

Cultural and Ethnic Fundamentalism

Identity, Liberation and Oppression¹

Joyce A. Green

Fundamentalism is characterized by nostalgia for a mythical time of goodness in an earlier order, which can be reacquired by adhering to fundamentalists' representation of the code of that tradition. Tradition becomes the social prescription for national or cultural rejuvenation and its practice reinforces boundaries and behaviour. Many Aboriginal activists and intellectuals have claimed that cultural traditions provide the formula for healthy indigenous communities today. For some, these arguments have included racialized notions of how "the people," or the relevant community, will be determined. These are not uncontested questions. Necessarily, the political questions of who decides, who is authoritative, how the truths are maintained and how deviance is disciplined emerge from these kinds of claims.

My intention is not to dismiss the inestimable value of cultural practices but to problematize political arguments that invoke tradition as absolute authority for fundamentalist formulations of cultural practices, community and politics. I use the work of Emma LaRocque and Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred to explore these themes. It is my contention that fundamentalism leads to rigid, exclusionary political processes that are likely to violate human rights and that it should therefore be eschewed by Aboriginal liberationists as well as by post-colonial vanguards. Ultimately, fundamentalist conceptions of liberation are oppressive and potentially place governments outside of the community of nations that subscribe to the collective discipline of human rights and international law.

"Fundamentalism," according to the *Oxford Canadian Dictionary*, is a "(1) strict maintenance of traditional Protestant beliefs ... (2) strict maintenance of ancient or fundamental doctrines of any religion, esp. Islam" (2001: 565). The notion is drawn from theological positions in which doctrinaire prescriptive approaches establish a correct practice, in contrast with incorrect or apostate or unholy practices. Fundamentalism is also typically thought of as "militant" and "reactionary." Anson Shupe and Jeffrey Hadden define fundamentalism as "a proclamation of re-claimed authority over a sacred tradition which is to be reinstated as an antidote for a society that has strayed from its cultural moorings" (1989: 110–11). They suggest that the sociopolitical template of fundamentalism is global, consisting of "a pattern of many contemporary sociopolitical

movements that share certain characteristics in their responses to a common *globalization process*, [which instigates a search] for ultimate meaning, values, and *resacralization* of social institutions” in the search for meaningful community identity (116, emphasis in the original).

This globalization process is a contemporary phenomenon and part of what makes fundamentalism itself thoroughly modern. Fundamentalism is reactive against the rapid transformation of societies, cultures, economies and politics. Globalization is an ever-more rapid set of transformations associated with technologies, especially communication technologies. It is also characterized by the evolving practices of global capitalism, including the emergence of regulatory mechanisms that are above national jurisdictions, such as the World Trade Organization and other trade agreements. Globalization is associated with the permeability of all cultures to the dominant consumer and cultural ethos embedded in mass entertainment media, especially that exported from the U.S.

The themes of culture, tradition and identity also emerge in indignant contestation of colonialism. It is in the search for authentic socio-political practices for anti-colonial praxis and theoretically informed political action that fundamentalism takes on a less theological but more cultural and political character. Yet the process of fundamentalism remains consistent: prophetic identification of sets of practices that invoke authenticity, against the violations of culture committed by colonial powers and inherent in their assimilative strategy.

This chapter aims to explore the process that is characteristic of fundamentalism, as well as its political purchase. The objective is not to invoke barriers to liberation but to trace the potential for non-oppressive politics of liberation. In so doing, I take up what I see as essentialist and fundamentalist impulses in arguments invoking tradition uncritically as a formula for contemporary social, political and, less often, economic organization. This formula has the potential for foreclosing liberation and for legitimating human-rights violations in the service of cultural redemption. Truly liberatory programs will have to create carefully the path between the imperatives and values of threatened traditions and the social and political limitations that traditional frameworks place on contemporary peoples. Liberatory programs must be mindful of the oppression inherent in any sociopolitical framework when that framework is constructed as incontestable.

Between Fundamentalism and Fundamentals

Religious fundamentalism strictly encodes tradition, which is treated by its adherents as inviolate. The *process* of fundamentalism is dualism: binary categories of right and wrong, good and evil, are established by elites who presume to know the content of the categories and who judge and prescribe sanctions for those who deviate from the correct formulations.

