

## Qallunology: A Pedagogy for the Oppressor

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### INTRODUCTION

In Inuit culture our elders are our source of wisdom. They have a long-term view of things and a deep understanding of the cycles and changes of life....So it was natural for us to respect the newcomers who seemed to know how to survive and how to make their organizations work. Their power looked like wisdom. We now know that it [was] a mistake....Our people did not have any institutional immunity, just as we had no immunity to measles or alcohol. When these institutions came into our lives we had no way to deal with their poisonous side effects, their tendency to undermine wisdom, and our spirits slowly began to die. In our weakened condition we attracted even more services and more rescuers, and the cycle got worse.<sup>1</sup>

The authors of the above report are from Nunavik, the Inuit homeland occupying the northern two-thirds of Quebec. Although many of the comments in this paper are from Inuit in Nunavik, Alaska, or Nunavut (the recently recognized territory occupying one-fifth of what we now call Canada) this paper is not really about Inuit. Inuit observations are cited in this analysis to help shed light on Euro-Americans, those whom the Inuit call “Qallunaat.” This term “Qallunology” was coined by Zebedee Nungak to denote what we might colloquially call “the study of white folks.”<sup>2</sup> Given that the property-based individualistic civilization that characterizes the Qallunaat emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, the words “white,” “Western,” or “European” denote its closest parentage and its place of birth, not the skin color of its current adherents or its current geographical limits.<sup>3</sup> In his book, *The White Arctic*, sociologist Robert Paine said that his one “message” to whites was to drop the illusion that they were “in the Arctic to teach the Inuit,” and instead focus on “learning about white behavior.”<sup>4</sup> Qallunology says that if Euro-Americans really want to study something they should study themselves; if Qallunaat really want to rescue indigenous peoples they should stop pushing them overboard to start with; and if Qallunaat educators really want to study something helpful to Inuit, they should study why Education was invented, and how it is a result of the ideology of scarcity.

### CEASE TO DO EVIL, THEN LEARN TO DO GOOD

Development interventions are typically conceived as some type of “addition,” which is based on the premise that underdevelopment is caused by some type of “absence”....The problem with this approach is that it shifts attention away from the international community’s own role as resource degrader and focuses instead only on its potential role as “helper.” I suggest that the international community needs to ask not just what it can do to help, but also what it must do to stop hurting.<sup>5</sup>

As Michael Dove has insightfully pointed out, what First World folks flaunt as “additions” to indigenous societies, the recipients tend to experience as “subtractions.” In the words of one Inuk elder: “Every time the white man comes and offers us something, the Aboriginal people lose something....Now when I see a white man doing something for our good, I worry about what we will lose.”<sup>6</sup> Instead of focusing on “halting existing predatory interventions and not initiating any new ones,” Qallunaat tend to prefer to focus on rescuing victims.<sup>7</sup> The “Rescuers” almost always

come from the ranks of Euro-American civilization, the affluent twenty percent of the world's population who consume eighty percent of the world's resources. Inuit, like most of those getting "rescued," belong to "the remaining 4.7 billion people—eighty percent of the population—[those who] survive on less than a quarter of world output."<sup>8</sup>

For the most part, Rescuers draw their numbers from the formerly indigenous peoples of Europe. These "Qallunaat" are the homeless ones, the landless ones. From 1821 to 1932, fifty million indigenous Europeans fled that continent's "Great Transformation" and claimed land in Canada, the United States, Argentina, and Brazil. Just as an aside, here—Has it ever occurred to anyone else that this must be the single biggest oversight in the practice of historical studies by European Americans? Hundreds of papers have been written on the supposed movement of First Peoples into the Americas across the Bering Strait, yet I am not aware of a single major treatise describing the psychosocial and political impacts of the largest concentrated movement of human beings in the earth's history: fifty million humans in one hundred ten years. This, the largest migration in human history, was sparked by the pricing and privatization of common land, the ransacking of Europe's social relations and their replacement by money relations.<sup>9</sup> Then these migrants turned around and reproduced the same anti-social arrangements in their new homelands as had existed in the Europe that had evicted them. Thus, the enclosure of Europe led to the enclosure of the Americas.<sup>10</sup>

Larry Lohman describes colonialism and development as the processes that "break down" the "social universe" of "partly independent wholes." Outsiders dismember local "cultures, languages, practices of livelihood, theories, arts, sciences," and "use the fragments, deprived of their old roles, to build up new wholes of potentially global scope."<sup>11</sup> Kloppenburg has pointed out that "indigenous people have in effect been engaged in a massive program of foreign aid to the urban populations of the industrialized North" for most of the past four hundred years.<sup>12</sup>

Qallunaat rush around the world proselytizing their alphanumeric fetishism, supposedly rescuing "primitive" civilizations from their richly integrated physical-oral-mental cultures. Meanwhile they pat themselves on the back because they are out in the igloo or under the banyan tree teaching liberatory pedagogy to the suffering locals so that they can hang on to that twenty percent of the world's resources that the Rescuers' civilization has not gotten hold of yet.

