*Abstract:*

*In the 19th century, boarding schools were created as a tool of assimilation for indigenous peoples. In the name of civilizing and Christianizing, children were removed from their lands, cultures, languages, and communities. Historians have long documented the destructive impact of these institutions. Boarding schools are still in operation around the United States today but have little resemblance to their predecessors. This paper critically examines and discusses the role of modern boarding schools and their impact on native youth and native communities. Specifically, I examine the experiences of former students of these boarding schools through interviews.*

## Introduction:

There are many societal problems that sometimes seem exacerbated on and around reservation lands, such as alcoholism, homelessness, suicide, homicide, and depression. Much of this seems to be new to indigenous communities, problems that historically were not existent. In western culture, these problems have been around for a long time; for example in Europe in the 18th century when European powers started to seriously look for new lands. These quests were marked by the need to find more space to live and expand to. These were also intended for the unwanted: the addicts, the homeless, and the violent. Superficially, one may connect the troubles surrounding Indian reservations to the influx of migrants from exactly these European nations. They brought their problems and behaviors with them, along with alcohol abuse and “survival of the fittest” ideologies. But did it really stop there? It is hardly the introduction of new people that alone will cause societal problems in their wake; rather it is the belief system that accompanies the newcomers.

In this paper, I discuss the role of Native American boarding schools as tools in the colonization of North America as a phenomenon of globalization that can be addressed through the lens of globalization theory. Globalization theory is often centered on metropolises in the sense of Saskia Sassen, multinational corporations, and the globalization of labor: their “casino capitalism,” “technology districts,” “strategic alliances,” “global cities,” and ”trilateral economies” (Chang & Ling, 2010, p. 1). However, Native American experiences in boarding schools throughout the late 1800s and 1900s will show a “transformationalist” view in which globalization of culture, education, and language has taken place already. I will use globalization theory in a new context.

I will apply this theory to the experience of recent Native Americans high school students in boarding schools across the United States. It will address how attendance at modern boarding schools affects Native American students. This research paper will be largely based on data drawn from interviews conducted with former Native high school students, who attended Kinłani[[1]](#footnote-1) Bordertown Dormitory in Flagstaff, AZ. In addition, the findings will be contrasted with expectations derived from existing research on the effects of boarding schools, such as “intergenerational trauma.” It will provide an impression of the impact of boarding schools on indigenous society today.

The interviews used target experiences of attendees of traditional boarding schools after 1975. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 brought many changes in boarding school approaches. This date is significant for future research contrasting the “modern” boarding school experience with “historic” experiences. Native education had been newly emphasized and partially handed to tribes in form of on-reservation day schools since 1934. However, it was still based on federal mandates, guidelines and allotments. The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), a branch of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), played a significant role in translating federal guidelines into practice.

Many accounts of historic boarding school attendees (pre-1975) displayed in museums or publications recite fond memories, yet, many accounts speak of abuse.[[2]](#footnote-2) Every individual walked away with a personal experience and not all schools were governed by the same moral and educational goals. Boarding schools and dormitories today are governed by different principles with one important modification: “discipline” (i.e. violence as a form of education; physical disciplining) is unlawful today, and has been replaced by stringent rules and regulations.

In future research, content analysis will be performed on the interviews of this study. The results will be contrasted with content analysis of historical oral and written testimonies of “survivors” of historical Boarding Schools (often called Residential or Industrial Schools). There is a need for additional research that addresses modern and historic boarding school experiences. This will help in understanding the long-term effects on multiple generations of families.

