

**Thunderbirds, Thunder-beings, Thunder-voices: The Application of
Traditional Knowledge and Children's Rights in Support of
Aboriginal Children's Education.**

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“Our dead never forget this beautiful world that gave them being. They always love its winding rivers, its sacred mountains, and its Sequestered vales, and they ever yearn in tenderest affection over the lonely-hearted living and often return to visit guide and comfort them. . . The white man will never be alone. Let him be just and deal kindly with my people for the dead are not powerless. Dead – did I say: There is no death, only a change of worlds.” (Chief Seattle, 1854)

The title for this paper draws on the traditions of the Indigenous people of the northwest coast of North America in particular Vancouver Island, ancestral home to the Kwagiulth, Nuu-Chah-Nulth and Coast Salish peoples since time immemorial. The Thunderbird speaks of transformation and change and is visually represented according to the art style of each area. When the Thunderbird is in flight the movement of the wings creates the sound of thunder and when it glances from side to side lightning is emitted. Sometimes the presence of the Thunderbird creates fear within the community because of its great power to change and or alter the fabric of the community.

The flight of the thunderbird brings change and renewal and is the most visible reminder that change is inevitable. It is the role of the traditionally trained elder to help young people and the community cope with change and to understand the place of fear as one of the many ways to cope with change. The old people by virtue of their training are the direct links to the ancestors particularly in the roles of guiding and comforting. Each area defines the way in which the Thunderbird, as agent of change, determines behaviour within the family and the community. Each area validates the knowledge of the old people with regard to hereditary song and or regalia use. Behaviour in this context is determined by the application of specific rules and regulations applied during times of

change such as birth, initiation, traditional namings and the ultimate transformation, death.

The following discussion seeks to combine the strengths of these traditional indigenous¹ cultural supports for children with international child rights treaties in helping to promote the right of all Aboriginal children in Canada to a meaningful education. The global context for this discussion is the International Decade for the World's Indigenous Peoples which runs from 1995 – 2004. The paper attempts to weave these two world views from the perspective of a Euro-American children's advocate/academic and a traditional Coast Salish protocol advisor who are both dedicated to bridging the language of children's rights with an expression of traditional indigenous cultural values and educational practices supporting children. The flight of the Thunderbird, the mythological figure representing powerful spiritual vision, change, and transformation is used to symbolise this process.

The paper will examine a variety of issues relating to indigenous children's education. Special emphasis will be placed on devising new educational frameworks that are more responsive to the needs of indigenous children by applying the strengths of their traditional culture to the contemporary challenges of the modern world. In doing this, ways are suggested in which international treaties, in particular the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Ministry of Canadian Heritage, 1992), can provide support for traditional indigenous values that promote children's healthy development, and encourage young peoples' self esteem by stimulating their participation in civil society.

The discussion also draws on the experiences of recent programs focusing on indigenous children's educational rights co-hosted by the Unit for Research and Education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (URECRC) at the University of Victoria, in partnership with local Coast Salish and Kwagiulth communities situated on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Suggestions and lessons learned from these experiences are presented in the context of Aboriginal educational reform in Canada and the Americas.

Aboriginal Children's Rights and Aboriginal Education

The near universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child presents an historic opportunity to implement an international human rights treaty at the international, domestic, and community level. It offers significant potential as a tool to provide greater access and more culturally appropriate education for Aboriginal children in Canada and throughout the Americas. In maintaining this momentum, additional efforts also need to be made to link the CRC with other international treaties, as well as national legislation supporting the rights of indigenous peoples in relation to sovereignty, cultural heritage, and human development.

The success in ratification combined with the important focus on education and children's cultural rights in the children's convention, allows for a broad based discussion of the implementation and monitoring of the rights of indigenous children with special regard to culture. The application of this process to Aboriginal education in Canada is especially important given the high incidence of child morbidity and mortality, poor standards of education and high drop out rates found in many Aboriginal populations in

Canada. This is compounded by the lack of adequate access to traditional culture experienced by many Aboriginal children, and the ensuing loss of the ameliorating affects of traditional Aboriginal teachings on many of these social problems.