In the language of politics, the closest approximation to fundamentalism is totalitarianism, characterized by ideological control. Contrast the nature of fundamentalism with the definition of “fundamental”: “of affecting, or serving as a base or foundation, essential, primary, original” (*Oxford Canadian Dictionary* 2001: 564). The tension between the two, then, revolves around the distinction between that which is essential and original, and a coercive approach towards enforcing behaviours in respect of that fundamental essence.

It is the authoritarian sociopolitical prescription, not the specifically religious content, that is characteristic of fundamentalism. This is a question of who knows, and how, and what kinds of coercive authority the knowers may invoke to compel conformity to their program. Fundamentalism is about process, not about issues, and it is the process that shares attributes across different kinds of fundamentalism that deal variously with ideology, religion, politics, economics, social mores and gender relations. Fundamentalism relies for its authority on fundamentals, but whose? And that authority is represented as unassailable, beyond debate. The fundamentalism formula consists of a (self-selected) prophet’s call for “the people” to return to a lost tradition, the repository of social and theological rightness. Posed as an alternative to evil (identified by the prophet), the return is to an Edenic state of being to which there are clear cultural and faith ties, and of which the prophetic class are guardians (Shupe and Hadden 1989: 112).

E.J. Hobsbawm writes: “The ‘fundamentals’ that fundamentalism stresses always come from some earlier, presumably primal and pure ... stage in one’s own sacred history. They are used for setting boundaries, for attracting one’s kind and alienating other kinds, for demarcating” (1990: 167). The code of an earlier tradition, described by fundamentalists through myth and nostalgia, becomes the social prescription for national rejuvenation, and its practice reinforces boundaries and behaviour. The narratives of fundamentalism are particularistic and prescriptive, as are national narratives. Each represents a selective history, and a selective theology, to explain and glorify the past and to chart the future through practices in the present. Fundamentalism is antithetical to plurality, to tolerance, to differences.

Fundamentals simply exist as argumentative tools on which subsequent claims are based: “Our traditions served us well in the past and ensured the reproduction of healthy communities. Therefore, the values carried in those traditions ought to be resurrected in the interests of contemporary healthy communities.” On the other hand, when the argument is transformed to one proposing: “Our traditions are these specific practices, done in these ways, by these people; therefore, these practices must be replicated precisely in order to achieve culturally authentic and healthy communities,” fundamentalism rears its head. The

proposition implicitly frames the speaker as the knower, able to discern infallibly, against whose knowledge others will be measured.

Fundamentalism cannot withstand intellectual contestation; it relies on its invocation of fundamentals in terms defined by its authorities. In this respect, fundamentalism leads to insularity and to exclusion of those who are not acceptable (or who do not accept), based on the assessment of the knowers. In such a climate, human rights cannot thrive, for they are always conditional on their fit with the sociopolitical frame determined by the fundamentalists. Democracy cannot thrive, for no oppositional propositions can be presented for serious consideration. Self-determination cannot thrive, for the community of interest must not be able to make a critical determination based on information and alternatives, and it must also not subject itself to the human-rights regime sustained (however imperfectly) by international law.²

The Politics of Fundamentalism

These habits of fundamentalism are political. Religion may have the highest profile, but the social-regulation aspects of fundamentalism also permeate areas that are only incidentally religious or are non-religious. The absolutist thinking and the resistance to critique and to critical thinking are characteristics of all fundamentalisms and, most perniciously, of politicized fundamentalism.

Politicized fundamentalism has become the scourge of our times, generating the terrorist reactions against hegemony and also the hegemonic imperial responses to terrorism. The reactive politics range from rejection of imperialism and colonialism, to rejection of Western political culture and social forms, to outrage about the radical material and political inequities inherent in the global economic order, which is in turn associated with the (Christian) West. The kinds of fundamentalism that are implicit in the Al Qu'eda program of terrorist violence against the American hegemony, for example, cannot be captured by the limited analysis of fundamentalism as a purely socio-religious position. It embodies a socio-religious preference and certainly has all of the totalitarian characteristics named above, but it emerges as a political response to a political condition, one in which the global political economy, with its concomitant cultural imperialism, is writ large. And this is the lesson to be learned: fundamentalism is reactive and can only be understood in its politico-historical context. Comprehension, not condemnation, is the first step in dealing with fundamentalism and also with terrorism.

