

**Neoliberalism, Mineral Development and Indigenous
People:
A Framework for Analysis of Convergences and
Divergences in Canada and Australia.**

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Abstract

There have been suggestions in recent literature that neoliberalism and globalisation present positive opportunities for Indigenous communities engaging in resource development projects on their traditional lands. This paper will present evidence from preliminary research on the neoliberal restructuring that has endured for those Indigenous communities of North Western Queensland affected by the development of the Century Zinc Mine in the late 1990s. Initial findings indicate that the state has devolved some of its responsibilities to the mining company in relation to Indigenous development and service provision. This paper develops a theoretical and analytical framework to enable an examination of the implications of this voluntary devolution of responsibility for Indigenous development and service provision and questions whether this represents a positive opportunity for Indigenous people in the region.

Introduction

At the current historical moment, perhaps the choice offered to remote living Indigenous people is too influenced by the dominant logic of neoliberalism: engage with the mainstream as individual subjects or miss out (Altman 2009:15).

Currently there are those who would insist the recent and ongoing financial crisis has pre-empted the demise of neoliberalism as the dominant global ideology. We are currently bombarded with 'ostentatious repudiations of the free-market credo from across the political spectrum' (Peck 2008:94). Indeed, Australia's Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd recently made such repudiation, arguing 'the great neoliberal experiment of the past 30 years represented by Thatcher, Reagan, Greenspan and John Howard has failed'. (cited in Kelly 2009). However the influence of neoliberalism, both as a discourse and a process, has become so hegemonic and pervasive that it has been incorporated in to the common sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world (Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism may be repudiated as the dominant ideology, but the hegemonic consensus it obtained is not easily dissipated, and it is therefore not unreasonable to still believe that the processes and techniques of neoliberalism are still entrenched 'everywhere' (Peck and Ticknell 2002:380). Unpacking the legacy of a neoliberal hegemonic consensus is, we argue, a task worthy of serious intellectual effort.

Stewart-Harawira (2005) believes that the restructuring that occurred under neoliberalism was an unmitigated social disaster for all but the most privileged, and that often the most vulnerable in society were impacted most

by neoliberal reforms, including Indigenous peoples. Indeed, there is increasing evidence from many sources on the negative impacts of neoliberalism for Indigenous communities, with Gordon (2006:18) arguing neoliberalism represents 'the intensification of ... accumulation by dispossession' for Indigenous peoples. In remote Australia, where many Indigenous communities reside, the mining industry seems to provide a stark example of this phenomenon, as continuing profits rely heavily on the exploitation of Indigenous lands and communities. While mineral development is often acknowledged as the harbinger of the intensification of neoliberal pressures, conversely, it is also often touted as the panacea for all the social and economic problems occurring in Indigenous communities, particularly those remote Indigenous communities with few other opportunities for economic development ¹(see Howlett 2007).

The mining industry is seen to provide a unique employment opportunity for Indigenous people in remote areas, which can reduce Indigenous dependence on the state, and empower individuals and communities to take responsibility for their future (Lawrence 2005:42). Recently, several authors have highlighted the opportunities and benefits that mining as a neoliberal exercise may present for Indigenous communities. Slowey (2008), O'Faircheallaigh (2004) and McDonald *et al.* (2006) have all argued in their various ways that neoliberalism has presented opportunities for Indigenous people to gain greater control over the material conditions of their existence, and created a space for them to exercise their agency. There is thus intellectual debate on the complex and sometimes deeply ambiguous nature of neoliberalism, and its impacts upon Indigenous peoples (McDonald *et al.* 2006: 209).

Despite this disparity in interpretations of the implications of neoliberalism for Indigenous communities, there has been very little empirical research done on the changes that neoliberal restructuring has wrought on Indigenous peoples impacted by mineral developments in Australia.² Following Peck (2004:396) we contend there is a significant role for theoretically informed empirical research that can track the actual patterns and practices of neoliberal restructuring that may occur in Indigenous domains as a result of mineral developments. This current research project will specifically focus on one aspect of neoliberal restructuring - the extent and implications of state devolution of responsibility for service provision and infrastructure development - for a remote Indigenous community in North Western

¹ This is despite research that suggests that the benefits from mineral development are often not realised by Indigenous people, and that the negative impacts can be unmitigated and substantial (Howlett 2007, 2010).