Historically, the context of Aboriginal education in Canada has been one of assimilation and integration. Since colonisation, all efforts were made to ensure that Aboriginal peoples would be absorbed into a European based society. Land was expropriated, traditional practices such as the West Coast potlatch ceremonies were banned, and many communities and families were displaced and their economic and cultural livelihood undermined. These social problems were further reinforced by the introduction of the residential school system in which family and cultural ties, especially language were weekend. As communities today struggle with high rates of substance misuse brought on by low self esteem and loss of autonomy, the alienation many Aboriginal children face from their own culture and the “dominant” society, has further increased as a result of widespread child removal policies, and non-culturally based foster placement programs for Aboriginal children at risk (Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Canada’s Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples captures the historical and present importance of education eloquently in stating:

In Aboriginal communities, as in many societies, children are regarded as a precious gift. Control over the education of their children has been a pressing priority of Aboriginal peoples for decades. This is not surprising. The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated. Education is the transmission of cultural DNA

from one generation to another. It shapes the language and pathways of thinking, the contours of character and values, the social skills and creative potential of the individual. It determines the productive skills of a people (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3, 1996: pg. 432).

Today, Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education has become one of the central and most contested debates in Federal/Provincial – Aboriginal negotiations. Much of the substance of this debate can be traced back to the 1972 *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy statement published by the National Indian Brotherhood (1972). The document focused on 4 themes that have become foundation stones for present discussions on Aboriginal education. These 4 themes are:

- Local control of First Nations education;
- Involvement of First Nations people in curriculum development;
- Training for First Nations people in the area of teaching and counselling;
- Establishing day schools in the communities;

Canada's ratification of the CRC in 1992 offers an opportunity to reinforce many of these principles. This is based on the CRC's strong focus on the role of education and culture, a point that was given added emphasis in Canada's "statement of understanding" when the CRC was ratified, that Aboriginal children's rights would be given special attention in implementing the CRC.

Education is a powerful tool for socialisation and social change and empowering models of education can have an ameliorating effect on many of these threats by providing indigenous children and youth, their families, and communities with the tools

to promote healthy development. Too often the reality, however, is that education systems are designed to develop conformity to national ideals of citizenship. For many Aboriginal children this amounts to a form of cultural imperialism or alienation. This latter type of education has caused many Aboriginal children today to suffer from low self-esteem and lack of cultural identity.

This often results in Aboriginal children and youth feeling disconnected from both their own and the dominant culture and leads to high levels of school drop out, and vulnerability to illness and disease associated with social marginalization such as misuse of alcohol and drugs, sexual exploitation, violence abuse, and HIV/AIDS. An example of this phenomenon can be seen in the high rate of school drop out and a corresponding high rate of alcohol and drug abuse amongst Aboriginal children in Canada, the U.S.A. and many Latin America countries (Cook, 1998).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child goes further than any other human rights treaty in promoting a framework for children's economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights based on sound developmental theory. A child's inherent right to an education is specifically laid out in articles 28 and 29 of the CRC. Article 28 supports a child's right to an education "with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity". Article 29 provides the ideal goals for children's education based on holistic development principles, respect for human rights, parental authority, cultural identity, language and values, as well as "respect for the national values of the country from which the child may originate, as well as for other cultures". In addition, the preamble to the CRC specifically emphasises the primary role of the family, community and culture in the socialisation and education of the child. Finally, the children's

convention recognises the child as a person with inherent human rights – a subject and not an object of rights.

These rights can be roughly categorised into groups of articles focusing on provision, protection, promotion and participation. The latter CRC principle is extremely important and is based on a notion of the child’s “evolving capacity” to participate in his or her own environment and development. This is critical to the evolution of culture, as children need to be socialised into a culture through participation in education, and involvement in various forms of civil society. These forms of civil society change across cultures, however in each case an interesting interplay exists between children and culture in which young people are both the recipients and future shapers and stewards of culture.

Article 30 of the CRC, the right of an indigenous child to his or her own culture, has special significance for the global community, nation states in which indigenous peoples reside, and for professionals involved in indigenous education. Specifically, Article 30 states that:

In those States in which...persons of indigenous origin exist, a child who...is indigenous shall not be denied in community, with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language (CRC Article 30).