Fundamentalism as Nationalism

How does fundamentalism, the ultimate essentialism, shape ideology, identity and nationalism? The political use of essentialism has produced a

formula I call ethnic or cultural fundamentalism, which constructs historically and nationally located identity as legitimate only when a precise set of cultural, ideological and, most worryingly, genetic markers or “blood quantum” are met. This form of fundamentalist rhetoric has emerged in some claims to self-determination. Nationalist fundamentalism is the oppositional and reactive construction of “nation” in relation to the existing social formation, as identifiable by known and essential practices and beliefs, which both identify in/outside and perpetuate the nation. These essential characteristics become idealized, policed and enforced, in defence of the politics and social purity of the nation. The nation is conceptualized as anti-modernist relative to the multi-national state.

The desire to belong is a common human need, and nationalism and related forms of collective identity formation and celebration are expressions of that need. The search for belonging plagues those whose socio-political context is bereft of meaningful community. Belonging seems to be most meaningful when it affirms one’s origins, identity, values and relationships. This is precisely why Marx’s call for workers of the world to unite has had little mobilizing effect, for “workers of the world” is too large and diffuse a category to be emotionally resonant for most of us. We seem to need community that not only affirms us in our contexts but that also has boundaries. The community that is not bounded is emotionally irrelevant. Boundaries return us to the *problematique* of schemas determining who is in, who is out and who decides. For states, this is called citizenship, a relationship between individuals and the political power embodied in the institutions of political power. When ethno-nationalists claim state-like powers to determine membership, or citizenship, they are drawing boundaries around a “relational concept” (Thomas 2001) in order to determine who is in. When the criteria for who is in revolve around notions of ethnic purity or cultural purity, the filter becomes very fine and very problematic. For where will disputes be heard, and how can those who have been defined as “not community” challenge the filters of the community?

There is little likelihood of eliminating nationalism. Any viable human community will, over a relatively short time, see itself through political and historical accounts that are nationalist.³ And nationalism frequently takes as its reference point a mythical past, lost to the contemporary community. That mythical past is sometimes invoked as the standard for the community, known to a few and imposed on the many in the name of cultural or national regeneration. Still, without the power inherent in the “nation” concept, communities will be hard pressed to act autonomously within the multi-national state. And without exclusivity of membership, definition becomes problematic. In sum, nationalism is a fraught concept and set of political assumptions; yet it is also imbued with much of the political muscle necessary to achieve a measure of the self-determination that is

itself a human right. The challenge is to find the path to self-determination across terrain littered with conceptual material antithetical to human rights.

The interpretation of the past (or historically resonant tradition) in a contemporary program is not a neutral exercise. Selected experts decide, and to the extent that the experts are sustained by political power, others must acquiesce. Therefore, the power relations within communities set the stage for the political programs that inevitably are encoded within nationalist narratives. “Imagined history” (and all history emerges from selective memory and imagination) must also be understood as a political and prescriptive narrative, the details of which suggest a political agenda (Levinger and Lytle 2001). The invocation of essential values is both a call to re-inscribe culturally relevant meaning on social life and a rejection of critique by any other form of social accounting.