## Theory: Globalization literature

Globalization Theory is a recent subfield in social sciences, which has developed alongside other critical theories since the 1980s. It shares some conceptualizations with Dependency Theory, World Systems Theory, or Post-Colonial Theory, all of which identify the market economy, neo-liberal economics, and class-based hierarchies as central to the structuring of global society. As such, they borrow from Marxism and put forth similar arguments but add specific foci to the approaches. For instance, Dependency Theory identifies “cores” and “peripheries” in the makeup of international hierarchy. World Systems Theory adds “semi-peripheries” of countries that are between core and periphery; it also provides space for those that are developing economically and moving up from the periphery and vice versa. Post-colonialism adds an important perspective by portraying such developments from the point of view of the global south, i.e. countries that have resulted from colonial rule and have experienced recent decolonization. It further gives a voice to those who are not heard, “othered,” and rendered invisible. Post-colonialism is one approach that is promising in identifying the forces in the North American indigenous experience. Its benefit is the incorporation of the voices of indigenous groups and understanding of colonizing forces. However, in this paper, I will focus on globalization theory as it may be applied to Native American boarding schools.

For the purpose of my argument, I define *globalization as not just a “good” or “bad” phenomenon but as a dynamic that describes economic, cultural, political, and territorial imperialism, which takes advantage of uneven development and self-perpetuates the exploitation of some for the benefit of others*. This addresses frequent criticisms of globalization theory of being too broad and describing whatever we want to describe. Assuming that the development of Native American boarding schools was a tool of economic, cultural, political, and territorial imperialism, it could be described as an early pattern of globalization.

Globalization theory consists of three waves that have been argued by proponents and critics in the field. Globalization theory offers critiques based on the following: a) technological advancements, b) cross-boundary interaction: the declining role and power of the nation-state, c) economic/neo-liberal forces, d) shift of power from the state to multi-national corporations, transnational networks, action groups, etc. e) cultural assimilation and hybridization, f) reshaping of global north and south (the core and periphery are in flux based on economic development), and g) capitalist centers that have developed into metropolises. The three waves mark a shift from analyses based on a neo-liberal economy that dominated in the 1990s to increased foci on internationalization, assimilation, and hybridization of culture, and the role of power in the relationships between corporations, nation-states, and international borders.

However, globalization theory’s shortcoming is a lack of attention to past events, such as the workings of post-colonial, United States government rule in North America and its treatment of the indigenous population. If applied to the settlement of the North American continent, as well the establishment of boarding schools in the late 19th century, an early version of globalization can be identified. Post-colonial theory also addresses some of these issues but globalization theory can provide additional insights into the settlement (and resettlement) of the North American continent. The term globalization is not understood in the neo-liberal way of global cities and transnational migration but in a “transformationalist” view of an old phenomenon of hybridization of culture and history by a foreign society (Martell, 2007, 177-178). Transformationalism marks the third wave of globalization theory. This wave denounces “causal power” of globalization and is seen as “heterogenous” and as “interplay between culture and economy” (Martell, 2007, 183). The globalization literature and its debates can highlight the relationship between white settlers in the United States and the system of forced Native American education and thus the shaping, of future Native American generations. Instead of continued fighting over land and removal of indigenous tribes, “education” became the method and the tool that caused the creation of a new labor class, migration, displacement, and feeding of the new metropolises along the coasts of the new “North.”

Connell’s argument of a third, or transformationalist, perspective in globalization theory “characterizes global society, not in terms of its traits, but in terms of its constitutive dynamic” (Connell, 2007, 372). The development of the boarding school system is representative of such a dynamic. Keeping with Marxist’s influence in terms of capital modes of production and accumulation of wealth, the indigenous lifestyle, as it was confronted by the settlers, did not fit into any conceptualization of industry. Indigenous tribes did not resemble anything that was common from a European point of view. The mostly classless, non-hierarchical tribal societies did not match perceptions of working class, middle class, and capitalist/landowners. The boarding schools (in particular Carlisle Industrial Indian School) were a way to redeem this situation. Many ‘goodhearted’ individuals were involved in boarding school education in an effort to “elevate” native children from their unclassified existences into educated individuals, trained to do menial labor (i.e. as housekeepers and manufacturers). Others saw the opportunity to create a new working class. Connell states “globalization is driven by capitalism’s inherent need to occupy more space, speed up production and circulation, and exploit nature as well as labor more intensively” (Connell, 2007, 372).[[3]](#footnote-3) This type of dynamic can be detected as the driving force behind the boarding school system.