² Lawrence's research (2005) is an exception. She developed an insightful analysis of the processes and techniques of neoliberalism for the Walpiri people.

Queensland, a community that resides next to one of the major mineral development projects in Queensland, the Century Zinc Mine.

The aim of this paper is to develop a theoretically informed analytical framework for ongoing and future empirical research on the outcomes of neoliberal restructuring in Indigenous communities. That research will focus on the provision of services and infrastructure to Indigenous communities impacted by the development of the Century Mine in North Western Queensland. The ultimate goal of that research is to develop a comprehensive picture of the impacts of neoliberal restructuring that occurs in Indigenous domains affected by mineral development, which can serve as a comparison with material from Canada, to identify convergences and divergences between the Canadian and Australian experiences. This paper therefore focuses on reviewing the literature on neoliberalism, Indigenous peoples and mineral development in order to develop the theoretical framework that will be employed in that research project. Preliminary desktop research indicates that a number of mining companies are currently involved in some form of service and program delivery within Indigenous communities, particularly in relation to employment programs and training issues. This paper does not offer an analysis of these early findings. That will occur in future papers. Rather, it offers these findings in support of our claim that there is a need for detailed empirical research on the processes and impacts that stem from neoliberal restructuring in Indigenous communities impacted by mineral developments. This paper predominantly seeks to develop a robust theoretical framework for that research.

The paper is structured in the following manner. First, it provides a discussion on what neoliberalism actually is. Highlighted in this discussion is the debate in social science literature between those who employ a political economy approach to understanding neoliberalism, and those who argue for a poststructuralist or governmentality approach. Somewhat of a theoretical impasse between these two approaches currently exists and as a means of moving forward from this theoretical impasse, this paper suggests a critical realist approach may provide the necessary robust theoretical lens for an analysis of neoliberalism. Following this exhaustive overview of neoliberalism and critical realism, this paper reviews the literature on how neoliberalism in general, has impacted Indigenous people in particular. Finally, the paper reviews the literature on mineral development as a form of neoliberalism in Indigenous communities, focussing on the consequences of the neoliberal restructuring of service provision and infrastructure development to Indigenous communities. The paper concludes with a re-emphasis of the need for this research.

Neoliberalism – what are we talking about?

There has everywhere been an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political- economic practices and thinking since the 1970s (Harvey 2005:2).

There is perhaps no more pervasive, nor contested term in the social sciences than neoliberalism. As Castree (2006:1-3) claims 'there is little consensus in theoretical terms for what counts as neoliberalism in either geography or the other social sciences.' For some it remains seriously underspecified and little more than 'a radical-theoretical slogan'. For others, it endures as the dominant logic of policymaking in most countries (Cahill 2007:221). Ward and England (2008:2) claim that it appears to have become the ubiquitous political common sense, yet ascertaining a precise definition of neoliberalism is no simple feat. Neoliberalism means many things to many people, and not surprisingly, has been labelled a 'perplexingly amorphous political economic phenomena' (Peck 2004:394). Nonetheless, an analysis that pertains to focus on the effects of the neoliberal restructuring of services and infrastructure for Indigenous communities requires a conceptual and discursive picture of neoliberalism.

For Peck (2004) neoliberalism can be regarded as a contemporary form of economic imperialism which has been accompanied by rising inequalities in different types of cultural, economic, environmental, social and political capital. For Heynen *et al.* (2007:16 -17) the term refers to an economic and political philosophy that questions, and in some versions, entirely rejects government interventions in the market and people's relationships to the economy, and eschews social and collective controls over the behaviour and practices of firms, the movement of capital, and the regulation of socio-economic relationships. Neoliberalism is represented by a fairly common set of discourses, ideologies and practices that remain the most dominant development in social regulation in the post-Keynesian era. The expansion of opportunities for capital investment and accumulation by reworking state-market-civil society that occurs under neoliberalism, combined with a stress on individual rights and freedoms, especially private property rights, results in a re-working of the way human society and non-human systems and beings relate (Heynen *et al.* 2007:23).