“Chameleon-like, nationalism takes its colour from its context,” writes Anthony Smith (1991: 79). Fundamentalism is sometimes fused with nationalism in ways that conflate the community with ideology and culture, and sometimes with ethnicity. Nationalism shares some characteristics with fundamentalism. Committed to the nation, a necessarily exclusive community, nationalism becomes problematic for the multi-nation state. Nationalism can create a positive sense of identity and common cause. When it is a valorization of some and an erasure of others; when its fictive and mythical elements resonate for some and alienate others, it is at best irrelevant; at worst, it dramatizes oppressive and offensive strands within the political culture. Such a culture, according to Monserrat Guibernau, is precisely what nation-states try to create.⁴

Nationalism “as a political principle holds that the nation and the state should be congruent” (Guibernau 1996: 62). Typically, nationalism is understood by academics to refer to a sense of allegiance on the part of a self-conscious community to a territorially bounded, politically constructed entity known as the state—or to the idea of creating such an entity. Nationalism is about collective aspirations and boundary maintenance in achieving them. The nation is an “imagined community,” in Benedict Anderson’s phrase (1983, cited in Hobsbawm 1990: 46), or a “narration” in Edward Said’s (1994: xiii). In Hobsbawm’s view, it can meet the “emotional void” that exists because of a lack of real human communities. Nationalism depends on an authoritative conception of the nation, which typically includes language and ethnicity.⁵ Yet, especially in colonized societies, language is often either a political imposition or a form of political resistance; and ethnicity may only impute a cultural affiliation (sometimes erroneously) as culture is a social phenomenon, not a biological or genetic one. But ethnicity can, according to Hobsbawm, contribute to the conceptualization of what he calls a “proto-nation,” because it functions to bind populations that are physically dispersed and that lack a common polity (Hobsbawm 1990). The markers of ethnicity

have been used with racist intent, so that “visible differences ... have too often been used to mark or reinforce [class] distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Hobsbawm 1990: 65–66). Rather than being primarily about nationality, ethnic and cultural differences are not politicized unless repressed or associated with the exploitative power relations of class, colonialism and imperialism.

National identity is composed of the characteristics of historical territory, common myths and history, common culture, shared legal rights and duties and a common economy with territorial mobility for members (Smith 1991). The signal attributes of ethnic communities (or *ethnie*) include collective consciousness manifested in a name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, differentiating elements of common culture, a “homeland” and a widely shared sense of internal solidarity (Smith 1991). Ethno-nationalism fuses the two into a political program for the *ethnie*, generally in opposition to an existing, sometimes colonial, authority.

Ethno-nationalism consists of a political national discourse and program for the culturally bounded, if not always geographically or politically bounded, community. Walker Conner (1994) suggests that ethno-nationalism (which seems to be identical to what Hobsbawm calls “proto-nationalism”) has been inadequately studied in part because of the vague terms used for the phenomenon and because of the reluctance of scholars to use the term “nationalism” in relation to ethno-nationalism.

Nationalism has been defined as “a strategic program or agenda whereby a given nation or nationality seeks to promote its autonomy, freedom, cultural priorities, prosperity, and (sometimes) sheer power” (Dallmayr and Rosales 2001: xvi). Matthew Levinger and Paula Lytle identify three elements of nationalist rhetoric that are remarkably similar to the attributes of fundamentalism: “the glorious past,” “the degraded present,” and “the utopian future” associated with national resurgence (2001: 178). Nationalism wears the Janus face of positive collective pride in common identification and the dangers of xenophobia and the legitimation of intolerance. Expressed as a declaration of primacy against all others, these kinds of collective identity are reactive, insular and ethically suspect. Nor do they offer a political program for change. E.J. Hobsbawm declares, “the call of ethnicity or language provides no guidance to the future at all. It is merely a protest against the status quo or, more precisely, against ‘the others’ who threaten the ethnically defined group” (1990: 168). Yet nationalism has also been a liberatory declaration against the imposition of external power, especially colonial power. Colonialism, in its typical processes of denigration of indigenous political and cultural forms and imposition of colonial ones, constructs the colonized as subordinate and deficient, save for the ameliorating effects of colonial influences. National and cultural resistance, therefore, are a

reclaiming of authenticity, of dignity and of an anti-colonial frame for political and cultural reference. "To identify with the nation is to identify with more than a cause of a collectivity. It is to be offered personal renewal and dignity in and through national regeneration" (Smith 1991: 161).