Is there any way we could shift our attention from bandaging the wounded to not wounding others in the first place? "First, do no harm," states the two thousand four hundred year-old Hippocratic oath. A century before that, the Buddha had said, "First, cease to do evil; then learn to do good, then purify the mind." This is the essence of a pedagogy for the oppressor. But the order is important: first cease to do evil. As long as Euro-America needs eighty percent of the rest of the world's resources, we are going to end up having to go next door and bully people to get it. It seems to me that if our way of life is causing most of the problems that the rest of the world has to deal with, the best thing we can do is *deal with our own way of life*. This is not rocket science. Let me give an example.

Barry Commoner's recent "source-to-receptor" research has tracked seventy percent of dioxins spewing from specific factories in America's industrial heartland into tiny communities in Nunavut.<sup>13</sup> In Qikiqtarjuaq (population: four hundred ninety nine), just east of where I lived for the past ten years, over sixty percent of the Inuit children under the age of fifteen and almost forty percent of Inuit women of childbearing age were found to have PCB body burdens exceeding "tolerable" guidelines.<sup>14</sup> Mothers in Nunavut have twice the allowable levels of dioxins in their breast milk. Nunavut's and America's communities are tied together by America's invisible exhalation of death. America breathes out, Inuit die.

I once represented the Baffin Region Chamber of Commerce before a Parliamentary Committee studying chemicals in the environment. The Committee chair asked: Why are you the only Chamber demanding tighter restrictions? Well, other Chambers have chemical producers as their members; we have chemical products *in* our members. The dioxin plumes rise with warm air and moisture and fall with cold temperatures, "grasshoppering" their way toward northern latitudes, where it is too cold for them to evaporate and instead they settle: absorbed into lichen, eaten by caribou, which in turn are consumed by Inuit. For the eight hundred residents of Coral Harbour, in the middle of Hudson Bay, over half of the annual dioxin burden for 1997 came from just three smokestacks: Ash Grove's cement kiln in Louisville, Nebraska, Lafarge's cement kiln in Alpena, Michigan, and Chemetco's copper smelter in Hartford Illinois.<sup>15</sup> This is what Qallunology, a "pedagogy for the oppressor," needs to teach. Stay home. Go on a field trip to Alpena, Michigan, or Hartford, Illinois. Figure out how to clean it up, slow it down, stop it. It is the Euro-American way of life that needs to be put under the microscope, not intriguing tribes in far-away lands. Instead of exotic slide shows on the Arctic, why do not American schools take exotic field trips to Bethlehem Steel and US Steel's iron sintering plants in Chesterton and Gary, Indiana?

The first step in Qallunology is to get white folks to examine and change their own destructive behavior. This includes examining the unusualness of a society embedded in an economy (rather than the more historically common instances of economies embedded in their societies).<sup>16</sup> The second step is to study the invention of the concept of Education itself, and particularly, how it is tied to the assumption of scarcity, and to the massive uprooting of human beings caused by capitalism.

#### UPROOTEDNESS AND THE INVENTION OF EDUCATION

Simone Weil once warned that what had undermined Europe was "the disease of uprootedness." Once uprooted, one "uproots others," but "whoever is rooted in himself doesn't uproot others."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, "the white man carries this disease with him wherever he goes," everywhere "European colonialism" has been felt, it ostracizes the land.<sup>18</sup> Weil linked Education and Economy as two "poisons" which spread the disease of uprootedness.

