionally – the historical relationship of First Nations to the origins of the Canadian state and the

fact of their aboriginal presence. First Nations also satisfied the third characteristic, occupational concentration. Most Indian adults, he argued, continued to perform traditional activities but at “a sub-standard of economic benefits.” Others had been able to transfer traditional skills into related areas like commercial fishing and guiding. A minority engaged in “our world of work” such as Iroquoian steelworkers. Finally, despite their extreme poverty group-cohesion was strong and Indian communities were able to maintain cultural transmission. Renaud rightfully observed but for the wrong reasons that the strength of this characteristic clearly indicated their intention not to assimilate. “Life on the reserves contributes relatively little towards integration,” he wrote. By this he meant that because services to First Nations were free – “provided by nature or benign government” – there was little incentive to join in with the Canadian mainstream.

If Indians were an ethnic group, were they also an ethnic minority? Renaud demonstrated that indeed they were and, in today’s language they were victims of colonial oppression.

Practically every area of community service is filled by a non-Indian, be it religion, economics, education, administration, even recreation. Officially, all the agents from outside are present for the good of the Indians. In practice...this allegation can be subject to question. It is evident that the trader, for instance, is not there...to enrich the Indians. This colonialism is more subtle with administrators and is probably unconscious among teachers and religious personnel. All in all, Indian populations have very little control over their own affairs. The lands on which they reside are not even their own... .

Renaud concluded, like Hlady, by posing several questions related to two issues. One, how were Indians reacting collectively to their present ethnic minority status? Renaud alluded here to their social and political aspirations and implicitly warned that one reaction could be militant. Two, how were Indians as individuals on a socio-psychological basis reacting to their status and treatment? Renaud was concerned that collectively and individually Indians would or already had developed reactions or traits symptomatic of victimisation that could run the spectrum from self-hate to fighting back. What his position was I am not sure. I suspect he was an integrationist. First, he took pains to depict First Nations as an ethnic group. Thus, he thought that ideally they could be fully functioning members of Canadian society but able to retain and promote their cultures and in-group identities. But, they were also an ethnic minority and thus faced oppressive barriers to their just integration. By identifying these barriers it would seem that he was pointing the way to new policies to remove them. The extraordinary thing to me is how Renaud identified then missed the importance of the historical relationship of First Nations with the founding of Canada. This fact alone wholly alters the analysis.

VI.

The final paper by Farrell Toombs was a complete counterpoint to the others though, I am sure, no one expected it to be so. Essentially reflective and introspective the paper's style was unorthodox. It read almost as a stream of consciousness and posed as many questions as it made statements. Toombs was a professor of industrial psychology at the University of Toronto. After World War II he worked with Carl Rogers in Maine where they introduced early forms of T-Group training. Rogers' humanistic psychology had a profound effect on him and this was evident in his paper. He obtained his PhD at the University of Chicago and while there or shortly after he was involved in the famous Hawthorne Studies at the Western Electric Company that transformed work organisation and management styles and spelled the end of "Taylorism" or scientific management. He also alluded to these studies in his paper. His politics were on the left.

Toombs had been asked to present a paper on psychological aspects of culture changes for Indians. Uncertain of what he could say on the subject he shifted the focus and called the paper, "Psychological Aspects of Culture Changes': An Exercise." Toombs first broached the idea of culture. Up to now, he explained, he had felt comfortable about culture and its ability to explain behaviour in meaningful ways. Now he was not so sure. "I cannot relax in the assurance that we 'know' this and that about man – that we have emerging successfully a science of behaviour with which we may develop 'greater degrees of abstraction in describing interpersonal relations'." ⁶ The problem with culture was precisely that it mediated our world-view. It was impossible for a social scientist really to come to a theory governing all human relations since the theory would itself reflect the biases of a culture that built knowledge in a certain way. "I am fearful," Toombs said, "that my colleagues have participated in a similar learning – that we are truly products of our 'culture'." The fear, Toombs went on to explain, arises from the fact that he now understood that "I speak with no 'person'." Instead, culture obliged him to speak with conceptions such as man, Indian Canadian, Zulu, psychopath, doctor, and so on. Today, this might be called "othering," the process by which we not only differentiate peoples from "us" but through which we also ascribe characteristics to them. Toombs proposed that even within our own culture we define people through the culture and rarely do we see or allow ourselves to meet the actual person. So, from this emerged the importance of 'speaking with' to which I shall return.