Contemporary existence provides a set of challenges to traditional forms of social, political and economic life in the context of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In response, some activists and theorists have recommended traditional formulae for politics, family, culture and so on, collapsing what David Lynes calls "the complicated relation between the commitment to cultural verity on the one hand and the appropriate means of defending this from the continued influence of colonialism on the other" (2002: 1044). This has been interpreted by some as nationalism, for the most part as ethno-nationalism, but occasionally as a claim to sovereignty equivalent to that of the colonial state. This linkage between culture, colonial occupation, resistance and nationalism is one of political possibility for both liberatory and oppressive consequences.

Ethno-nationalism draws communities of interest together under the umbrella of shared culture, history and language, to be a shield against the dominating and fragmenting colonial culture. It provides a collective frame for identity, based on essential elements of "continuity over time and differentiation from others" (Guibernau 1996: 72–73). This shared sense of community is a powerful human need, made more acute in the face of racist oppression such as that to which Aboriginal peoples are routinely subjected. Yet ethno-nationalism (like generic nationalism) is also problematic, for it sharpens the focus on cleavages between communities and against an "enemy-image" (Wilson 2001: 376). It has fundamentalist characteristics. It does not tolerate dissent within, but requires acceptance of an elite-determined "group voice" (Nira Yuval-Davis, cited in Wilson 2001: 376). It thrives on oppositional differences rather than on affirmative political agendas. It draws on "elements of racist and fascist discourses" (Guibernau 1996: 85). In Robin Wilson's view, ethno-nationalism escalates conflict (2001). Infamously, ethno-nationalism has a racist potential, constructing the "we" community as fundamentally racially pure and distinct from others, who are political competitors. At its worst, this has resulted in fascism, ethnic "cleansing," mass atrocities and genocide.

Whatever the superficial differences in appearances, it is the human species that is the "race"; different communities are not in fact fundamentally, biologically different. (Relatedly, scientists have recently proposed including chimpanzees in the genus *homo*, as chimps and *homo sapiens* share 99.4 percent of their genes. Not only are humans not fundamentally different from each other, but we're barely distinct from chimpanzees.) Yet, as Conner reminds us, "it is not *what is*, but *what people believe is* that has behavioural consequences" (1994: 75).

Canada has developed a set of practices to facilitate some ethno-

national accommodation within the practices of federalism and within the text of the Constitution (Asch 1984). Until 1982 this accommodation was limited to the province of Quebec, implicitly understood to be the geographical heartland of the Quebecois, conceptualized as *pur laine* descendants of French colonists. In the wake of the 1982 constitutional recognition of “aboriginal and treaty rights” and of Indians, Inuit and Métis as the peoples referred to, a body of jurisprudence and of scholarship is emerging that links, approvingly, (ethno)-nationalism to decolonization, within the boundaries of the Canadian state and with the support of the Canadian polity. This nationalism is never called such, but it may be time to start calling it a duck if it walks like a duck; “self-government” demands look more like nationalism than like requests for administration of colonial programs and policies. These claims are made on behalf of nations, against what Guibernau might classify as an “illegitimate” state.⁶

Culture and Identity

Culture remains an essential context for individual and collective identity and is politically resonant in virtually all societies (Smith 1995). Culture is the context in which our individuality is made meaningful. Where culture has been suppressed, as in colonial relationships, recovery of culture and strategies for resurrecting political power flowing from culture are parts of a decolonization narrative. Indigenous nations around the world have formulated a nationalism that claims difference from the colonial states as a justification for self-determination (Macklem 2001). At the same time, cultures that have been subordinated undergo a variety of transformations that radically change them, even as they can become ossified in memory and practice at the time of subordination. Applying Frantz Fanon’s analysis, Lynes writes, “an indigenous culture under a colonial regime lives continually under the strain of knowing that its very existence is at risk. Faced with the perpetual need to resist this threat, very old traditions are forced into service playing new roles in defence of the culture which gives rise to the tradition in the first instance” (2002: 1056). In other words, the political project of cultural recovery is limited to what resources are available, be they imperfect, disputable or historically located at some distant time. Yet it is that culture which bears with it the claim for political liberation in the form of self-determination, as well as the potential for meaningful human community for those who are in the circle.