For Bargh (2007) neoliberalism is those practices and policies which seek to extend the market mechanism into areas of the community previously organised and governed in other ways. This process involves the entrenching of the central tenets of neoliberalism: free trade and the free mobility of capital, accompanied by a broad reduction in the ambit and role of the state

(Bargh 2007:1). England and Ward (2008:3) summarise it as an economic and political orthodoxy marked by commitments to policies of free trade, privatization, deregulation and welfare state retrenchment. They contend it encompasses such issues as the cutting of public expenditure on social services, the elimination of the concept of “public goods” and the restructuring of the welfare state (2008:7). For Cahill (2007:226) a defining feature of neoliberalism is the transfer of resources from public services to private providers in the name of creating a market for such services, and of fostering choice. Thus there has been a restructuring of the state, the market and the public services under neoliberalism.

A fundamental critical trope developed around the belief that neoliberalism instigated the shrinking of the nation state, and that the market would replace the state as the major social, economic and political regulator (Peck 2004:392), based on the belief that the state and its interventions are obstacles to economic and social development (Clarke 2002:771). The reality is, that under neoliberalism, the state has continued to play a strong, active, interventionist, and coercive role and has restructured *itself* to be a conduit and transmission belt for the new rules and requirements of the global economy (O’Tuithail, *et al.* 1998:15). Neoliberalism entails the imposition of a new set of regulations, often designed to open up freedoms for capital and to discipline, or restrict, the freedoms of labour, and Cahill (2007:222) insists this has led to a restructuring, and sometime, strengthening, of the state. States can block, adapt to, and mediate neoliberal tendencies. In short states have agency in the face of neoliberalism. Harvey concurs, insisting that very often the state is the architect of its own restructuring and can selectively manage its own restructuring process (Harvey 2005). What definitively has occurred under neoliberal restructuring, and which is the focus of this paper, is the deliberate and intentional privatisation of many services that were previously handled by the state and have been devolved to the private sector, such as education, health employment and training and infrastructure development. However analysis of the actual patterns and processes of neoliberal restructuring, such as devolution of state services, is complicated by the cleavage in analytical approaches that have developed within most social science disciplines.

Divergent Perspectives

As with all political phenomena, epistemological and ontological positions influence what neoliberalism will be determined to be, and even if it can be determined to be anything at all. Indeed some advocates insist ‘there is no such thing as neoliberalism!’ (Barnett 2005:9). The two dominant theoretical approaches to the understanding of neoliberalism have emerged from the

Marxist political economy approach and the poststructuralist or governmentality approach. The former prefer analytical focus to privilege the identification of the similarities between different forms of neoliberalism, and hence give weight to the claim for neoliberalism as a hegemonic unified entity (Larner 2003:510). The latter approach prefers to view neoliberalism as a process, - neoliberalisation - which is contextual and contingent rather than a monolithic and hegemonic force (Ward and England 2008:250) and gives analytical weight to identification of the differences in the outcomes and processes of neoliberalisation. What follows is a discussion of the dangers in taking an either/or approach to analysis of neoliberalism and a justification for a more nuanced approach that incorporates both theoretical imperatives.

The Marxist political approaches to neoliberalism emphasise the shared features and generic characteristics of neoliberalism (Ward and England 2008:257). Harvey (2005) argues for a conception of neoliberalism as a global project to restore, renew, and expand the conditions for capital accumulation and, in related fashion, to restore power to economic elites (or to establish it where it did not already exist). He defines the central elements of the neoliberal era as featuring the rollback of regulations on capital accumulation, coupled with reductions in social safety net provisions and state-coordinated redistribution of wealth and income, with evident consequences in spiralling social inequality. Thus, as mentioned earlier, the political economy approach argues for a conception of neoliberalism as a hegemonic, unified entity, and for an analytical focus that privileges the identification of the similarities between different forms of neoliberalism.