There are two other articles in the CRC that specifically refer to indigenous children. The first of these is article 17.d, the right to access to appropriate information and the necessity of the mass media to respect the linguistic rights of the indigenous

child. The other article is 29.d, the need to promote respect for all cultures including those of indigenous peoples.

The International Labour Organisation Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples also articulates these rights in Article 28, the right of an indigenous child to his or her language, and article 29, the imparting of knowledge and skills to help indigenous children participate in their own community and in the national community. With regard to education these articles can be grouped together to: 1) uphold an indigenous child's right to education based on cultural values; 2) promote indigenous languages; 3) provide access to various forms of communication and appropriate information; and 3) support skills enabling their participation in the local, national and international community.

It has been shown that for many indigenous young people positive self esteem is very closely linked to meaningful participation in community practices that connect a young person with a larger sense of their personal and cultural identity (Pepper and Henry, 1995). This need is supported in CRC Article 8, the right to an identity, name and nationality. When this article is combined with CRC Articles 17, 29, and 30 and ILO Convention 169 articles 28 and 29 they become a powerful lens on the other articles in the CRC in implementing and monitoring indigenous children's education in a way that is culturally and developmentally appropriate.

Traditional Aboriginal Teachings Supporting Children's Development

Many indigenous peoples place great emphasis on the interconnectedness between the land, and the social and supernatural worlds. For the purposes of this paper, songs,

prayers, dance (men dressed as “Thunder-Beings” in West Coast cultures) represent the most formal way in which connectedness with the natural and supernatural worlds is represented. Each community through their own ancestral connections determines the way in which sacred phenomena are represented. It is the action of ritual/dance specialists to return individuals or communities to states of balance.

Children born to traditional families in this modern period have stronger chances at success in life if the fundamental values of the culture are reinforced. Similarly, children who do not have the same advantage are best served by a process which enhances their capacity to understand the traditional Indigenous strengths of their people.

A child who learns the many connections between themselves and other worlds has the capacity to maintain order and balance within the community when their parents time has come to and end. When a child has learned to keep still, to differentiate periods of play, and the required restraint before singing or dancing, then the child’s capacity to access and apply the teachings of the ancestors and of the old people then the ability to cope is enhanced. Of this relationship the traditionally trained elder, *Siem na Sulxwane*, Dr. Samuel Sam,OC (Coast Salish) said:

“Everything is a balance. Body, mind and spirit has to be balanced to be able to teach those things and listen to the teachings and carry that with you throughout the years. If you don’t, then when something is missing, you don’t hear those teachings about how we should look after that, things that were left to us as Indian people.” (Sam, Personal Communication, 1995)

Traditionally, Aboriginal learning is accomplished by observing adult role models. This style of learning is sometimes referred to as “field dependent” as opposed to the abstract or rote learning of Euro-American schooling, which is more “field

independent” (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). A child raised under the influences of traditionally trained elders has the advantage of knowing at a very early age the variety of ways in which interpersonal behaviour reinforces good connections and responsibilities to each other. Often prayers and or advice give to young people reminds everyone of the need to truly love one another, to take care of one another and of continuing the process of moving as a family. With repetition the child learns the many and varied ways old people listen to new information, ways in which inquiries if any are made, ways in which new information is discussed with their contemporaries, and finally, learning the ways in which solutions are brought forward.

The old people are particularly astute at identifying ‘good methods’ ‘healing methods’ to new problems. The capacity of the modern tribal organisation to fully utilise and apply that knowledge is particularly crucial at this time in particular activities related to membership, the meeting process and education. The challenge for old people is to work with young people in a new and powerful ways and to be able to do so while still maintaining the core cultural integrity provided to them.

Tribal peoples throughout the Indigenous world consistently reinforce the importance of children learning how to watch, to listen, and keep quiet. Young people, even those raised without the advantage of consistent stable traditional upbringing have learned the value of prayer and songs in the course of their healing. The challenge therefore is to fully understand why the traditions utilise preliminary periods of training, preliminary periods of quiet and restraint and to bring these cultural phenomena forward during initial periods of discourse.

With the assistance of traditionally trained elders, such as *Ninogad* (Kwagiulth traditionally trained person) or *Siem Na Sulxwane* (Coast Salish traditionally trained person), it should be possible to identify complimentary methods to revisit the means by which spiritual safety/strength can be utilised for this vulnerable population.