The next issue for Toombs was the phrase, 'psychological aspects' and its relation to culture. What did it mean? He used as an example his experiences at Western Electric where work had been divided by floors. Each stage of production occurred at a specific floor level. Each level depended on the efficiency of the workers on one level to get the work to the next level using an elevator. If work was stalled at one level because of the inefficiency of another it was common to use the expression, "I'm waiting for the elevator." The phrase came to be cultural code for efficiency, responsibility, punctuality and consistency. Indeed, Toombs mused, it also implied science and reason since

the entire mode of production was based on scientific management. "I'm waiting for the elevator" raised fear of retribution and blame. Was this a 'psychological aspect'? he asked. The system aside, that the culture produced such an indirect phrase worried Toombs. Why do we not say what we mean? "Would it offend you greatly," he asked, "if I were to tell you that I am seeking to avoid 'death'? Precisely the 'death' that comes in saying 'what you mean', when 'what you mean' can come only from the exchange of persons speaking with each other in some way – and this includes the intention to speak-with as well as...learning to speak-with." Toombs argued that belief systems that lie at the core of culture(s) and to which we are socialised are what obstruct our being able to speak with each other: they lie at the basis of why we accept or reject one another. He then posed the question that lay at the heart of his paper. "Hence, I would ask you: 'may not learning to 'speak-with' be of central importance? How else but through your responses in relation to me may my 'belief' be modified...?"

I now move to the crux of his paper. Toombs introduced the work of Sol Tax, the eminent American anthropologist who transformed field-work through his use of early forms of transactional analysis and social action research. Tax was involved with the Mesquakies or "Fox Indians" in the western United States. Accused of interference, he answered his critics,

First, there is the value of truth. We are anthropologists in the tradition of science and scholarship. Nothing would embarrass us more than to see that we have been blinded to verifiable fact by any other values or emotions. We believe that truth and knowledge are more constructive in the long run than falsehood and superstition.⁷

Toombs immediately picked up on Tax's concern with truth. "Would it be impertinent to ask: 'What is truth?' Is it something definitive, final, once-for-all; is it something without contradiction?" Toombs wondered whether Tax understood truth to be determined only by science and verifiable fact or was he also implying that values and emotions could be linked to the tradition of science and scholarship? To further clarify his intent Toombs turned to Lev Shestov, the Russian Jewish existentialist. Shestov wrote that real truth lies within each person. Everyone may know this but to communicate with each other we "must renounce the truth and accept some conventional lie."⁸ Shestov continued,

Therefore truth does not by nature resemble empirical truth in the least, and before entering the world of philosophy, you must bid farewell to scientific methods of search, and to the accustomed methods of estimating knowledge. In a word, you must be ready to accept something absolutely new, quite unlike what is traditional and old. That is why the tendency to discredit scientific knowledge is by no means so useless as may at first...appear to the inexperienced eye.⁹

With this interpretation of truth Toombs returned to Tax and the Mesquakies and to subsequent comments that Tax made in relation to the Fox project. Tax wrote that he believed that his team had knowledge that was worth sharing with the Indians but he would never consider imposing choices on them "on the assumption that 'we know better than they do what is good for them.'" Tax

concluded, “what is best for them involves what they want to be.”¹⁰ This last statement attracted Toombs. It resonated with his work with Carl Rogers and the idea that being human is a constant process of becoming. To stress this last point Toombs quoted from Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, “Who knows...perhaps the only goal on earth...lies in this incessant process of attaining, in other words, in life itself, and not the thing to be attained...”¹¹ Turning again to Tax and the Mesquakies, Toombs asked what do we now make of his statement, “what is best for them is what they want to be?” “Is it helpful,” Toombs queried, “to think...of a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way ‘to be’? How would the ‘being’ of Sol Tax meet the ‘being’ of a...Mesquakie?” Here, Toombs cited a lengthy quote from Buber the gist of which was that humans seek certainty by establishing principles or propounding dogma that destroy the power of dialogue. “Dogma...has become the most exalted form of invulnerability against revelation,” wrote Buber. “Revelation will tolerate no perfect tense, but man with the arts of his craze for security props it up to perfectedness.”¹²