Larner (2003:510) however argues that there is a real danger in reifying neoliberalism as a hegemonic, unified entity as political economists are wont to do, as doing so actually exaggerates its power and renders it monolithic and inevitable. She is echoing the work of many poststructuralists who contend that we discursively create the very hegemonic projects we are seeking to critically analyse.³ Larner argues that this tendency to view neoliberalism as either a unified set of policies, or a political ideology, has resulted in a lack of analysis of the techniques of neoliberalism (2003:511). Post structuralists and proponents of the governmentality approach to the understanding and critique of neoliberalisation insist that highlighting the complexity and contradictions of neoliberalism, and the techniques and process of neoliberalisation, provide us with a more nuanced view of neoliberalisation as a process. According to Larner (2003:509). if we pay attention to `the different variants of neoliberalism, to the hybrid nature of

³ This has been the recurring critique of the political economy approach in political analysis that I have referred to in previous work (see Howlett, 2007).

contemporary policies and programmes ... [and] to the multiple and contradictory aspects of neoliberal spaces, techniques, and subjects' we can elucidate the complexity of neoliberal state agendas, including its relationship with civil society and the many tactics, strategies and techniques used to normalise neoliberal programs and agendas.

This tendency in the literature to view neoliberalism as either an end state, or as a process has resulted in a cleavage in the analysis of the actual effects of neoliberalism, and consequently on the implications of those effects (England and Ward 2008:3). As Larner (2003) insists, both theoretical traditions have important things to say about neoliberalism and the challenge is to bring these two analyses of neoliberalism closer together. Focusing on both the similarities *and* the differences in the impacts of neoliberal restructuring upon Indigenous communities has dual benefits. First it allows us to discern more about neoliberalism itself, both as a hegemonic structure *and* as a contingent process. Secondly, and perhaps in this context, more importantly, it may allow us to identify which types of neoliberalism and which techniques of neoliberalisation have the most impact upon Indigenous communities. Given the dominance of the ideology and practice of neoliberalism, Peck (2004:396) urges that 'one of the analytical and political challenges is to develop adequate accounts of this paradigm shift ... and its putative alternatives'. The very real effects of neoliberalism, divergent and varied though they may be, demand we develop a coherent and comprehensive analytical framework that can transcend the impasse between Marxists and poststructuralists. Castree (2006) suggests a critical realist approach may offer a way forward from this theoretical impasse.

A critical realist approach

Critical realists believe that there are deep structural forces that exist which may constrain, or conversely, facilitate the capacity of various actors within political contexts, and that these structural forces are often hard to discern, observe and analyse. The realist is concerned with illuminating how these structural forces may constrain or facilitate behaviour (Higgs 2001:49-53). A critical realist approach insists that it is possible to gain knowledge of these actually existing structures and generative mechanisms, without reifying them (Danermark *et al.* 2002). For critical realists, how the structural power of neoliberalism is activated depends on the context in which it is exercised. Thus for critical realists the outcomes of neoliberalism will vary depending on how its power is activated and mediated (Ward and England 2007:259). Adopting a critical realist paradigm might therefore allow us to:

- treat neoliberalism as a set of (structurally constrained/enabled) *practices*

- talk about how those practices are indeed shaped by (contextually specific) institutions and, conversely, how they act to shape them.
- give analytical space to local practices as well as the undeniable global forces that impact upon them.