One (poison) is money. Money destroys human roots wherever it is able to penetrate, by turning desire for gain into the sole motive.... [The] second factor making for uprootedness is education.... [Education] abstracted culture from tradition...[and the] result has been a culture...removed from the world, in a stovepipe atmosphere—a culture very strongly influenced by technical science, very strongly tinged with pragmatism, extremely broken up by specialization.<sup>19</sup>

Education is the main compensatory mechanism invented to deal with uprootedness and the collapse of family and community relations, and to train converts to the new non-social economy. Education is a “designed process which is carried on in specially constructed places under various kinds of bribe and threat,” as John Holt defined it.<sup>20</sup> It always denotes some kind of “treatment.” Education is an “odd, modern social phenomenon” that entrenches the belief “that competence in the world derives from being instructed about it, taught about it.”<sup>21</sup> The word “education” itself does not show up in French until 1498, in English not until 1530, and in Spanish not until 1632.<sup>22</sup> Europeans first began to conceptualize the “world as school” in 1759, and when, thirty-three years later, a Cambridge tutor introduced the idea of grading student papers “human thought succumbed to writing and writing had succumbed to numerical evaluation”<sup>23</sup> These dates could be said to mark Europe’s surrender to the “ideology of literacy”: the beginning of the widespread belief that knowledge is a subset of writing and that “learning can be sliced up into pieces.”<sup>24</sup> As Suzanne de Castell explains:

I do not mean to imply that prior to the development of literacy human beings lacked knowledge, in the sense that they were ignorant. Indeed there is evidence that a wealth of intelligent accomplishment existed before literacy...What I mean by suggesting that knowledge is a subset of writing is, rather, that the very idea of knowledge, the concept of knowledge “as such,” and hence the idea that human beings could lack, develop, transmit, and possess knowledge, may be entirely a literate construction.<sup>25</sup>

The pervasiveness of the ideology of literacy is marked by belief in knowledge as paper, brain as book, world as school, universe as library. Thus the making of one of the two main life preservers that the Rescuers prescribe to cure the “lesser-developed” world: Education. Education and Economy sit side-by-side in the Rescuer’s toolbox: print and price, alphabet and money, bankbooks and schoolbooks. To join the ranks of the “developed,” a people must be able to spell and spend.

Again, as an aside, it is interesting to note that although we prescribe literacy to the oppressed, literacy has not necessarily cured the oppressor.<sup>26</sup> This causes some confusion and consternation among transformative educators: “Using print literacy as a major doorway into critical consciousness and political mobilization does not seem to be as useful in the First World as it is in Latin America.”<sup>27</sup> We say to the supposedly lesser-developed: Literacy will help you build a just society, although it has not done that for us.

In any case, most non-alphabetized cultures have not seen the need to disembed a process called Education from their ongoing pattern of life in order to transfer discrete objectifiable “knowledge” or “information.”<sup>28</sup> This causes even more confusion: what Euro-American Rescuers view as tools of salvation, much of the rest of the world experiences as tools of dissolution—not life preservers, but life-eroders. Witness these remarks by Alaskan Inuk, Yupiktak Bista:

Before the erection of school houses and the introduction of professional teachers to whom Western civilization entrusts the minds of their children...we did not worry about relating learning to life, because learning came naturally as a part of living...(from) the father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, brother, sister, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends...(and from) the weather, the sea, the fish, the animals, and the land....The coming of Western civilization broke this unity and living....Today we have entrusted the minds of our young

to professional teachers who seemingly know all there is to know. They are teaching a child how to read, write, repair a car, weld two pipes together. But they are not teaching the child the most important thing. Who he is: an Inuk or Indian with a history full of folklore, music, great men, medicine, a philosophy, complete with poets....Now this culture and subsistence way of life are being swept away by books, patents, money, and corporations.<sup>29</sup>

### WHY DO EDUCATION AND SCARCITY ALWAYS SEEM TO GO TOGETHER?

#### (TAPS VERSUS OCEANS)

I imagine that in the old tribal days everyone must have sensed that people are born knowing how to be human, just as beavers are born knowing how to be beavers, and that learning is an aspect of normal human behavior—built in. So there wouldn't have been any more concern about children learning than there would have been about them breathing or eating.<sup>30</sup>

Education is “the remedy of a defect, the supply of a deficiency.”<sup>31</sup>

Two years ago, I took a course with an eminent professor of education who described a school somewhere in rural Australia where the teacher and pupils had built an entire sheep paddock in the classroom—little cardboard fences, sheep dipping and shearing areas—the whole works. He “oohed” and “aahhed” and described this as an ideal learning situation. But this school was in the middle of Australian farm country, where there were sheep farms all over—why not just go outside and work on a real farm? Ivan Illich gives us the answer:

Schooling is the ritual of a society committed to progress and development. It creates certain myths which are a requirement for a consumer society. For instance, it makes you believe that learning can be sliced up into pieces and quantified, or that learning is something for which you need a process within which you acquire it.<sup>32</sup>

Almost twenty years ago, in his keynote address to the fifth World Congress of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies in Paris, as well as in a speech to the twenty fifth annual meeting of the International Association of Educational Research, Illich “begged” the thousands of attendees “to study the constitution of the *idea* of education, of learning under the assumption of scarcity.”<sup>33</sup> He says he “failed completely.”<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps. Here is how I see it. This is a crude analogy, but the relationship between education and life is analogous to the relationship between restaurants and food. Restaurants can be found in most neighborhoods—as can schools—but the difference is that no one believes that without restaurants we would starve. When we come across a society without schools we either assume that they are not a very “developed” or learned people, or we assume that there has to be some sort of education system hidden in the social structure somewhere...and we just have to suss it out. Yet if we do not see restaurants in another civilization we do not immediately assume that the people are starving or that they must have a restaurant system hidden in their food relations somewhere. Why do we assume Education to be an ahistorical given?

Well, we all know that human babies are not born with a full genetic complement that covers everything a human adult needs to know, any more than a baby is born with its body containing all the water it will need to drink. Therefore learning must be embedded in life. So is drinking.

Education under the assumption of scarcity creates the fervent belief that you can only drink if you have a tap; that you can only learn if you have a school. The

idea of Education is founded in what Reddy called the “conduit metaphor:” the assumption that learning requires a conduit, a pipe, a channel called *school* to distill, decipher and deliver pure knowledge to the receptacle—the student.<sup>35</sup> After some time has passed, tests are applied to determine the purity of the knowledge residue still residing in the students’ brains and then (scarce) credentials are distributed which permit the student to have access to scarce wage employment and money. Teachers become dispensers of entitlements which restrict “the supply for [waged] positions and” monopolize them for “the owners of educational certificates.”<sup>36</sup>

I recently visited an activist newly enrolled at Trent University. With several years background organizing workers’ cooperatives in Central and South America, she had more experience of “development” than most of the professors she was studying with. Yet one of them had convinced her to go to university for the first time in order to get “legitimacy” and “credentials.” She said that when she finishes her four years of university, she expects to have an accumulated school debt of sixty thousand dollars. “But,” she said, “You can’t put a price on education—right?” Well sister...you just did!

So when Nunavik Inuit say “culture cannot be taught with a piece of chalk,” or when the elder Malaya Nakasuk laughs and says “you cannot teach the Inuit way of life from a book”—they are trying to remind Qallunaat that life is an ocean of unfoldment and growth, Inuit should not have to hunt for an accredited tap every time they feel the thirst of curiosity.<sup>37</sup> Traditional values, says Nakasuk, used to be “learned as part of daily camp life” in “interactions among people who lived... closely linked to the land.”<sup>38</sup> But in Nunavut, the reality of abundance of wisdom from elders and communities is being replaced by the enforced Qallunaat illusion that learning is scarce and only obtainable through state-sanctioned Education outlets administered by accredited (ninety five percent Qallunaat) teachers.<sup>39</sup>

In our Inuit heritage, learning and living were the same thing, and knowledge, judgment, and skill could never be separated. In institutional life these things are frequently pulled apart and never reassembled. For example, schools spend much of their energy teaching and testing knowledge, yet knowledge by itself does not lead to wisdom, independence, or power.<sup>40</sup>

What is happening in the Arctic is an extension of the school promoter’s war against rural “ignorance” led by Egerton Ryerson one hundred twenty years ago. Ryerson, Upper Canada’s Chief Superintendent of Schools, fought to liberate children from farm families, communities and traditions in order to hand them over to the schools for alpha-numeric training and conditioning for wage-work. From 1846 until his success in 1871, Ryerson lobbied for legally compelled school attendance “to protect children against” the “cupidity and inhumanity” of negligent parents.<sup>41</sup> “Ignorance was no longer merely a cause of crime—it was a crime,” as he argued in his *Annual Report for 1857*:

If ignorance is an evil to society, voluntary ignorance is a crime against society.... If idle mendicancy is a crime in a man thirty years of age, why is not idle vagrancy a crime in a boy ten years of age? The latter is the parent of the former.<sup>42</sup>

