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**Cultural and Ethnic Fundamentalism:
The Mixed Potential for Identity,
Liberation, and Oppression**

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For her public lecture, Dr. Joyce Green argued that fundamentalism leads to rigid, exclusionary political processes that are likely to violate fundamental human rights, and so fundamentalism should be eschewed by Aboriginal liberationists as well as by post-colonial vanguards.

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Cultural and Ethnic Fundamentalism:
The Mixed Potential for Identity, Liberation, and Oppression[1]

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Fundamentalism is characterised by nostalgia for a mythic time of goodness in an earlier order, which can be re-acquired by adhering to fundamentalists' representation of the code of earlier 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, who is not authoritative, and how the truths are maintained and deviance 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 culture as absolute authority for fundamentalist formulations of cultural practices, community, and politics. Here, 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 fundamental human rights, and so fundamentalism should 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 "(1) strict maintenance of traditional Protestant beliefs ... (2) strict maintenance of ancient or fundamental doctrines of any religion, esp. Islam". (2001:565) The notion, then, is drawn from theological and cultural positions, in which doctrinaire prescriptive approaches establish a correct practice, in contrast with incorrect or apostate or unholy practices. Fundamentalism is typically thought of as "militant" and "reactionary". Shupe and Hadden define fundamentalism "as a proclamation of reclaimed authority over a sacred tradition which is to be reinstated as an antidote for a society that has strayed from its cultural moorings." They suggest that the socio-political 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 instigate "searches for ultimate meaning, values, and *resacralization* of social institutions" in the search for meaningful community identity. (Shupe and Hadden, 1989:110-111; 116) (emphasis theirs)

This globalization process is a contemporary phenomenon, and part of what makes fundamentalism itself a thoroughly modern phenomenon. 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; the evolving practices of global capitalism, the emergence of supra-constitutional regulatory

mechanisms such as the World Trade Organisation and supra-national trade agreements, and the permeability of all cultures to the dominant consumer and cultural ethos embedded in mass entertainment media, especially that exported from the United States.

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

This paper 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 organisation. These formulae have the potential for foreclosing liberation, and for legitimating human rights violations in the service of cultural redemption. Truly liberatory programmes will have to carefully create the path between the imperatives and values of threatened traditions and the social and political limitations that traditional frameworks place on contemporary peoples. Finally, liberatory programmes must be mindful of the oppression inherent in any socio-political framework that is constructed as incontestable.

Between Fundamentalism and Fundamentals

As noted earlier, fundamentalism is typically associated with rigid, codified, enforced socio-religious practices. Religion encodes and reproduces tradition, and is often treated by its adherents as inviolate and infallible. Setting aside the focus on monotheistic religions, 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 consider that they can 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*, which is "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 socio-political 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 programme. 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. This is 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)

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) Fundamentalism is characterised by nostalgia for a mythic time of goodness in an earlier order, which can be re-acquired by adhering to fundamentalists' representation of the code of earlier tradition. Tradition 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. Necessarily, the political questions of who decides, who is authoritative, who is not authoritative, and how the truths are maintained and deviance disciplined, emerge from this tension.

Fundamentalism is antithetical to plurality, to tolerance, to differences. Fundamentals, on the other hand, 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. It is when the argument is transformed to one proposing that 'our traditions are these specific practices, done in these ways, by these people; and therefore, these practices must be replicated precisely in order to achieve culturally authentic and healthy communities' that fundamentalism rears it's 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 it's authorities. In this respect, then, 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 socio-political frame determined by the fundamentalists. Democracy cannot thrive, for no oppositional propositions can be presented for serious consideration. Self-determination cannot thrive, for in order to be self-determining, the community of interest must both be able to make a critical determination based on information and alternatives; and must also 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 in fundamentalism, but the social regulation aspects permeate other politics that are only incidentally religious, or non-religious. The absolutist thinking, the resistance to critique and to critical thinking, are characteristics of all fundamentalism, and most perniciously, of political fundamentalism.