Another effect of globalization is assimilation and hybridization. Or, what Connell refers to as “cultural mixing.”[[4]](#footnote-4) It refers to the integration of one group into a new and different other culture. This is was enforced in early boarding schools, in which students were prevented from practicing their languages and their customs; instead they were taught Christian values and customs in addition to the English language. The goal was to make them as “white” as possible.

Globalization theory also frequently employs the concept of “weakening boundaries” (Connell, 2007, 377). It can be argued to have happened in the interactions between the United States and the formerly sovereign indigenous tribes. Beginning with the first treaties between the US government and indigenous tribes, there had been continued effort to undermine said sovereignty and to chip away at the geographical and political boundaries of these until not only boundaries but also entire tribes had been moved and eliminated.

Globalization theory is by no means an ideal lens for the understanding of North American “territorial imperialism” and “capitalist imperialism” (Ampuja, 2012, 294).[[5]](#footnote-5) It largely excludes the perspective of those affected, here Native American tribes. It is applied from a “western” or “Northern” point of view (Connell, 2007). It does, however, provide explanatory tools for actions taken by the colonizers, i.e. white settlers and the United States government. Post-colonial theory would allow for an indigenous perspective on these very same historical events and should be employed in future discussions.

## Background

I believe that the system of removing them from their tribes and placing them under continuous training in the midst of civilization is far better than any other method... I am sure that if we could bring to bear such training as this upon all our Indian children for only three years, that savagery among the Indians in this country would be at an end... The end to be gained...is the complete civilization of the Indian and his absorption into our national life, [for] the Indian to lose his identity as such, to give up his tribal relations and to be made to feel that he is an American citizen.... The sooner all tribal relations are broken up, the sooner the Indian loses all his Indian ways, even his language, the better it will be for him and for the government and the greater will be the economy to both. (Pratt, 1964, pp. 260, 265)

*Boarding Schools:*

The topic of Indian boarding schools is heavily convoluted. It ranges from a history of abuse, death, and forced assimilation to accounts of friendship, opportunity, and fond memories. In order to understand these stark contrasts and the testimonies of former students, one must take a look at the background of the boarding school system and in which situation the boarding schools became an option or necessity for many.

The interest in Native American education gathered momentum with Capt. Richard Pratt in 1887. Pratt had been involved in ongoing wars with Native tribes and was seeking a better way to deal with the “Indian problem”. In his well-known statement “kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (United States Environmental Protection Agency, n.d.), he summarized precisely what his intentions were when founding the first Indian boarding school in 1892: the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. It was Pratt’s goal to remove all native traits from the children and raise them in separation from their families as “white children” (Bear, 2008).

Applying his experiences and knowledge from an ‘Indian prison’ in Florida, where he worked on assimilating the native prisoners to western ways of life, he created an educational program for Indian children. They would be removed from their tribes and families and moved to Pennsylvania, they would be dressed in “civilized” clothing, their hair would be cut short, they would not be allowed to speak their native languages but had to learn and communicate in exclusively English. The expectations towards Native American’s ability to learn were low and not based on any experience but white arrogance and assumptions of superiority. Furthermore, there was a need for a lower working class. Thus, the mission of Carlisle Indian School was to “civilize” and “assimilate” these Indian children and to train them in menial labor: housework and physical labor.

Pratt paved the way for a new cheap labor force and created a new chapter in *economic imperialism* in North America. Native children that were educated in the boarding/industrial school system were intended to learn how to be white, how to be Christian, and how to use their hands and not their brains (Trennert, 1998, 47). So-called “outings” were used for the students to visit or live in white people’s houses doing domestic work and continuing their assimilation. The Carlisle Indian Industrial School survived until the 1930s, when on-reservation day-schools were created and enrollment declined. Also, many Native Americans joined the armed forces to fight in World War II, which signaled an end of a need for assimilation (“PA State Archives - MG-216 - Scope and Content Note - Carlisle Indian School Collection," n.d.)*.* This development also coincided with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Nevertheless, for the time of its reign, Carlisle prided itself in educating future scholars, successful actors, and athletes.