Some critics “deplored” Ryerson’s amassing of “regulatory powers” to the nascent educational bureaucracy. They complained that “schools would undermine parental responsibility in educational matters”<sup>43</sup> But school promoters argued in response

that the “right of the parent to direct any action of his children was not “a natural one.” Every person living in a civilized society enjoyed certain benefits as a social being and, in return, the society had the right to demand reciprocal benefits.”<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the “public” should not interfere with “society’s” representatives, the teachers, as they go about delivering these “benefits.” According to educational advocates, “the family (was) educationally inadequate.”<sup>45</sup>

In recent years the crusade begun by Ryerson has been extended to the Arctic, and the sad results can be heard from Inuit who wonder why “the school...had taken away their children?” Inuit parents say “they can’t take their children out on the land and hence can’t teach them....The government has taken from the parents their ability and responsibility to teach.”<sup>46</sup> “Quiet native children were always being told to ‘speak up’, and encouraged to compete with each other,” says Crowe, “native habits like the silent facial yes and no of the Inuit were stopped in class.... The old closeness between all ages had been broken.”<sup>47</sup>

There are limits to how much can be achieved in a classroom. Wisdom can only be gained by engaging with life, by honouring ones heritage and by mastering the skills necessary for independence. We used to have this when we lived on the land....Wisdom was essential for survival on the land, but it is not essential for survival in institutions.... What happens in most schools is that children and teachers are caught in a mechanical organization that has no interest in wisdom or independence. There is no preparation for life, just preparation for work in another controlling institution.<sup>48</sup>

Until Qallunaat arrived, Inuit children would grow and take their place in their vibrant civilization without any sense that they ought to have been “instructed” about things. Then along came this invention called Education, and its first wave of proponents kidnapped and attempted to assimilate Inuit youth. Realizing that that was wrong, the second wave of Qallunaat school promoters now tell Inuit: “We’re on your side, we want to protect your language and culture; so we’re going to boil it down into books and curricula and administer it to age-separated cohorts inside concrete buildings.” A Qallunologist would note that his subjects like to take an abundance, make it scarce, and certify people (and charge them money) to get access to it.

Furthermore, as François Larose recounts, attempts to bring elders into schools and “native-ize” curricula may be inherently contradictory—and boring to boot!

(In) the context of the bush-oriented society, the distinctions between playing, learning, and working just do not make sense.... On the basis of personal experience and on the basis of observation of a formal school board’s integration of “Native technology,” there is no evidence that this attempt results in a mastery of cognitive or motor competencies by the students. Storytelling inside the classroom has quite often been considered as a “boring” job by elders. The context is wrong. The classroom environment is alien to the way storytelling was practiced in the past. Traditional technical knowledge when taught as part of school subjects is often perceived as folklore.... Most of Native technical knowledge cannot be taught in the classroom.<sup>49</sup>

**CONCLUSION: THE PRICED VERSUS THE PRICELESS (RECOVERING ABUNDANCE)**  
If the means for learning are abundant, rather than scarce, then education never arises—one does not need to make special arrangements for “learning.” If, on the other hand, the means for learning are in scarce supply, or are assumed to be scarce, then educational arrangements crop up to “ensure” that certain important knowledge, ideas, skills, attitudes, etc., are transmitted.<sup>50</sup>

In Inuit society, where the battle between the priced and the priceless is less intense, abundances can be more easily noticed: multiple generations living in proximity, elder aunts and grandmothers raising the grandchildren instead of daycare centers, community feasts and square dances several times a month, hunting trips with the dog team, going down the bay in summer and clam-digging or berry-picking, visiting and drinking tea, watching the neighbors clean skins and make fur clothing. When Inuit in Nunavut were asked for input into the new Education Act, one of their suggestions was that the government coordinate school and work holidays, so that families could spend more time together out on the land.

So the last lesson of Qallunology is not just “cease to do evil,” but also learn to do good—at home. We need to address our own deficiencies, not rush off to fix somebody else’s. We need to seek out our own unexploited abundances and join in, nourish them, encourage them. Abundances are the unmediated, priceless realms that have not succumbed to scarcity. Things like community gardens, medicinal herbs, local foods, seasonal surpluses, cycle paths, and pedestrian places, playing music together, finding the “great good places” that nurture conversation and community spirit.<sup>51</sup> Qallunaat need to recover the “high context” richness of “pattern languages” like poetry, music, adornment, and built-space, where quiescence is just as important as activity.<sup>52</sup> We need to reassert our right to experience the priceless, and win back some turf from the priced.

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