

# DECOLONIZATION

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**T**HE PROCESS OF COLONIZATION begins with the physical occupation of land and domination of the Indigenous people. Following the primarily physical aspects of colonization (ie. Military conflict, relocation, etc.), non-physical methods are applied. These include what could be called mental aspects. Religious indoctrination, cultural, social and economic assimilation are common examples. Therefore it could be said that colonization is comprised of two primary aspects - physical and mental.

Prior to colonization Indigenous peoples were free and sovereign nations. Through colonization Indigenous people are deprived of their freedom and live in an oppressed situation. In order to be liberated from this oppressive state the process of colonization must be reversed. That is, it must begin with the mental aspects and move towards the physical.

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**Colonization is always destructive. This destruction becomes internalized within the Indigenous person. Some basic characteristics of this are:**

## **1. Internal violence and aggression**

Anger and violence directed toward oneself, one another and family/community. This includes rape, murder, assault, sexual abuse of children, suicide, etc. The irrational violence within the colonized Indigenous person results from the oppressed conditions that colonization imposes upon people. (ie. Poverty, loss of identity, breakdown of family and nation structure, etc.) Some of this comes from specific methods used by the colonizing nation, for example Residential schools, the reserve system, etc.

## **2. Individualism - self interest**

With the breakdown of the nation and the family, fragmentation and competition has come to replace the sense of unity, community and togetherness that was once the basis of Indigenous society.

## **3. Neglecting one's culture - assimilation**

A key tactic if colonization is to portray the Indigenous culture as negative and irrelevant to (modern) society. Once this belief is entrenched within the Indigenous person they have no alternative but to assimilate and conform to the colonialist society.

## **4. Inferiority complex - identity crisis**

The objective of the colonialist is to have the Indigenous person believe that there is little or no positive aspects within



the Indigenous culture. Physical and mental domination, constant negative portrayals of Indigenous people and history, and white supremacist attitudes play fundamental roles in the creation of the Indigenous inferiority complex. The indigenous person begins to question their identity and becomes caught between the historical concept of the traditional Indian and present day reality. "Who am I?" "What does it mean to be an Indian?" Major contributing factors to these questions are Residential/public schools, fostering of Indigenous children, inaccurate histories, centralization in urban areas, and loss of language and culture.

## **5. Abandoning of traditional territories**

Colonization creates a feeling of Indigenous dependency on colonially established towns (reserve - towns) and cities. In order to benefit from colonial programs and institutes Indigenous people must migrate to these areas and leave their traditional territories. The act of relocating and isolating Indigenous people into the reserve areas is a tactic used to force the people away from the majority of their territory. This allows the colonial state to assume jurisdiction over lands that were once controlled by Indigenous Nations. It also removes the Indigenous people physically to accommodate the establishment of settler communities and resource extraction. The current BC Treaty process is a way of legally entrenching, and acquiring consent for an agreed upon abandonment and surrender of traditional territories.

**Decolonization, as mentioned earlier, is the act of reversing the process of colonization. It can be said that decolonization is constructive rather than destructive. the following methods of decolonization are aimed at reversing the destructive effects of colonialism that have been described above:**