These twin impulses—change precipitated by external forces and contemporary reification of a particular previous cultural frame—vex those who would resurrect cultural practices, both for authentic identity and for political resistance. As Lynes argues,

The problem is that what will count as an adequate defence of traditional culture is itself subject to the inevitable influence of the

many forms this defence has assumed in the persons of innumerable, *legitimate* Indigenous and non-Indigenous advocates of Aboriginal culture. The defence itself, in other words, will not always be merely or exclusively conservative in its orientations or its aims. As new ways of formulating the defence are developed and expressed, the very nature of what is being defended inevitably evolves as well. (2002: 1046, emphasis in original)

To the extent that political power within the decolonizing nations is derived from cultural invocation, culture becomes a site of political struggle, and the authorities determining what and who is valid become political elites. Culture can be associated with the nation or state in xenophobic ways. It becomes a source of identity, sometimes characterized as “a return” to culture and tradition, that asserts codes of intellectual and moral behaviour (Said 1994). And, like fundamentalism, culture is also contemporary, shaped by the forces of “globalization” and communication technologies, and a powerful source of identity, as well as a connection to an apparently more authentic past (Bhabha 1994).

From Scepticism to Enthusiasm: LaRocque and Alfred

Several indigenous scholars have commented on the virtues and limitations of tradition in the context of decolonization and the recovery of indigenous power and authenticity. Apropos of this discussion of fundamentalism, identity and decolonization, it is useful to examine their premises and prescriptions against the characteristics of fundamentalism. Scholarship demonstrates the breadth of opinion and analysis and the contestations within indigenous communities over theory, analysis and praxis. Moreover, because liberatory projects can also fall prey to the oppressions they contest, a valid (equitable, sustainable, non-oppressive, authentic) decolonization process must take care that its intellectuals and, therefore, its programs and projects, are not damaged by logic and claims that would so taint them.

Here, I briefly take up the work of two powerful and very different voices. Emma LaRocque, Ph.D., is a Métis professor of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. She has contributed to historiography, literary criticism and a gendered and feminist analysis of culture discourse for many years.⁷ She is also theoretically and in her praxis a feminist. Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred, Ph.D., is a Mohawk political scientist who heads the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria. His two books argue that indigenous liberation is found in the practice of cultural traditions and in the maintenance of Canada–indigenous relations via formal mechanisms such as treaty relationships (1995; 1999). He also takes a more polemical and prescriptive approach in his popular writing in indigenous presses, where he lays out a program for action based on

cultural authenticity, boundary maintenance and rejection of compromises (such as policy like British Columbia's treaty commission) with the colonial state (2000 a and b). His work seems implicitly anti-feminist in its insistence on an uncritical reification of tradition, which of course has always been a site of contestation for feminists.

LaRocque argues:

Aboriginal peoples are, *ipso facto*, dynamic peoples, whose cultures were seriously disturbed but not entirely erased by colonization processes. In part, the task is to know (or try to) the places (where) we have been imposed upon, and the places of our resistances, which has led to some significant maintenance of crucial cultural spaces. In other words, how do we read our many changes: where have we changed due to colonial force(s), or due to "natural" change as ordinary human beings who respond to our environments? In any case, I do believe in the value of Aboriginal peoples, cultures, nations' right to their distinctive identities. For example, I value my Métis landbased and linguistically Cree-rooted cultural background, along with a particular worldview that this embeds us/me with. However, I have never viewed or experienced my distinctiveness (intellectually and/or spiritually) as static, or as Hiawathian. Nor do I believe that oppression makes us morally superior or extra sensitive. (LaRocque, personal communication 2003)

LaRocque warns of the dangers of politicized tradition and essentialism when she expresses concern with the potential for human rights abuses through the imposition of traditions "created from the context of colonization" (1997: 76). "Terms such as 'traditional' or 'culturally appropriate' appear as a matter of course in discussions on Aboriginal governance.... The result has been a growing complex of reinvented 'traditions' which have become extremely popular even while lacking historical or anthropological contextualization. This is particularly true with respect to notions of justice and the role of women in Aboriginal societies, past and present" (1997: 76). For LaRocque, culture is always contestable, and she is especially interested to see how culturalist politics play in the lives of the marginal, especially marginal women. In her view, Aboriginal women find their interests subsumed in male-dominated institutions within Aboriginal communities—and in the external colonial society. Culture, supported by male colonial politicians and claimed for its political force by Aboriginal male politicians, can become a weapon to maintain women's subordination. LaRocque's is a minority view, but a cogent and substantive one.