The added advantage for children with traditional training is the capacity to work with *Siem Na Sulxwane/Ninogad* in a new time and within entirely new places. The ability to watch, listen in a quiet way, unencumbered by secular thoughts, represents the old peoples way of preparing the child for the many lessons in life. A child with consistent reinforcement and repetition has the capacity to apply oral teachings to the present situation and to do so in a sustained manner. If old people are feeling vulnerable now, then ways have to be found to assist their relatives and students prepare for changes to their world.

This holds true for children's rights where a child's right to an education is often seen as being inextricably linked to their immediate physical environment, the seasons, and an adherence to "natural law". These principles are only peripherally addressed in the CRC in Article 29, the need to foster a respect for the environment, and in Article 24, a child's right to a clean environment. There is, however, a need to link these articles in the CRC to other international treaties supporting the environment and indigenous heritage rights.

These include the Convention on Biodiversity, in which the importance of Indigenous stewardship of the land is addressed both in the preamble and in article 8.j.. Similarly, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (Agenda 21) emphasises the need to educate children on the need for sustainable development and

care for the natural environment. Specifically, Principle 10 states: “Environment issues are best handled with the concerns of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level”.

Principle 21 affirms the role of youth in this process by proclaiming: “The creativity, ideals, and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilised to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all.”

The CRC’s focus on a holistic educational model is founded on: 1) a developmental perspective; 2) a notion of evolving capacity; 3) the importance placed on an interconnected, nurturing environment; and 4) the centrality of involving children in decision making in and their own lives and in issues affecting their community. These themes reflect many key principles of children’s healthy development. Recent cross-cultural literature (Myers, 1992) comparing children’s developmental trends highlight a number of characteristics common to children in most cultures that support the CRC articles and their promotion of an indigenous child’s right to their culture. These developmental characteristics include:

1. Children’s development is multidimensional. To adequately describe a child’s development requires more than measuring how well a child is developing his or her ability to think or walk. It requires looking at all dimensions of development: the physical motor dimensions (the ability to move, co-ordinate); the cognitive dimension (the ability to think and reason); the emotional dimension (the ability to feel); and the social (the ability to relate to others). Reference to “psychosocial” encompasses all three of these dimensions.

2. Child development is integral. More than one dimension of the child's development are interrelated and must be considered together. Emotional development, for example, affects physical and cognitive development. A child under emotional stress may be affected in terms of his or her physical development and ability to learn. Changes along one dimension both influence and are influenced by development along the others; thus attention to the "whole child" and emphasis on the "total" or "integrated" approach to programming for child development is required.
3. Development occurs continually. Development begins pre-natally and continues throughout life. Child development must be seen as a part of human development occurring over the entire life span. Early development affects development occurring in later years as well as behaviour and attainment in all of later life. A child is always developing and changing conditions undercut or support existing patterns of development.
4. Child development occurs in interaction with people and things. Development occurs as a child responds to, learns from, and seeks to affect his or her biophysical and social environments. Fostering development requires responses to initiatives taken by the child as well as providing stimulation.
5. Development is patterned but unique. All children develop in a general sequence. The rate. Character and quality of development vary from child to child. Individual variation is due to the interaction between a child's special biological make up and the particular environment in which it struggles to survive and develop. The rate of development varies depending on the family, culture, community, as well as the child.

6. The goals of child development. The main goals of a child's development across all cultures and individual differences is to adapt to and seek some mastery over his or her surroundings. There are several levels of environments influencing the child's development. The immediate family environment (or household), the community (or close social networks), a larger social, political and economic context (with attendant institutions, laws, policies, and norms), and a culture (providing values, rituals, and beliefs).

Education, in its many forms, is the vehicle through which many of these developmental principles can be applied. The model of education varies greatly across cultures and is equally diverse amongst indigenous peoples. There are some common themes here however, and many of them hold hands with the holistic vision of the CRC and commonly held principles of development. The most important of these are: the centrality of the family, community and culture in shaping all aspects of children's development, the importance of a holistic, integral environment for children, and the necessity to promote their capacity to participate in interacting with their environment.