Toombs had artfully led his audience back to his original suggestion, that the psychological aspect of culture changes was the process of speaking-with. It is best, I think, to conclude this synopsis with his own powerful – and I can only imagine to those present – controversial conclusion.

I would ask: do our fundamental assumptions have anything to do with ‘what’ we see? What are our fundamental assumptions? We may ‘see’ hunger, pain, indifference, prodigality, joy, commitment, prudence, etc. – all ‘meanings’ abstracted from the complex of ‘living situations’. To what: to whom do these ‘meanings’ have relation? I have suggested ‘psychological aspects of culture changes’ are the possibility, the difficulty, the impossibility of persons ‘speaking-with’ each other. How many participants in ‘culture’ consider this? Must we seek ‘universals’? Might it be that we always are faced with a question: that ‘life’ is a question; and, in that question lies our assertion? My ‘truth’; your ‘truth’; our ‘truth’?

Conclusion

I once heard a comment that working with government on First Nations issues was rather like watching a Hollywood “B” movie: you could fall asleep for an hour, wake up and pick the story right up again. While it is fair to say that much has changed for First Nations since 1960, it is also fair to say that in some ways the story hasn’t changed. What can be gleaned from these papers that would assist us today in understanding the present and future of First Nations peoples in Canada? There is much I would like to say and analyse in these papers but time and length are a constraint. Thus, I will identify three contrasting themes that stand out and that provide a good starting point for discussion.

One clear theme was that of expert vs. anti-expert. The five mainstream papers placed major emphasis on building and utilising knowledge to direct change in First Nations’ communities. This emphasis on a knowledge base assumed that First Nations needed the right guidance in adapting or acculturating to Euro-Canadian society. The correct understanding of their cultures was also required

to harness them toward change. Toombs in contrast was more interested in what they wanted to become or more accurately, in simply giving them the space to become. Eric Wolf in his book, *Europe and the People Without History* (1997) reminds us that indigenous peoples throughout the world have culturally adapted to and survived their encounters with Europeans for centuries. Thus, the issue would seem not to be the capacity for adaptation or the need to adapt. Rather, it is an issue of liberation, of removing the constraints that hinder becoming.

A second contrasting theme was that of certainty and fixedness vs. uncertainty and fluidity. The five mainstream papers – possibly with the exception of Hlady – were interested in directing change in First Nations from a fixed point in the past to a fixed point in the present. Underlying this theme is that the mainstream papers explicitly or implicitly assumed First Nations peoples to be backward and still possessing certain primitive, cultural attributes some of which could be accommodated, others of which would have to be discarded. It was critical that First Nations be assisted in adapting to the modern world. The important point is that the mainstream papers understood there was a solution to the problem and that the solution underscored a universal truth about human progress. Toombs rejected this. His point of view, largely existential, but also pointing the way to a more post-modern interpretation revealed that there is no certainty, that there are only ways of knowing. We can only know and understand each other through authentic dialogue and dialogue itself is open-ended. While the mainstream papers reflected a quest for a paradigm, an objective, explanatory model that would be both utilitarian and absolute, Toombs believed that objectivity was impossible. We are doomed to be both part of and agents for the reproduction of our own biases as expressed through culture. Science, as an element of western culture was intrinsically biased.