A critical realist approach to neoliberalism or any other topic resists the 'violence of abstraction' referred to by Castree (2006:5), whereby discussion about the structural power of neoliberalism and the material effects that ensue from that, emphasised in the political economy approach, are divorced from discussions about the context of its operations, which are the focus of the poststructuralists. Thus, embracing a critical realist approach may be a fruitful way to navigate the impasse between the political economy approach and the post structuralist approach (Ward and England 2003). It allows for analytical interrogation of the messiness and variation in the processes and techniques of neoliberalism without losing sight of its hegemonic tendencies and characteristics. Critical realism can therefore provide a systematic framework within which it is possible to explicate, analyse and assess radically different hypotheses and explanatory models (Patomakki 2003:209). In short, it provides for a comprehensive and multi levelled analysis that can discern between various theoretical explanations, while privileging none.

Despite its ubiquity as a structural phenomenon and ideology, or alternatively as a discursive and constitutive process, there has been a noted absence of analysis of the effects of neoliberal restructuring on Indigenous peoples.⁴ The forthcoming discussion reviews the literature on Indigenous people and neoliberalism, and is followed by a discussion of the mineral industry as a site of neoliberalism in Indigenous communities in Australia.

Indigenous peoples and Neoliberalism

Economic development approaches produce Aboriginal capitalists whose thirst for profit comes to outweigh their ancestral obligations to the land and to others (Coulthard 2006:12)

Neoliberalism presents significant challenges for Indigenous communities. Neoliberalism is distinguished from other forms of governance through its claim to respect the liberty of individuals in the name of, and through, freedom (see Harvey 2005). As subjects of neoliberal rule, people are encouraged to regard themselves as rational, economically independent and active subjects. Associated with this philosophy is a take on economic

⁴ For some exceptions see Slowey 2008, Bargh 2009, Lawrence 2008.

development as arising from the pursuit of individual profit, which has become somewhat hegemonic, and has become problematic for many Indigenous groups. It is based on universalism, a focus on the individual, a growing intolerance of cultural difference, and a limited view of development that is committed to market-based solutions (Altman 2009:40). Bargh (2007:13) argues therefore that neoliberalism is often incompatible with an Indigenous worldview. Without wanting to essentialise or romanticise Indigenous culture, many Indigenous peoples view the land, and the landscape as a cultural asset, not just a commercial asset (Altman 2009:43). Indigenous worldviews foreground multi layered and multidimensional relationships with the land that are based on a custodial ethic rather than an exploitative ethic (Kuokkanen 2007:33, Howitt 2001) and are therefore not easily reconcilable with a market based, capitalist, neoliberal ethic.

Macdonald *et al.* (2006:218) contend that Indigenous people can be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of neoliberalism if they do not have a national treaty or a political commitment to self-determination.⁵ As mentioned previously, these impacts are varied and nuanced and can include the following; a reduction in public services and infrastructure, the cutting of public expenditure on social services, welfare retrenchment and state facilitated expansion of economic development. While the focus of this paper is the reduction in public services and infrastructure, and their subsequent devolution to the private sector, it is worth briefly ruminating on how neoliberal restructuring has manifested in the Australian context and the general implications for Indigenous Australians, before moving to an examination of the particular restructuring that has occurred when mineral developments are imposed upon Indigenous communities.

In Australia, where there is neither treaty nor constitutional recognition of Indigenous rights, related policy has been subject to frequent changes, often – as far as appearances go – ideologically driven. Some recent changes help illustrate the peculiar relationship of neoliberalism to this area of policy, as they seem to represent radical adjustment not only to the administration of Indigenous affairs, but to its philosophical basis. Since 1973, Federal policy had been oriented to ‘self-determination’, with certain kinds of funding

⁵ Conversely in New Zealand, where there is a treaty between the Crown and Maori peoples, Bargh (2007:42) argues that the New Zealand Crown has used the treaty settlements process as a conduit for neoliberal policies and practices. This perspective is substantiated by Stewart-Harawira’s (2005) contention that neoliberal reforms in New Zealand were an unmitigated disaster for all except the most privileged.

allocation and service provision (the latter particularly for remote communities) being gradually devolved to Indigenous-controlled and elected bodies. In 2004, the then Liberal Government, led by John Howard, moved to abolish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the chief representative body for Indigenous people, declaring the end of 'separatism' and implementing instead a 'mainstreaming' of service delivery.⁶