And politicized fundamentalism has become the scourge of our times, generating the terrorist reactions against hegemony, and also the hegemonic imperial responses to terrorism. Reactive against the conditions of modernity, fundamentalism is a contemporary phenomenon. (Shupe and Hadden, 1989:111-114; McCarthy Brown, 1994:175-76 and 179) This reactive politics ranges from rejection of imperialism and colonialism, to rejection of especially 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 Qaeda* programme of terrorist violence against the American hegemon, for example, cannot be captured by the more limited analysis of fundamentalism as a purely socio-religious position. Rather, 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 Essentialism

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/outsiders and perpetuate the nation. These characteristics become idealized and essentialized, policed and enforced, in defense of the politics and social purity of the nation. The nation is conceptualised as anti-modernist, relative to the multi-national state.

Belonging 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 has boundaries. The community that is not bounded is emotionally irrelevant. Boundaries return us to the *problematique* of schemas determining who's in, who's 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 ethnonationalists claim state-like powers to determine membership, or citizenship, they are drawing boundaries around a "*relational* concept" (Thomas, 2001:4) in order to determine who's in. When the criteria for who's 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 mythic past, lost to the contemporary community. That mythic 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 multinational 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 programme 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 programmes which 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, 2001:118) 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.

Fundamentalism as Nationalism

"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 mythic elements resonate for some and alienate others, it is, at best, irrelevant and at worst, dramatizes oppressive and offensive strands within the political culture, which, according to Guibernau, is precisely what nation-states try to create.[4]

5

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) and on the view of Hobsbawm, 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, that typically includes language and ethnicity.[5] Yet, especially in colonized societies, language is often 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 conceptualisation of what he calls a 'proto-nation', because it functions to bind populations that are physically dispersed and that lack a common polity.(Hobsbawm, 1990:63-64) 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'". (Ibid 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 comprised 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, 1991:14) 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. (Ibid:21) Ethnonationalism fuses the two into a political programme for the *ethnie*, generally in opposition to an existing, sometimes colonial, authority.

Ethnonationalism consists of a political national discourse and programme for the culturally bounded, if not always geographically or politically bounded community. Walker Conner suggests that ethnonationalism [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 ethnonationalism. (1994:72-76)

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, which 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 programme for change. 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 libratory declaration against the imposition of especially 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 colonised as subordinate and deficient, save for the ameliorating influence of colonial influences. National and cultural resistence, 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 ethnonationalism, but occasionally as a claim to sovereignty equivalent to that occupied by the colonial state. This linkage between culture, colonial occupation, resistance, and nationalism is one of political possibility for both liberatory and oppressive consequences.

Ethnonationalism 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, ethnonationalism (like generic nationalism) is also problematic, for it sharpens the focus on cleavages between communities, and against an "enemy-image." (Wilson, 2001:367)   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, ibid:376) It thrives on oppositional differences rather than on affirmative political agendas. It draws on "elements of racist and fascist discourses." (Guibernau, 1996:85) On Robin Wilson's account, ethnonationalism escalates conflict. (2001:370) Infamously, ethnonationalism has a racist potential, constructing the 'we' community as fundamentally racially pure and distinct from others, who are political competitors. At it's worst, this has resulted in fascism, ethnic 'cleansing', mass atrocities and genocide.

And, 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% 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 ethnonational accommodation within the practices of federalism and within the text of the Constitution. (Asch, 1984:82-88) Until 1982, this accommodation was limited to the province of Quebec, implicitly understood to be the geographical heartland of the Quebecois conceptualised as *pur laine* descendants of historic French colonists. In the wake of the 1982 constitutional recognition of "aboriginal and treaty rights" and of Indians, Inuit and Metis as the peoples referred to, a body of jurisprudence, and of scholarship, is emerging that links, approvingly, (ethno)nationalism to decolonisation, 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, and "self-government" demands look more like nationalism than like requests for administration of colonial programmes 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, 1995:53) 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 part 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, 2001:10) At the same time, cultures that have been subordinated undergo a variety of transformations that both radically change them, even as they can become ossified in memory and practice at the temporal point of subordination. Applying Frantz Fanon's analysis, Lynes writes that "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)