A final theme was control vs. liberation. The mainstream papers all in some way wanted to control the direction of First Nations' development and the approaches were heavy, deadening. First Nations' development was predicated principally on adapting to western liberal capitalism. The most obvious example was the emphasis placed on community development as a tool for directed change, or to be more blunt, for social engineering. There was a certain naïveté in understanding community development: it was principally discussed as a neutral or apolitical tool. Absent was any discussion or understanding of its role in the cold war as colonised peoples became independent. It was vital to maintain the newly emerging nations as allies of the west and it was no accident that colonial powers like Britain invested much energy in preparing their colonies for independence by infusing them with skills suitable to liberal democratic economies and governance. Thus, community development was anything but neutral.

Toombs clearly did not see it as a neutral process but he was not opposed to community development. In 1963, Walter Rudnicki, Chief of Welfare Division at Indian Affairs, retained Toombs to help hire and then train community

development workers for the new on-reserve community development program. The program had a short but powerful impact on reserves in Canada. So powerful in fact that the government stopped it (Shewell, 2002). But Toombs had no agenda in mind about what community development should accomplish other than human liberation because he believed – I think – that human liberation was essential to real social justice. He recognised that methods that would release human energy, that would raise consciousness, which would allow people to become their true selves (in both a Marxist and existential sense) would necessarily permit ‘what had to be done’ to follow. In this sense his thinking was supportive of the work of Memmi (1957), and connected with Fanon (1961) and Friere (1970). But he was also an early post-modernist. There is no doubt Toombs was highly suspicious of order, of universal truths, of grand narratives. Not unlike Foucault (1972) – whose work followed sometime later - he had a sense of the exercise of power and the relationship of power to knowledge. His emphasis on dialogue echoed Bakhtin – and certainly his Russian heritage suggests that he may have been familiar with Bakhtin’s work just as he was of Shestov’s.

Finally, Toombs’ real interest lay in eliminating those barriers that impeded human becoming, those multiple forms of oppression entrenched in the social system and individually and collectively internalised through years of socialisation. George Manuel - who became the first chief of the Assembly of First Nations - wrote about Toombs, “he impressed me as a person with a high degree of humanity that seems to transcend every situation. If there is any one man outside the Indian community in Canada who inspired human development within our community it is Farrel (sic) Toombs” (Manuel and Posluns, 1974, 130). Farrell Toombs died in Springfield, Illinois in 1997. May the inspiration of Toombs continue and may First Nations continue to become.

Endnotes

¹ The Annual Conference of the Learned Societies was first held in 1931. It was – and is – a major gathering of Canada’s scholars, academic societies and associations for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. It is the major conference in Canada for the presentation of papers, workshops, seminars and so on usually focused on a central theme. The conference recently changed its name to the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

² See also Weaver, 1982. p. 12. She tends to support this view both of the IEA and its interest in the hearings of the Joint Committee.

³ Hlady had made no reference to this terminology in his paper and its appearance suggests that he might have already heard Father Renaud’s presentation.

⁴ F.G. Vallee, “Ethnic Integration in Canada,” *Residential Education for Indian Acculturation*. Ottawa: Oblate Fathers Indian and Eskimo Welfare Commission, 1958. p. 39. Cited in Renaud, p. 3.

⁵ Ralph Linton, ed. *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1945. pp. 347-8. Cited in Renaud, p. 4.

⁶ The concluding quote was taken from Margaret Mead, "Social Environment in Primitive Societies," *Environment and Education*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942. p. 61.

⁷ Sol Tax, "The Fox Project." *Human Organization*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 1958, p.18. Cited in Toombs, p. 6.

⁸ Lev Shestov, *Penultimate Words*. Boston: John L. Luce, 1916. p. 136. Cited in Toombs, p. 7.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Op.Cit., 18-19. p. 7.

¹¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes From Underground*, trans. Constance Garnett. *The Short Novels of Dostoevsky*. New York: Dial Press, 1958. p. 151. Cited in Toombs, p. 8.

¹² Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. R.G. Smith. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957. pp. 17-18. Cited in Toombs, p. 9. It is worth noting that Carl Rogers knew and derived inspiration from Buber.

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