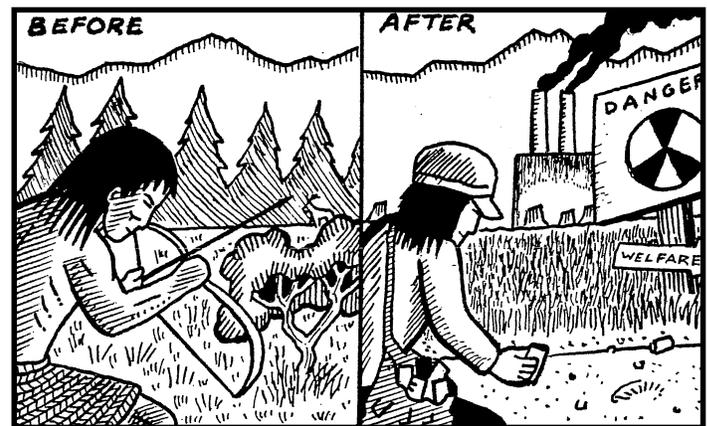
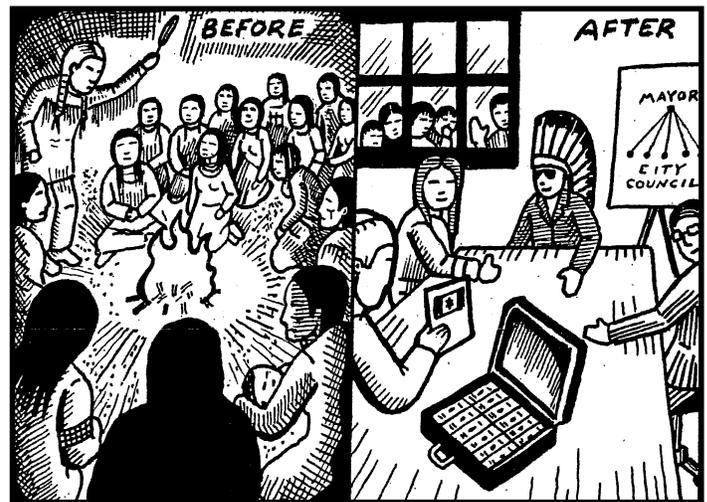
**1. Raising consciousness** of the oppressive state that Indigenous people live in by exposure to a more realistic account of history and by identifying an enemy that's creating and maintaining that oppression. An effective strategy can include counter-action methods such as: educating oneself and serving as an example for others, advocating sovereign Indigenous rights, and exercising and defending those rights and traditional territory. These activities provide experiences that instill a sense of purpose by involving people in actions that make a positive contribution to their communities and ul-

timately to their sense of self. Individual, family, then community healing must occur. During this healing process, irrational violence and aggression is dissolved and a more purposeful facet may be identified to vent negative feelings that remain from colonization.

**2. Understanding you are a people and a Nation sharing the same ancestry.** During the early steps of recovery, unity and togetherness play a vital role in the strengthening of the family and community units. An Indigenous person who is conscious of their oppressive history is also aware that they are not alone. The individualistic attitude introduced through colonization gives in to the Indigenous natural inclinations of caring and supporting one another. Self-interests also deteriorate and communal or national Indigenous interests become a key focus as a necessity in the process of decolonization.

**3. Revitalizing a sense of nationality and appreciating the knowledge and ways of Indigenous ancestry.** Traditional philosophies of respect and appreciation for the Earth, life, others and oneself are positive parts of Indigenous culture that are still relevant today. An understanding of the negative and positive aspects of the colonial society is important and education on the negative aspects must be emphasized, while positive aspects are utilized. It must be acknowledged that all Indigenous people are assimilated to one degree or another, no one is immune from colonial influence or assimilation. While this remains true, it must also be accepted that Indigenous culture and ways are not static. If Indigenous people had not undergone the influence of colonialism, they would not be the exact same societies as those that existed at the time of initial contact. The Indigenous person must now learn to exist within a colonial environment in a decolonized manner.

**4. Recognizing the strength in Indigenous ways.** While undergoing exposure to the truths of history, the Indigenous person realizes the fallacies and disinformation that the colonialist society circulates in regards to Indigenous history, culture, and practices. To broaden the process of decolonization, it is important to begin circulating more accurate and truthful accounts of Indigenous society at this stage. Re-education must first be directed towards the Indigenous Nations and then focus may be directed towards people of other nationalities. As Indigenous people have acquired an inferiority complex through the oppressive lifestyle that they have become accustomed to, their initial reaction may be to overthrow their oppressor and gain control of the reigns. The Indigenous person must understand that the colonial society is destructive and the few positive aspects it does contain are the only beneficial components that can contribute to the process of decolonization. It is not feasible for a colonized Indigenous Nation to return to a totally traditional lifestyle, as their mentality and environment has been drastically transformed. However, an incorporation of positive aspects of (modern) society and ancestral Indigenous ways will contribute to overcoming the effects of inferiority and identity crisis.



**5. Reoccupying traditional territory.** This includes establishing permanent or semi-permanent camps and communities in areas previously occupied by the Indigenous Nation and now abandoned, as well as increasing traditional activities such as fishing, hunting, and other food gathering. A primary goal of such reoccupations is to eventually establish self-sufficient and independent communities beyond the range and influence of colonial society. From these, sovereign and free territories can be reconstructed, ultimately removing Indigenous people from the colonial society - a primary aim of decolonization.

**Colonization is constructive to the colonizing society, but destructive to the Indigenous society. In contrast, decolonization is constructive to Indigenous society, but destructive to the colonial society.**

*Zigzag & Keyway Long Hot Summer '99*

**FIGHT FOR  
FREEDOM!!**