Most indigenous cultures have applied, and to some extent still do apply, these principles through an intuitive, experiential model of education in which the community is the child's school. All aspects of life are imbued with a sense of the sacred. In this way a cradleboard, for example, provides an infant with a sense of belonging, and toys, games and dolls carry a sense of spirit symbolising adult activities. Storytelling is the link to the past. The rhythm of language, song, music, and activities not only comforts the child but provides a way to learn by listening rather than talking.

Creation stories carry special significance. Each nation has a different world-view that is taught from the time of birth. It is from these concepts of creation that the purpose behind the land, sun, moon, stars, wind, water, plants, animals, and spirit forces is made clear. Creation is a sacred act. It is kept alive in the stories told in indigenous homes, in rituals performed in the community and in the arts and crafts of the people (National Museum of the American Indian, 1994).

Elders with traditional training in these areas are the key to transmitting this knowledge. A submission to the Canadian House of Commons Study on Aboriginal Wellness (1992) clarifies this position:

For indigenous people, authentic elders are living models of transcendence, that is they are the epitome of human experience in an awakened mind (...) Authentic elders today are not necessarily chronologically old. Rather, they are individuals who are possessed to have many gifts with which they can perform multiple roles. The leadership hat is only one of many that elders wear. They are also looked to as historians, teachers, cultural workers, ecologists, environmentalists and healers' (p. 21).

Noeli Pocaterra, President of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, takes this one step further in describing the way in which the notion of family, elders, women, and children, and are all interconnected with the health of an indigenous community:

According to our vision of the world, it is impossible to speak of the family without reinstating our elders as spiritual guides for our behaviour; the woman as advice giver, fighter, reproducer of life and the backbone to the preservation of our peoples; the youth as our future generations and the children as the continuity of our peoples, because they are our own lives.

Colonisation, enforced schooling, and acculturation from state and church have resulted in a breakdown and the loss of many of these educational traditions. Many indigenous children today must learn to walk in the world of their traditional culture as

well as in the world of an educational system imposed by the dominant society. While aspects of western education are essential for young people to succeed in the contemporary world, the form of education presented to many indigenous children is biased towards a Euro-american mindset that is highly individualistic and is not always compatible with the indigenous world view. There is now a greater need than ever before, therefore, to find ways of reconnecting indigenous youth with the holders of traditional knowledge in order to help these young people “make their mind strong and make the best of both worlds (Sam, 1995)”.

Creating New Paradigms of Aboriginal Education

To return to the image of the thunderbird: this mythical image of change represents the time of creation and reinforces phenomena more powerful than the people. The image of the Thunderbeing represents the transformation each community creates to show its relationship to each other, to the ancestors and of course the natural and supernatural worlds. Finally, ThunderVoices represents the ways in which the old people within the community pass the rules and regulations from one generation to another and represent the most visible link to all things sacred.

The consistent application of traditional Indigenous values (for example, respect for the old, emphasis on sharing, group responsibilities) lays the ground for the connectedness a young person has with the ancestral past. It is the voice of the old people that with consistent application determines the path away from fear and vulnerability. Children are taught their responsibility to each other, their families, their

ancestral past, the teachings of the family and finally their responsibility to the way of the people.

Not all children today can have experience of traditional training of elders like Dr. Samuel Sam, described in the following process:

“When I was thirteen or fourteen..I went up to the mountain and did my cleansing baths. I had to go up there for a month. As time went on I got really close to the animals and then my uncle said, “Okay, you’re ready to start your learning on speaking. He said there are different tones that you use when speaking. One when there is a memorial and sadness in the house. In teaching you have a different tone and to lecture, you have a different tone. I had to sit there till lessons were finished then I was able to go out. Most times when I was playing I was doing something that would be useful some day (Sam, 1996).”

However, ways can be developed to help Aboriginal children become reconnected with these teachings and their traditional teachers. In this way, old teachings make themselves known in a new time, in a modern time. The voices of the elders are at least twenty generations old, their voices frame the ways in which the Thunderbeings walk across this great land to help the people.

Their voices are a direct link to the powerful places of creation, and the places where songs, prayers and ancestors operate. They hold information useful to the modern child, to the modern organization related to community and or personal healing. Their lives have transformed radically, and for the most part they have applied the traditions to lengthen their time with us. In essence *Siem Sulxwane* and *Ninogad*, or whichever term the community uses to identify traditionally trained elders are the most visible link to the land of the Thunderbeings.