Today, boarding schools and dorms operate under different premises. Where schools used to be run by missionaries or former military (i.e. Pratt) and banned all types of traditions and customs, the schools today are run in the effort to preserve indigenous tradition and customs. Missionaries and former military have been replaced with Native American educators and strictly scheduled daily routines.

*Signs of Globalization: The Boarding School System*

This quote points to the intended assimilation of Natives into white, western culture, or *cultural imperialism,* which stands at the beginning of the boarding schools. Significant change to this mindset came following three acts that are particularly significant for Native American self-determination and the changes in Indian education. First, *The General Allotment Act (or Dawes Act) of 1887* contributed to the already dire situation of native tribes. Tribal land was split up amongst tribal members in 160 acres per household head, and smaller amounts to individuals (United States Environmental Protection Agency, n.d., p. 266).[[6]](#footnote-6) The remainder was automatically transferred to the state and sold to non-native individuals, or native individuals with citizenship, etc. (United States Environmental Protection Agency, n.d., pp. 165-166). This splitting up of previously commonly shared land, in addition to land grab, and criminal use of resources (timber and deforestation, oil drilling, hunting) left many tribes at an economic disadvantage due to lost resources, depleted land, and dependence on menial labor for survival. This reflects signs of territorial imperialism as considered under some globalization approaches. In this situation it is not surprising that the Boarding School system could fill a gap in providing education to children when parents sometimes did not have much choice but to allow for their children to be taken to boarding schools. This continued for about 50 years until in the 1930s new approaches arose from the realization of the unsuccessful boarding school concept. It turned out that the Indian identity could not be eradicated. On-reservation “day schools” replaced the boarding school experience for some, while many still ended up in far-away locations. Additionally, changes in Indigenous society made it increasingly harder to care for one another. Such changes include the disruption of the traditional family, economic hardship, and racism.

Boarding schools appear to have slowly changed from institutions of forced assimilation to institutions where parents could send their children when in need. For instance during the economic downturn in the 1930s (The Great Depression), boarding schools became a place where children would be taken care of (Child, 1998, 15). By the beginning of the 20th century, two generations of Native Americans had already gone through the boarding schools system and had been successfully removed from their homeland, their cultures, and customs. Sending their children to boarding school may not have seemed as dramatic to this generation as it did to their own parents. By the 21st century, boarding schools and dorms had become a stable part in Indian education. At that time, indigenous groups had experienced cultural imperialism and assimilation practices have shown first successes.

Furthermore, once children knew that their friends, siblings, or other family members were away at a boarding school they wanted to be with them and willingly went. In some other cases, racism and discrimination in towns was so rampant that families deemed it safer for their kids to send them away as well. This way their children had a chance to learn, as opposed to having to fight for their survival and well-being at all times. However, even in a bordertown like Flagstaff, AZ students on a regular basis experience said racism. This is partially due to the students in Flagstaff attending a public (and thus ethnically mixed) high school.

In addition to military enrollment in the 1930s and the economic downturn, the *Indian Reorganization Act of 1934* (also called “Wheeler-Howard Act” or “Indian New Deal”) played a large role in the decline of boarding schools. It included the restoration of *vacant* land to the Indian tribes. This vacant land was tribal land before but had been taken away in the allotment process. Land that had not been claimed by white settlers was now being returned. This Act also had provisions for several thousand dollars (approximately $25,000) in tuition funds for Native American students. During this process, reservation day-schools came into existence. They constitute the skeleton of Indian education today. The majority of Native students attend K-12 schools on reservations today. For some, the extreme distances between home and school still make a boarding school or dorm more attractive. However, some on-reservation schools also offer dormitories, making it more attractive to stay on reservation land for education. A frequent criticism for on-reservation schools is “poor education”. This lack of educational value is frequently attributed to low quality, culturally unaware (white) teachers, negative local influences, such as gang activity, crime, and drugs. Even though the quality of on-reservation schools is not part of the discussion here, it deserves additional attention.

