

Chapter 12

Global Technoethics and Cultural Tensions in Canada

INTRODUCTION

From the time I was a child until now I have seen changes. We once used snow shoes and now we use skidoos and trucks and to get to our land we use airplanes. The reality is that development will happen but that we would like to have a say in the pace that this happens to try to hold back and allow our people time; time for our land time to heal, and time to allow my people to adapt to these changes that are happening so fast. --Matthew Coon Come, Grand Chief of Quebec's Grand Council of the Crees.

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Winston Churchill once said that history is written by the victors. This statement from Churchill highlights the challenge that marginalized local cultures face in the global world and how important parts of their cultural history can get left behind and forgotten in the drive for national prosperity in the global economy. This chapter focuses on the cultural tensions that arise when a technology rich culture threatens the sustainability of a technology poor culture. A pilot case study of cultural tensions between aboriginal people and dominant French and English Canadian populations. This pilot study explores how technoethical considerations are intertwined with historical, political, and social factors that have threatened the sustainability of aboriginal culture in Canada. Findings suggest that more attention must be invested to ensure that that globalization efforts by technology rich dominant cultures do not lead to the demise of technology poor marginalized cultures. Given the longstanding history and broad scope of aboriginal problems in Canada efforts to revive the cultural history and identity of aboriginal people is suggested as one option to help rebuild aboriginal trust and willingness to collaborate with dominant Canadian populations on global initiatives.

BACKGROUND

What is Culture and how does it emerge? Culture can be described as the collection of symbols, language, behaviors, practices, customs, traditions, beliefs, and values held by people brought together with common needs and common challenges for survival. Culture is embedded within family and professional life, communities and villages, and organizations within society.

What is Global Culture? The idea of a global culture first became popularized by Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s in describing the shift in society from an individualistic visual print culture to an oral culture (tribal culture) dominated by electronic media, increased interdependence, and a greater sense of collective identity. McLuhan (1962) referred to this new form of social organization he referred to as a 'global village':

Print is the extreme phase of alphabet culture that detribalizes or decollectivizes man in the first instance. Print raises the visual features of alphabet to highest intensity of definition. Thus print carries the individuating power of the phonetic alphabet much further than manuscript culture could ever do. Print is the technology of individualism. If men decided to modify this visual technology by an electric technology, individualism would also be modified (p. 158)

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