In this way too, they learned indeed the dead are not powerless, indeed the dead continue to work amongst us and finally the ancestors have left places in our midst where

balance, joy and playfulness, songs, prayers, advice, ritual wait for young people to discover. Like their ancestors before them, like their immediate relatives who have held places for them they too have the capacity to “Make their Minds Strong, and to Use the Best of Both Worlds.”

Recommendations for Applying Children’s Rights in Support of Aboriginal

Children’s Education

The implementation of education for indigenous children must occur at various levels. First, the CRC in its entirety, and in particular through Article 30, can be used to advocate for the creation of stronger legislation putting Aboriginal education back in the hands of Aboriginal peoples. Second, existing legislation must be applied to form more culturally grounded policy which must then be put into practice in the context of Aboriginal self governance.

In moving from policy to practice, the Convention’s 4 guiding articles can provide a useful implementation and monitoring lens with which to implement indigenous children’s rights to meaningful education. These 4 articles are: 1) the right to non-discrimination (Article 2); 2) the application of the best interests test in determining children’s needs (Article 3); 3) the right to life, survival and development (Article 6); and 4) the right of the child to be heard and considered (Article 12).

Some suggestions for programming based on experiences in partnerships with Aboriginal organisations on Vancouver Island include:

- 1) Non-discrimination. Wherever possible do not remove indigenous children from their family, community and culture; ensuring the support for traditional paradigms of

education service delivery; and promoting the involvement of young people in curriculum design and delivery. Elders who are seen as specialists in children's education and health and well being should also be consulted and involved in curriculum design and delivery. Respect appropriate protocol in these matters. Try to design programs that are inclusive of vulnerable and marginalized youth and create a place of safety for elders and young people in doing this.

- 2) Best-interests. Allow for community discussion on the meaning of best interests as it applies to children. Look at the principle from a holistic perspective including physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual dimensions. Seek input from elders and youth in this discussion. Identify cultural values and practices that either support or inhibit this principle.
- 3) Life, Survival and Development. Encourage the development of education that is inclusive of traditional culture. Research cultural concepts of birth, child rearing, initiation and naming. Focus on life skills, and experiential learning. Involve elders in sharing traditional teachings. Include a strong environmental focus in teaching children about the interconnectedness between their cultural heritage, natural heritage, and language. Promote ecological literacy. Encourage the teaching and learning of traditional arts and crafts as an important form of self-expression and medium through which core cultural values are transmitted.
- 4) Participation. Allow for traditional forms of "participation" based on listening and being respectful. Recognise the importance of good relationships as a fundamental starting place for participation. Let young people explore notions of participation in ways that are safe, encourage positive self-esteem and foster a healthy sense of

cultural identity. Allow youth to explore these concepts through various media and participatory research programs (e.g. interviewing elders). Support the active participation of young people in various forms of civil society in both the indigenous and non-indigenous community.

If traditional teachings are more effectively incorporated into Aboriginal education, then education will not only become more likely to serve the developmental needs of Aboriginal children and youth; it will also improve society in fostering a culture of human rights. Such a process benefits both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in creating a more active and engaged civil society that has far reaching impacts on the ways in which not only education, but also health, social services, and the role of government itself are shaped to serve all voices in society. Indeed, “There is no death, only a change of worlds” and the old people who remember the songs, the prayers, the values and recall the importance of treating each other well, wait. Their teachings are at least twenty generations old and when the old people speak the rules associated with transformation and change allow the flight of the thunderbird to take place in another time and place.

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ⁱ The term “indigenous” is used to refer to people who identify themselves according to : 1) priority in time with respect to the occupation and use of a specific territory.; 2) the voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness, which includes aspects of language, social organization, religion and spiritual values, modes of production, laws and institutions; 3) self identification, as well as recognition by other groups, or by State authorities, as distinct collectively; and 4) an experience of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination, whether or not these conditions presently exist. These factors do not constitute an inclusive or comprehensive definition. Rather, they represent factors which may be present to a greater or lesser degree in different regions and in different national and local contexts (UN Economic and Social Council, 1996)