Finally, the *Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975* fully placed Indian education into the hands of tribes. It is overseen and programs are administered by the BIA. With this, tribes have achieved full authority over the allocation of funds received from the federal government, which primarily affects the education system. This act also marks the beginning of a new timeframe for comparison.[[7]](#footnote-7)

*Intergenerational Trauma:*

In existing research, intergenerational trauma has become a way of explaining the effects that boarding schools have had on Native American societies. Intergenerational trauma describes adverse affects, such as substance abuse and violence, trickling down and manifesting in future generations. Some practitioners find “that most of the family violence, alcoholism, and suicide behaviour among First Nations [i.e. Native population] citizens originated either directly or indirectly from the abuse suffered by residential school students (Quinn 72).” Generational abuse or intergenerational trauma (or historical trauma) is trickling down from these boarding school experiences. Dr. Eduardo Duran, on his professional website, describes, “Historical trauma is the trauma that occurs in families and is then passed on to the following generation unless the trauma or soul wounding is dealt with” (Duran & Firehammer, 2010). Former boarding school students are inflicting the same punishments and lack of patience on their children. Moreover, former boarding school or dormitory attendees not only have their own families but may be employed in today’s educational system.

Some scholars also refer to the “soul wound” in reference to intergenerational trauma. The term “soul wound” was first coined in reference to descendants of former American slaves. From a psychological perspective, the scars of slavery and oppression are argued to still affect descendants today. Similarly, to Native tribes it means that a “trauma occurred in the soul or spirit (Duran 3).” This trauma is passed on from generation to generation. The soul wound was inflicted by violence against Native Americans through forced removals, i.e. the Long Walk, and discipline in the Boarding Schools, infringement of formerly sovereign territory and warfare (massacres, violence).

The healing of the soul wound will come through understanding where the problem originated. In the case of Indigenous boarding school experience, soul wound is a reference to generations of individuals who have experienced forceful separation from their families and culture, in many cases abuse and neglect, which trickle down to the next generations due to repeated behaviors. Often, former students who become parents may raise and discipline their own children in the same way as they experienced it at boarding school.

In comparison, Australia and Canada share many colonial/imperial experiences. They each deal with their history differently. Australia has addressed the forced removal and adoption of aboriginal children to white families in the report of the “Stolen Generations.” This led to an apology for genocide. Canada had also developed an extensive boarding schools system in the 1800 and 1900s. In the early 1990’s, as a result of escalating social problems in Aboriginal communities throughout Canada, the federal government created the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). RCAP confirmed a link between social crisis in Aboriginal communities, residential schools and the legacy of intergenerational trauma. In response to RCAP, the federal government initiated the Gathering Strength initiative, which then led to the creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) in 1998. The AHF funds community-based healing initiatives that address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in the Residential School System, including intergenerational impacts (Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2014). The situation in the United States is similar, however, there are no federal programs in place yet that foster ‘healing.’

The interviews, which were conducted for this research, may show traces of soul wounds. The former students of Kinlani Bordertown Dormitory had much different experiences. At the same time, they may have experienced the effects the education system may have had on family members. Perhaps, there is indication that the soul wound ends with generations that received their education post 1975, or perhaps, the soul wound continues to exist based on the continued separation from family and culture.

## Methodology

I am testing the application of globalization theory to a new field of study. Globalization theory as described above has the potential to identify an earlier version of economic, cultural, political, and territorialimperialism and the impact it has had on indigenous tribes in the colonization of the North American continent. Post-colonial theory would complement globalization theory well. In my literature research, I found that neither globalization nor post-colonial theory have been applied to boarding schools in the United States. In this undertaking I will limit my analysis to a globalization lens.