Contrast LaRocque's view with the more prescriptive nationalist

program of Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred. Alfred argues that dominant western theories of nationalism are blind to the power relations in colonial states and are indifferent to the proposition that indigenous societies' resistance takes on characteristics of nationalism, articulated within the historic conditions of colonialism. "If we are to become strong nations again, we must move far beyond the politics of pity and begin to take action to free ourselves from the colonizer's cage" (2000b). Alfred considers that indigenous resistance to colonialism ultimately takes on a nationalist character, which is itself grounded on authentic traditional cultural and institutional bases (1995; 2000b) and corresponds most closely to the nationalism that western scholars call "ethnic" (1995). Ethno-nationalism "seeks to achieve self-determination not through the creation of a new state, but through the achievement of a cultural sovereignty and a political relationship based on group autonomy reflected in formal self-government arrangements in co-operation with existing state institutions" (1995: 14). This nationalism is directed not at construction of a separate state but at autonomy and a formal political relationship with the colonial entity.

Alfred's conceptualization of institutions and communities requires a very precise definition of who is who, and how we know. Alfred's model is silent on these issues as well as on the difficulties posed by hybridity. It does not address the problems that LaRocque raises of the syncretic nature of cultures (which makes absolute characteristics problematic) and of the many contingent choices individuals make in their cultural selections. Rather, for Alfred, the native cultural *corpus* is essentially fixed and not transient, in contrast with the fluidity (and hence the less politically significant) ethnic identities in the settler population. It is in these details that potential for oppressive fundamentalist formulations arises. "In Native societies, the various cultural, spiritual and political affiliations which comprise ethnicity are at root primordial and fixed, whereas in the general population there is a transience of ethnic identity" (1995: 11). Yet he also conceptualizes traditionalism as a self-conscious political strategy, a tool in the struggle for indigenous authenticity in the context of colonial occupation and hegemony. Tradition involves "changing attitudes, not looks or lifestyles" (1999: 134).

Identity formation is an important component of Alfred's conception of indigenous nationalism. Indeed, but for the distinctness of identity, native nationalism would lose its purchase in the popular indigenous imagination. Therefore, the cultivation of a distinct indigenous identity is both a strategy for, as well as a condition for, liberation. He notes approvingly that his Mohawk community has "enacted a membership law with strict provisions against marriage to non-Indians and membership criteria based on lineage." This is important lest "down the road we will be overwhelmed by people who have some Indian blood but no knowledge of the culture, no desire to participate in the community and

no stake in the future of our nations” (2000a). It is in defining the community of identity that politics again manifest themselves, along with the potential for essentialism and fundamentalism. Like nationalism, then, identity formation and identity politics offer both community coherence and radical exclusion. “The various permutations of the collective identity are understood as forms of nationalism because they maintain traditional cultural boundaries and create group self-identification as a political community distinct from the state, and consistently committed to the right of self-determination (1995: 182). Identity is fused with a political project, and made dependent on it. Yet Alfred is not unaware of the problems associated with boundary maintenance: he suggests communities should be self-determining and that membership will involve “blood and belonging” determined *via* particular processes (1999).

