

Marks of a Colonial Context in Institutions

01. Colonialism a **political-economic** phenomenon whereby various empire states nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world. Sometimes this took the form of stationing of an occupying army with a governor from the conquering nation; other times it took the form of establishing a self-ruled, vassal, dependent government. **Purposes** of colonialism included economic exploitation of the colony's natural resources, creation of new markets for the colonizer, and extension of the colonizer's way of life beyond its national borders.

02. Colonialism is accompanied by *colonization*; that is, the physical settling of people from the imperial country. Before colonization can be effected, the indigenous population must be **subdued and assimilated or converted** to the culture of the colonists (**enslaved or killed**); otherwise, an arrangement of mutual accommodation must be established by the imposition of a treaty or an alliance. Typical aspects of colonialism include: racial and cultural inequality between ruling and subject people, political and legal domination by the imperial/colonial power, and exploitation of the subject people.

03. Colonization occurs when a people is conquered by another people through **destroying and/or weakening basic social structures** of the conquered society and replacing those structures with those of the conquering culture. Colonization robs the colonized of most of their land and resources. And sometimes involves forced relocation off the traditional lands – placing the resettling the group in the midst of other peoples – creating inter-ethnic hostilities, competition over scarce resources, and eventual conflict. Loss of the land base means loss of the foundation for the group's traditional social, economic and cultural ways of life. Colonization robs the colonized of their cultural inheritance. Colonizers view and treat the colonized as lesser human beings; this leads to stigmatization, shame, and sense of worthlessness. The **dehumanization** and racist response to the conquered people facilitates the interests of the colonizer – assuages guilt by viewing the conquered as less than fully human, facilitates domination and lessens resistance. (Bill Mussell, member of Skwah First Nation, “Cultural Paths for Decolonization.”)

04. Antecedents to colonialism: Colonialism receives its moral authority in the Doctrine of Discovery of 1493: The Doctrine asserts that on the basis of certain knowledge [above all questioning and doubt], through the lordship of Jesus and acting as vicars of Jesus [representative/deputy, vested in the Papal apostolic line] and on behalf of the interests of God [the propagation of the Catholic faith], the Doctrine of Discovery, confers power and authority and gives, grants, and assigns all the peoples, cities, camps, places, villages to the Spanish King. The Papal Bull of the Doctrine of Discovery places the king and his envoys and captains Lords over all lands and peoples with rightful claim to all resources and wealth, with full power to make decisions and laws, and to rule and govern.

REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Which of these MARKS of a COLONIAL CONTEXT are present in your institution? After noting the marks that you find, triggered by the twenty-six probes, note what other marks of a colonial context are present in your institution.

Social Analysis Worldview, Knowledge, Critical thinking

01. Does not provide knowledge and resources to critically examine what is happening; obscures the history—fails to link outcomes of a colonial conquest and its justification in the Christian Doctrine of Discovery with contemporary racial hierarchy and racial disparities; neglects historical-critical

analysis (i.e., the exploitive enrichment of whites and co-incidental, consequential impoverishment and immiseration of Native Americans and African Americans).

- 02. Holds a worldview that understands morality as an individual, optional concern and not as an ethical-political stance—closed to opportunities of political awareness or involvement that would include questioning its own use of resources.
- 03. In its institutional story of origins (the founder, history of institutional origins and rationale for its institutional existence) is silent about (sometimes because of true ignorance of—not knowing that one does not know) and misses the colonial context of how its land and resources were required, where its political alliance were invested—connection to genocide of Indigenous People, removal of Indigenous People and theft of their land; its connection to and benefit from US slavery, and the exploitation of oppressed minorities. Because of this, institutional leaders miss the ethical principles of people's relationship to the state, such as the imperial context of the lives of Jeremiah, Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and the ways these and such prophets spoke against Empire.
- 04. Stymies historical understanding through reluctance to face their own and white their ancestors centrality in the colonial and imperialistic history of racial and other oppression—Christianity (Catholic and Protestant) being central as the religion of those who conquered, colonized, exploited and profited unjustifiably from others wealth and lands