The abolition of ATSIC was seen as part of a deliberate program to dismantle the self-determination paradigm in favour of 'mutual obligation', a program which also saw the abolition of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) scheme, a public works program that provided welfare payment to Indigenous Australians in return for nominal labour (Maddison 2009). The idea was to reduce welfare dependency and encourage greater self-reliance, on the assumption that the availability of 'sit-down money' (i.e. welfare payments) acts as a barrier to achieving economic independence. Thus the Howard government has deliberately aimed to refashion Aboriginal subjects as economically self-reliant individuals who, importantly, are placed on a superficially 'level playing field' with individuals in mainstream Australia. This is entirely consistent with a decline in the willingness and capacity of the neoliberal state to maintain public services and infrastructure (McDonald *et al* 2006: 219-220). And this roll back in government service provision and welfare is likewise consistent with the neoliberal logic which sees those sectors of society, such as Indigenous populations, who continue to burden government by failing to act in a 'responsible manner', targeted for reform (Lawrence 2005,:41).

On 21 June 2007, Howard announced an 'emergency intervention' into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The intervention was justified as a crisis response to allegations of widespread child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. The terms of the intervention were far-ranging, including the quarantining of welfare payments, new alcohol restrictions, compulsory health checks for children, and the acquisition of townships by the government through five-year leases (Maddison 2008:4). The incumbent Rudd Labor Government continued with the Intervention strategy, despite its signing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and has made 'Closing the Gap'⁷ its key Indigenous affairs policy

⁶ Howard had vehemently opposed the original establishment of ATSIC while in opposition in 1990.

⁷ Closing the Gap strategy is the current Australian government policy framework that rests on a shared arrangement between the Australian Federal government and the States to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes (Australian Government, 2010).

focus, with a halving of the employment gap in the next 10 years one of its key aims (Altman 2009:18). Thus there is a distinct policy focus on preparing Aboriginal people for participation in the 'real economy', an approach which has had the support of several prominent Indigenous leaders.⁸ Mining is often viewed as the panacea for regional and Indigenous development with greater engagement of remote-living Indigenous people in mine economies seen as the perfect neoliberal solution to the problems of poverty and welfare dependence that inhibit Aboriginal participation in the real economy (Altman 2009:14).

Mineral development on Indigenous Australian land: A neoliberal exercise.

Australia is currently in the grips of the largest expansion of mining and energy activity in its history. It is worth quoting Langton (2010) at length concerning the current expansive mineral development occurring in Australia:

'Exploration expenditure topped \$6 billion in 2008–09. In the six months to October 2009 fifteen projects with a capital expenditure of \$3.9 billion were completed. A further seventy-four projects were at an advanced stage with an estimated expenditure of \$112.5 billion. The value of energy exports increased to \$77.9 billion.' (Langton 2010).

The overall significance of the mining sector to the world's fifteenth largest economy is likely to continue in the immediate future (Altman 2009:1). The Australian economic scenario is considerably better than most OECD economies and this is largely because of mineral development and activity. Unfortunately Indigenous people, who constitute 2.5 per cent of the population, do not share equitably in the wealth of the mining sector, much of which is generated from their land in remote regions (Altman 2009:1). There is considerable empirical evidence that Indigenous people rarely benefit equitably when major extractive activities occur on their customary land—indeed it is far more common for such activities to impact negatively on the livelihoods and cultures of Indigenous communities (see, for example, Altman 2009, Howlett 2010, Langton 2010).

⁸ Noel Pearson, a prominent Aboriginal lawyer, is one leader who supported the Intervention Strategy. It was perceived the Howard government's Intervention Strategy was actually heavily influenced by the ideas of Pearson, and his support for reduced welfare dependency, relocation of Aboriginal people according to employment opportunities, and the enhancement of opportunities to participate in the real economy, all regarded as solutions to the problems endemic within Aboriginal communities (see Maddison 2009:90, 129-30).