Towards a Non-Oppressive Politics of Liberation

I have argued that fundamentalism is about process, not about content. I have shown how culture and nationalism, not only religion, can be fundamentalist. I have suggested that while indigenous liberatory struggles are necessarily located in history and culture, they, like all political movements, can become fundamentalist in ways that are unhelpful to the liberatory project and can constitute violations of fundamental human rights, if they are framed in dualistic and totalizing terms. The challenge, then, is to retain the political space for resistance to colonialism latent in cultural authenticity, while avoiding imposing social roles or racist and sexist boundaries for the community. Necessarily, this strategy must avoid conflating cultural authenticity with genetic purity in ways that are racist and that deny the existence of hybridity. The challenge extends to keeping culture vital and relevant, while recognizing that all cultures are syncretic and evolving. In relation to decolonization of Canada, LaRocque and Alfred have differing degrees of faith in the power of culture as a liberatory formula. LaRocque warns of the oppressive potential when culture and belonging are deployed politically to the disadvantage and disenfranchisement of marginal members of communities of resistance. Alfred is more sanguine about the ability of indigenous communities to negotiate the definition and maintenance of boundaries of belonging. Yet feminist theory and analysis would indicate that LaRocque’s concerns must be attended to, as it is precisely in tradition that women and marginalized others have identified the most deeply held beliefs that sustain oppressive practices. While all tradition is not pernicious, neither is it all innocent of relations of dominance and subordination, nor of exclusion, and liberatory theories will have to attend to concerns of oppression within.

Culture is the repository of much collective wisdom; it provides meaning and context for human existence, but it is not infallible and it is not universal. This suggests that both critique and boundaries should be

maintained. Nationalist and culturalist agendas serve both “in constructing identity and in mobilising popular support” and so must be considered in light of their strategic power (Levinger and Lytle 2001: 177). Nationalism, especially ethno-nationalism, relies on particularity for its force—boundaries matter, and they are often demarcated by shared culture. This, according to Andrew Robinson, limits cultural dynamism and the subjects of and parameters for contestability (personal communication 2003). However, liberation agendas should rely on claims of liberation from oppression rather than on cultural redemption, for in the latter way lies the potential for much anguish and oppression. Fundamentalism is never emancipatory. Finally, cultural redemption itself can still be a collective project of decolonizing societies, most safely when it is not tied too closely to political power, and when it is a dynamic, contestable process involving even those who dissent.

Notes

1. A version of this chapter appeared as “Cultural and Ethnic Fundamentalism: The Mixed Potential for Identity, Liberation and Oppression” in *The Scholar Series*, Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, University of Regina. Thanks to Andrew Robinson, Assistant Professor, Political Science and Contemporary Studies, Wilfred Laurier University, Brantford Campus, for his helpful comments on this chapter. I acknowledge the excellent assistance of Courtney England, MA student, University of Regina; and of Kathy McNutt, PhD student, Simon Fraser University. I also gratefully acknowledge the support of the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, where I was Senior Fellow for the academic year 2002–03.
2. For a discussion of the wisdom of subjecting indigenous governments to the international human rights regime, see Joyce Green (forthcoming).
3. Dallmayr and Rosales note that “the most decisive criterion of proto-nationalism [is] the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity” (2001: 73).
4. “While the national has a common culture, values and symbols, the nation-state has as an objective the creation of a common culture, symbols and values. The members of a nation can look back to their common past; if the members of a nation-state do likewise, they may be confronted with a blank picture—because the nation-state simply did not exist in the past—or with a fragmented and diversified one, because they previously belonged to different ethno-nations” (1996: 47–48; see also 62–64).
5. Hobsbawm also considers national languages to be politically motivated constructs imposed over a variety of languages or dialects (1990: 51).
6. Guibernau classifies states as illegitimate when there is inclusion of different nations or parts of nations under the predominance of one nation. While all citizens are treated equally, “there exists some kind of discrimination that derives from the fact that the state tries ... to instil a common culture, a set of symbols and values and pursues a programme of homogenization among its citizens” (1996: 60).
7. LaRocque’s work includes (but is not limited to) “Teaching Native Literatures:

Margins and Mainstreams," *Reading Aboriginal Literatures: Epistemological, Pedagogical and Cononical Concerns* (R. Eigenbrod and J. Thom, eds.), Bearpaw Publishing (at press); "From the Land to the Classroom: Broadening Aboriginal Epistemology," *Pushing the Margins* (J. Oakes et al., eds.), Winnipeg: Native Studies Press, 2000; "Tides, Towns and Trains," *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America* (Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, eds.), New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997; and "The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar," *Women of the First Nations* (P. Chuchryk and C. Miller, eds.), 1996.

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