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**Book Review**  
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***Decolonizing Employment: Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada's Labour Market.***

By Shauna MacKinnon. Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2015. ISBN-978-0887557811

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Shauna MacKinnon's book, *Decolonizing Employment: Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada's Labour Market*, examines the impact of Aboriginal skill-training programs are having on Aboriginal exclusion from the labour market. MacKinnon delivers a clear and well-articulated political economy account of the failure of neoliberal social policy to redress the issue of Aboriginal exclusion from the labour market. She also provides a number of concrete solutions and recommendations for improvements of already existing programs. Paramount among these is the holistic approach to Aboriginal education that decolonization pedagogy reflects. She describes decolonization pedagogy as a focus on cultural knowledge, new curriculum design, historical accounts of colonialism, and emphasizing the values of Indigenous peoples (p. 70). MacKinnon identifies that the skill-training programs that work around pedagogy of decolonization offer improved self-esteem and confidence to their graduates. Mackinnon provides a convincing argument about the failures of neo-liberal policy in addressing Aboriginal unemployment. I will begin by discussing the structure of her book. I will then review the strengths of her book. I will conclude with some areas that still require expansion and clarification in her work. Overall, *Decolonizing Employment* is an extremely informative and

well researched book, which provides a nuanced discussion of the barriers surrounding Aboriginal employment under contemporary Canadian colonialism and neo-liberal policy.

Mackinnon's book skillfully undertakes a political economy analysis of the colonial relations of the Canadian labour market and Canadian state. Her work makes a number of positive contributions. The book is divided into two parts. The first section of the book provides an overview of neo-liberal social policy in Canada and the labour market barriers encountered by Aboriginal peoples. The second section of the book examines the impact of supply side labor market policies on adult Aboriginal learners in Manitoba. The core argument of her book is that short-term training programs do have a role to play in supporting Aboriginal adults, especially, if they incorporate pedagogy of decolonization, but neo-liberal policy is not a solution to the myriad problems of colonialism (p. 183). I will now turn to address her core findings.

*Decolonizing Employment* makes a number of contributions to critiques of neo-liberal social policy. Centrally, she deconstructs the myth of skills mismatch that has been a mainstay of neo-liberal policy makers (p. 20). MacKinnon contends that supply side programs do not change employment trends in any meaningful way as there are no mechanisms to ensure that trainees find employment upon completion. Furthermore, the programs are unable to measure their success as they are not tracking placement rates post-graduation. As MacKinnon describes: “[h]ow do we know if labour market policies are lifting people out of poverty, improving health and well-being, and leading to jobs that are fulfilling if we don't know where people end up” (p. 162)? On this point, her work makes the invaluable contribution to the problem of evidence with supply side approaches. Her thirty-six interviews with 25 program graduates and 11 instructors reveal that there are major gaps between completion and the attainment of work in the field of training (p. 125). To make matters worse the Government of Manitoba allows adult learners to

access a cost of living allowance “in addition to covering the costs of tuition, books, and supplies” (p. 146). This proves problematic due to the economic marginalization most Aboriginals face.

Moreover, there are various assumptions on the part of employers’ structure hiring criteria. As she describes: “[i]t seems that what many employers are naively looking for are Aboriginal people who have escaped colonization unharmed-fully assimilated” (p.169). She clearly points towards the role Western assumptions about the neoliberal subject play in producing unrealistic expectations employers have towards Aboriginal workers. Lastly, her work highlights the positive space these programs created for adult Aboriginal learners (many of whom are returning to school). The primary contribution her work makes is identifying the positive space these training programs that draw upon a pedagogy of decolonization creates through cultural training, educational attainment, and creating a safe-space from the racism of urban life (p. 139-145). As she notes: “the most effective programs for Aboriginal job seekers offer ‘holistic approaches that address all the barriers to work and raise aspiration and confidence; they provide continuing support once the individual has moved into a job; they involve partnership working between the agencies” (p. 168). In effect, her book provides a fair critique of the failures of neo-liberal supply policy to solve Aboriginal exclusion from the labour market while also discussing the healing role pedagogy of decolonization can have.

MacKinnon’s book has two gaps that warrant further research. Primarily, her focus on the urban setting of these skill-training programs removes a larger focus on the role the employment provisions of impact and benefit agreements are having on Aboriginal employment in Canada. A more detailed study of skill- training and bilateral agreements between resource extraction companies and first nations would seem to be the logical extension of her findings. Second, her

focus on the neo-liberal era seems to avoid a detailed discussion of Aboriginal employment during the Keynesian welfare state era. While her study clearly outlines the shift from Welfare policies to neo-liberal policies for Canadians generally, her study of neo-liberal policy since the 1990s on Aboriginal peoples provides only half of the picture of Aboriginal labour market exclusion. A more detailed study of Aboriginal labour market exclusion under Keynesian policy would have strengthened the depth of her argument and critique. With these two points in mind, MacKinnon provides a skillful study of urban neo-liberal policy its relationship with broader trends of colonialism in Canada.

To conclude, MacKinnon skillfully examines how the values of neo-liberalism are impacting adult Aboriginal learners. She reveals that training programs that focus on historical, cultural, and social support provide a pedagogical tool for mental decolonization to take place is invaluable. MacKinnon's critique of the bad match discourse of various neoliberal politicians at various times proves to be an essential read for those who seek to contest neoliberal skill-training measures as a means of combatting systemic racism. As someone rather new to her work, and labour market studies of Indigenous engagement, I felt her examination of neo-liberal policy to be exceptionally well developed and organized. Given the complexity of the issue, I still contend that even a brief account of the pre-1990s period of Keynesianism would have provided a more nuanced picture of Aboriginal-state relations prior to this period of devolution and privatization. MacKinnon's piece risks fetishizing demand side interventions that can have their own colonial relations behind them. With that being said, I felt her book to be extremely informative and a stellar critique of failures of various federal and provincial governments to address Aboriginal employment. This work is essential for anyone taking up the question of skill-training and Aboriginal peoples.

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