One way in which this historical inequity has been addressed in recent years – at least in theory – has been through direct negotiations between miners and Indigenous communities for access to traditional lands, usually (but not always) as a right under the *Native Title Act 1993*. Negotiations are said to provide for better control and agency on the part of the Indigenous traditional owners, as well as often resulting in agreements whose monetary value might far exceed benefits they would otherwise receive from the mine. We suggest that the trend to negotiation could be read as a neoliberal one, which pulls ‘access to country’ into a market that previously did not exist. Indigenous people exercise their agency in an explicitly capitalist framework, and create ‘choices’ about their negotiated gains which are seemingly not linked to universal rights.

Responsibility for service provision and infrastructure in Indigenous communities rests principally with the State governments,⁹ who under the principle of crown ownership, can claim an interest in almost all sub-surface minerals, which entails the right to allocate exploration and mining titles, and to require various fees and royalty payments (Howitt *et al.* 1996:14). There has been some retreat of the state in terms of public investments in remote regions and a growing state view that profitable mining corporations have a responsibility to provide social services to remote communities, including Indigenous communities. Similarly, there has been a view expressed that benefits accrued from mineral development agreements should use those payments provided as compensation or benefit sharing for community purposes (Altman 2009: 3, O’Faircheallaigh, 2004). Langton (2010) argues, State governments have effectively delegated their powers and responsibilities – formally through legislation and informally through budget cuts – to the mining companies. State governments are increasingly relying on mining companies to provide services to remote Indigenous citizens. The issue of the proper division of responsibility for funding the services needs of Aboriginal communities adjacent to major mines has received some attention in recent literature (see Altman 2009).

O’Faircheallaigh (2004:42) suggests there is considerable controversy surrounding the issue of whom should pay for Indigenous development and services, with the real danger that when mining companies take over service provisions and infrastructure development, government may reduce its existing spending on services, leaving Indigenous people no better off as a result of allowing mining to occur. As Altman (2009:38) declares there is recent evidence that Indigenous peoples have articulated a desire to sign

⁹ Funding and service provision arrangements are complex and differ from State to State. In remote communities they can often be federally funded.

mining agreements with companies to gain access to essential services that should be provided by the State and federal governments. Although O'Faircheallaigh (2004:47) ultimately believes Indigenous people can positively utilise the opportunities presented to them via the payment of monetary compensation from mineral companies, he also believes that it is repugnant that Indigenous people might have to use money they gain from allowing development on their land to pay for basic services, especially given the negative social, cultural and environmental impacts of mining.

There is also a real danger for Indigenous people when service provision and infrastructure development are the responsibility of mineral development companies, especially given the finite nature of mines. Devolution of responsibility to the mining companies for the provision of basic services and infrastructure development may leave Indigenous communities in a precarious position when an operation closes. The Minerals Council of Australia (MCA), the major representative body for the minerals industry, has expressed the concern of its members that their reputations will suffer when closures affect Aboriginal communities. They have recently criticised State governments for poor delivery of essential community social and physical infrastructure, like education and health services and housing and water, to Indigenous communities (MCA 2004 cited in Altman 2009:27). They are also reluctant to take on state-like functions for fear it could jeopardize their profits, a situation which will only be further exacerbated with the very recent announcement by the Australian federal government to impose a 40% super profits resource tax on mineral development in Australia.

In order to gauge the extent and types of service delivery being undertaken by mining corporations in Indigenous communities in Queensland, a desktop review of self-published material from mining companies with operations in that State was conducted. Websites, annual, quarterly and other reports, policy statements, newsletters, and media releases were reviewed. It was found that a primary area where mining companies have engaged in Indigenous communities has been in the provision of education, training, and employment initiatives. It was found that a number of mining companies are involved in some form of service and program delivery aimed specifically at Indigenous people and communities. Some are engaged in partnerships or agreements with other parties, including State/Federal Government and local Indigenous organisations; others act unilaterally. Based on research so far, apprenticeships, traineeships, and employment programs are the most common form of service delivery delivered by mining companies to Indigenous Australians.