Semi-structured interviews

In 1975, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act was passed, which turned boarding schools over to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and education was partially placed in the hands of the tribes. This change led to the closing of many schools and dormitories and allowed for the opening of schools on reservations. A significant change of values occurred in the schools that remained. The strict military and often abusive discipline of students was replaced with strict organization while making room for culturally significant programs. Many schools started teaching tribal native languages; allowed for ceremonies, drum circles and other activities that the students could partake in. Yet, the abuse that many students once experienced in the dorms continued outside of the school system.

In order to understand the experience of individuals who have attended federally sanctioned boarding schools or dormitories, I am interviewing 20 individuals who attended an off-reservation dormitory in Flagstaff, AZ after 1975.[[8]](#footnote-8) I will record their accounts and put into context with existing social problems on reservations, the soul wound or intergenerational trauma, as well as the effects of globalization.

The experiences of these individuals are not yet being compared to historical accounts, due to the difference in types of schools, boarding, the change of educational objectives, and overall type of experience. At the same time, they allow for the understanding of experiences, highlighting the changes that have occurred in Native American Education, and a general understanding of the state of intergenerational trauma. The shift from vocational training and “civilizing” of Native youth to education governed by tribes with the goal to preserve native culture and prepare students to attend higher education could not be starker. Background, “recruitment” or enlisting of students, the schooling philosophies, and general settings are very different from prior to 1975 to afterwards. Today, boarding schools and dormitories are still run very stringently with tightly scheduled days, very little free-time for students to do what they want or to “hang out”, yet the schools do not push a western or religious agenda anymore. Instead, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and/or individual tribes run these institutions. They offer many programs from educational study halls, tutoring, field trips, and college prep programs to drum circles and ceremonies. Students are not facing the same sort of discipline as their predecessors. Still they are pushed very hard to perform well in school. This is mostly done by restriction of free time. Trips to the store or to local entertainment are limited to well-performing students or based on need.

I am expecting that the interviews will reflect these practices, as well as educational successes and struggles. Students are still removed from their families. While this was done forcefully in the past, today often socio-economic struggles, the hope for the “best possible” education, and problems at home have forced Native parents to send their children to off-reservation dormitories, where they attend a public school.

All testimonies will be collected in person. All participants attended Flagstaff High School and lived at Kinłani Bordertown Dormitory in Flagstaff, AZ. They have graduated from high school at the time of their interviews. No minors will be interviewed. Each participant was asked to sign a Consent Form (Appendix B) and to respond to 19 open-ended questions (Appendix C) and has as much time as needed to respond. The interviews will be voice-recorded and transcribed. Following transcription, the recordings will be erased and analysis will be performed on the transcriptions.

*In the following sections, I will describe the state of modern boarding schools for Native American children and will connect these facts with the testimony from former students. This will be contrasted with assumptions posed by globalization literature, followed by a discussion of my findings and a conclusion.*

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1. According to students, Kinłani stands for “many homes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Many of these accounts can be found through organizations recording oral histories. For example, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission or more recently the Boarding School Tribunal in Green Bay, WI (Oct 22-25). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. He refers to T. Brennan: *Globalization and its Terrors: Daily Life in the West.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In reference to criticism by Jonathan Friedman. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Concepts are based on David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “A grant of 160 acres to each family head, of 80 acres to each single person over 18 years of age and to each orphan under 18, and of 40 acres to each other single person under eighteen….” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In a planned and approved future study I will connect here and interview students who have attended an off-reservation dormitory. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I have experience with the off-reservation dormitory in Flagstaff, AZ, where I founded and co-led the Kinłani for Community (KfC) service club at Kinłani Bordertown Dormitory for four years. The purpose of this club was based on a need observed at a visit to the dorm at an earlier point in time, which showed a disconnect between the dorm, it’s inhabitants, and the surrounding community. The students in KfC started volunteering in Flagstaff, helping at events, fundraising for a club trip, and began to spend time together. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)