Embodies Colonial Power Relationships

- 05. Perpetuates the legacy of colonial arrangements (a domination system)—those who have control and power continue to have control and power. Absolute power remains with the colonizer. Although that power may be invoked infrequently, it is always “there.”
- 06. Has no vehicle available to represent the worldviews of the colonized, so the worldviews of the colonized are not present.
- 07. Communicates and interacts with communities of color from a position that is hierarchical, superior, and patronizing (assumptions of dominance and legitimate power over the other).
- 08. Is not actively involved in teaching the disenfranchised, disempowered or the poor to liberate themselves from the ruling elite or “over-lords.”
- 09. Understands its self to have the power, right, and ability to define the interests of the colonized.
- 10. Its primary work is never to decolonize itself—this can never be accepted as what the “interests of the colonized” most require.

Lacks Moral Commitment/Conviction

- 11. Doesn't “push,” uphold, or enforce the laws, rules, proclamations, resolutions, or policies it has already enacted in support of equity, non-discrimination, justice, or restitution.
- 12. Avoids what knowledge is available—decision makers of the organization do not engage in serious study of race or racism from a “critical studies perspective,” or attend workshops (i.e., antiracism) or other events that would start to lift away the shroud that's thrown over everything).
- 13. Defines “what counts,” “what's important” as that which contributes to maintaining the status quo. White epistemology (white way of knowing, colonialist worldview) is what counts and is given priority and weight. Therefore antiracism / decolonization work is not counted as essential or critical to the values and mission of the organization. At best, such work is optional.
- 14. Does not follow-up on what is learned following an antiracism or a white privilege workshop—hearing but not doing.
- 15. Fails to address the colonialism in the members' own personal lives and in contemporary life as a society—failing to speak out against the immoralities and hypocrisies in our lives that Jesus, Gandhi, and King spoke against in their time.

**Does not acknowledge/name its own position in the colonial order—
does not “see itself” in any of the analyses**

16. Private property, consumption and other “marks of success” in the colonial project are normalized and sometimes explicitly endorsed in institutional culture and in its symbolic language – not naming the problematic of wealth and consumption as necessarily being the outcome of an oppressive colonial (domination or capitalistic) system.
17. Justifies and normalizes the culture of exploitation; accepts the whiteness of the organization as “the way it is” – the norm – despite the harms experienced by People of Color who enter.
18. Assumes the universality and rightness of white norms and of the legitimacy of white privilege, perpetuating the colonial mindset in relations with people of color.
19. Cultivates a colonial cultural climate – instead of condemning the alliance of the organization with the dominator interests and sensibilities, the cultural climate is one of celebrating the fruits of imperialism (costly trips, attained political power, high-priced charity, educational levels, land base provided by homesteaded farms and GI bill financing, recreation and lake cabins in “white space” areas).
20. Is characterized by self-aggrandizement and celebration of the benefits that have come from the colonial project and whiteness.
21. Is characterized by self-satisfaction of having realized the values of success in dominant society, with no reference to the costs to other people of what those values represent.
22. Supports the alliance of the organization with the trappings of power, including educated elites from other nations.

Political Action (or Inaction) that Accommodates an Ongoing Empire

23. Uses 501(c)(3) status and other economic factors as rationale to block equity, social justice, or antiracism activity of the organization.
24. Serves as a cultural mediator or cultural broker on behalf of the colonizer community to colonized community, uncritically transmitting, upholding, or enforcing the values of the colonizer to communities of Color.
25. Is invested in the advantages coming from capitalism (domination) and from its members who are doing the work of continuing the system to block radical changes – the kinds of changes that would be necessary to restructure things to lift the burden of oppression from the poor.
26. Engages in activities that soften the “punch” of oppression without changing the basic relationships that produce oppression. The attention given to the oppressed is in the form of charity.
27. Recognizes and sanctions organizations whose work supports the colonial project; does not ally itself with organizations opposing the colonial project (“too radical” or “too political”).