This evidence of mining company involvement in the transformation of Indigenous Queenslanders into work-ready, responsible citizens, able to participate in economic development opportunities, supports Lawrence's conclusion from research she has undertaken with the Warlpiri peoples of the Northern Territory, where she has found there has been a distinct emphasis on preparing Indigenous people to participate in the economic opportunities now afforded them (Lawrence 2008:42).¹⁰ There is ultimate irony in this current situation. The reality for Aboriginal people is that even if they were willing to engage in employment opportunities offered by the mining companies, historical underinvestment in social and physical infrastructure by State governments in remote regions means that many Indigenous people do not have the capabilities to work at mines, even if they wished to. And the solution to this historical lack of investment by the State in infrastructure development is sought via devolution of these responsibilities to the private sector.

Thus the current devolution of training, education and employment opportunities from the Queensland state government to the minerals development companies in Queensland that we have identified in our preliminary research fits with Bargh's contention that under neoliberalism, Indigenous peoples are constructed as impediments and obstacles to development, and reconstituted, via employment and training opportunities, as work-ready capable citizens (2007:13-15). This preliminary research and its attendant implications thus provide evidence of the need for further in-depth research about the concomitant effects of neoliberal restructuring on Indigenous communities. We intend to conduct in-depth qualitative and quantitative research on the effects of neoliberal restructuring for the Indigenous people of North West Queensland impacted by the development of the Century Mine in order to provide that evidence. In conducting this research we will be providing evidence of the peculiarities, and divergences that can emanate from neoliberal restructuring in Australia which will then be used to compare with material from Canada. Thus we will be focussing on the messiness and variation in the processes and techniques of neoliberalism here in Australia, so that we can identify the commonalities with the experience of Canadian Indigenous peoples.

¹⁰ Lawrence also argues that there are dangerous links between the discourses underpinning practices concerned with reducing 'dependency' and encouraging Warlpiri people into employment and training programs and the current governmental policies that rationalise 'mutual obligation' and require more 'active' participation from citizens.(2005:47)

Conclusion

In the words of Ward and England (2008) it remains politically important to constantly draw attention to the implications of neoliberal restructuring for Indigenous peoples. And while there are those who argue for a consideration of the positive implications of neoliberalism for Indigenous communities, and how Indigenous people obtain important opportunities to exercise their agency via resource developments on their traditional lands, there is a real danger in overemphasising the transformative capacity of Indigenous agency, particularly in the face of neoliberal processes and practices, without a concomitant analysis of the processes and techniques of neoliberalisation, and the negative impacts for Indigenous people (see Howlett 2010).

Analyses that extol the potential of neoliberalism, via state supported mineral and resource development on Indigenous lands, can potentially normalise both the discourse and practices of neoliberalism in general, and mineral development in particular. We therefore argue for an attendant focus on analysis of the not so positive implications of neoliberalism for Indigenous peoples if we are to develop a comprehensive picture of neoliberalism, both as a hegemonic process and discursive power. While conscious of Head's imperative that in not extolling and articulating Indigenous agency, we risk presenting Indigenous peoples as victims of neoliberalism and 'silencing them just as they begin to speak' (Head 2001:102), it is nonetheless imperative we remain cognisant of, and interrogate, the capacity for neoliberalism to exacerbate the inequalities that already exist for Indigenous peoples.

In this paper we have sought to articulate a tentative theoretical framework for research on neoliberal restructuring that endures when mineral development occurs on Indigenous lands. As such we welcome comments and suggestions on this framework. We have argued for a critical realist theoretical framework that can facilitate identification of the similarities and divergences between several Australian and Canadian case studies of mineral development on Indigenous lands, not to reify the structure of neoliberalism and ignore the differences but rather, as indicated earlier, because even with these differences, there still exist substantive commonalities of process and outcome that require analysis and interrogation.

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