8

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 to be associated with the nation or state in xenophobic ways; this becomes a source of identity, sometimes characterised by 'returns' to culture and tradition that assert codes of intellectual and moral behaviour. (Said, 1994:xiii) And, like fundamentalism, culture is also contemporary, shaped by the forces of 'globalization' and communication technologies, and a powerful source of identity and is a connection to an apparently more authentic past. (Bhabha, 1994:172)

From Scepticism to Enthusiasm: LaRocque and Alfred

A number of indigenous scholars have commented on the virtues and limitations of tradition in the context of decolonisation and the recovery of indigenous power and authenticity. *A propos* of this discussion of fundamentalism, identity, and decolonisation, it is useful to examine their premises and prescriptions against the characteristics of fundamentalism. Why? Because this scholarship demonstrates the breadth of opinion and analysis, and the contestations within indigenous communities over theory, analysis, and praxis. And, 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 programmes and project, 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 Metis professor of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. She has contributed to historiography, to literary criticism, and to a gendered and feminist analysis of culture discourse for many years.[7] She is also theoretically and in terms of her praxis, feminist. Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred, Ph.d., is a Mohawk political scientist heading up the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria. His two books argue that indigenous liberation is to be found in the practice of cultural traditions, and in the maintenance of Canada - indigenous relations via formal mechanisms such as treaty relationships.[8] He also takes a more polemical and prescriptive approach in his popular writing in indigenous presses, where he lays out a programme for action based on cultural authenticity, boundary maintenance, and rejection of compromises (such as policy like BC's treaty commission) with the colonial state. 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 Metis land-based 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." (Ibid.) For LaRocque, culture is always contestable, and she is especially interested to see how culturalist politics play in the lives of the marginal, especially of marginal women. On her account, 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 programme 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 (1995:12; 2000b) and corresponds most closely to the nationalism that western scholars call 'ethnic'. (1995:6-23; 178-191) Ethnonationalism "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 cooperation with existing state institutions." (Ibid:14) This nationalism is directed not at construction of a separate state, but at autonomy and a formal political relationship with the colonial entity. Who is the relationship between? Colonial institutions and populations, on the one hand, and indigenous ones, on the other.

Alfred's conceptualization of institutions and communities is requires a very precise definition of who is whom, and how we know. Alfred's model is also silent on the difficulties posed by hybridity. It does not address the problems that LaRocque raises, of both the syncretic nature of cultures (which makes absolute characteristics problematic) and of the many contingent choices

10

individuals make in their cultural selections. Rather, for Alfred, the native cultural *corpus* is essentially fixed and intransient, 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 it's purchase in the popular indigenous imagination. Therefore, it's cultivation 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 the defining of 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. (1999:84-85)

Conclusion: 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 also 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 both unhelpful to the liberatory project, and can constitute violations of fundamental human rights, if they are framed in messianic, 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 or 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, and of the instruments of oppression, especially of the most marginal members of any society. 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 ethnonationalism, requires 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 that way lies much anguish and more potential for 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.

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Endnotes

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2. For a discussion of the wisdom of subjecting indigenous governments to the international human rights regime, see Joyce Green, "Towards Conceptual Precision: Citizenship and Rights Talk for Aboriginal Canadians", in (provisional title) *Insiders and Outsiders: Alan Cairns and the Reshaping of Canadian Citizenship* (Gerald Kernerman and Philip Resnick, eds.), Vancouver: UBC Press, anticipated 2004; also forthcoming in *"The Great Escape: Scaling the Walls of Ideology"* (Darlene Juschka and Leona Anderson, eds.). Vancouver: UBC Press, anticipated 2004.

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". Fred R. Dallmayr and Hose M. Rosales (eds.) *Beyond Nationalism? Sovereignty and Citizenship*. Lanham, U.S.A.: Lexington Books, 2001, at 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." Montserrat Guibernau. *Nationalism: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, at 47-48. See also 62-64.

5. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, at 51. Hobsbawm also considers national languages to be politically motivated constructs imposed over a variety of languages or dialects.

6. Guibernau classifies states as illegitimate when there is inclusion of different nations of 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 pursue 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.

8. *Heeding the Voices of our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995; and *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto.* Toronto: Oxford Press, 1999.

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