ABORIGINAL IDENTITY IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract / Résumé

This paper focuses on both the individual and structural determinants of Aboriginal identity in the Canadian context. The paper discusses three theoretical approaches to identity and assesses their relevance for Aboriginal people. A brief assessment of the historical conditions leading to contemporary Aboriginal identity also is presented. A detailed analysis of what Aboriginal identity means and how it has changed over the past century is then presented. Finally, a discussion on how Aboriginal people are coping and reclaiming their identity is presented and what it means for creating a healthy people.

Le présent article se concentre sur les déterminants individuels et structurels de l'identité autochtone dans le contexte canadien. Il propose une discussion de trois approches théoriques de l'identité et une évaluation de leur pertinence pour les Autochtones. Il présente également une brève évaluation des conditions historiques qui ont mené à l'identité autochtone contemporaine, ainsi qu'une analyse détaillée de ce qui définit l'identité autochtone et de son évolution au cours du dernier siècle. Finalement, l'article présente comment les Autochtones composent avec leur situation et récupèrent leur identité et ce que signifie un tel travail pour le développement d'un peuple en santé.

Introduction

While considerable theoretical writings have focused on the concept of "identity," there has been little focus on Aboriginality as an identity. What is lacking is a basic understanding of Aboriginal identity; the contextual basis for contemporary Aboriginal identity and the conditions that have created the new emergent identity Aboriginal people are exhibiting (Adams, 1999; Chandler, et al, 2003; Valaskis, 2005). This includes an understanding of generational differences, differences among various sub-groups of Aboriginal people (e.g., Indian, Inuit, Métis) the differences in Aboriginal identity that are exhibited in people who live in urban and rural settings, and the differences in identity of Aboriginal males and females.

Identity is a multifaceted concept that allows individuals living in a diverse society such as Canada to choose to identify in a variety ways (e.g., ethnic, occupation, religion, sex). Criteria for membership in any group can include, among other things, self-categorization or identification, descent, specific cultural traits such as custom or language and a social organization for interaction both within the group and with people outside the group. In this paper, our focus is on the concept of Aboriginal identity. It is clear that in the context of regional and national affiliations, because in a plural society like Canada, a fragmentation of identities and allegiances is possible. One way to reconcile this fragmentation of identities is to conceptualize a person's orientation to different groups (e.g., identity), as being nested. Thus one can identity with and hold allegiance to smaller communities (e.g., ethnic groups), while nested within a larger community.

Aboriginal identity encompasses an enormous diversity of people, groups and interests located within varying socio-political, economic and demographic situations. In other words, Aboriginal people do not make up a single-minded monolithic entity, speaking with one voice. They spring from many nations and traditions. At a legal level, Canada recognizes specific groups such as Indians, Inuit and Métis. However, within these broad categories there are many sub-groups (e.g., Red River Métis, Western Métis; Inuvialuit, Nunavut; Cree, Ojibwa, and the list could go on). Aboriginal people have long argued that Aboriginal identity has been essentialized so that the implementation of the government's policy of Aboriginal people would be made easier and which in the end, results in the negligence of acknowledging these variations among such a wide group of peoples. The missing homogeneous worldview by Aboriginal people complicates the determination of a single description of "Aboriginal identity." We begin our paper by discussing the concept "identity," its meaning and different ways of conceptualizing it and then move

to look to the concept of ethnic identity and Aboriginality.

Identity Formation Models

There are three general theories regarding identity formation relevant to our topic.

(1) Psychiatric/Psychoanalytic

This perspective focusing on identity formation, popularized by Fanon (1967), focused on the individual and his/her colonial subjugation. It relies upon psychiatric-psychoanalytic explanatory factors. In this psychological perspective, it is argued that the economic and cultural colonization produces a neurotic alienation in the colonized person such that the individual's identity is a reflection of the psychoanalytic processes impacting on the individual. As part of colonization, racism penetrates to the very core of who we are. This brings about a deprecation of identity by the dominant culture and the resultant damage to the minority group members' sense of self. Redressing this harm requires engaging in a politics of recognition. As such, group members of the minority group join together to refashion their collective identity by producing a self-affirming culture of their own.

(2) Primordialism

A second model of identity is suggested by Geertz (1963, 2001) and focuses on primordial attachments of an individual to a group. The original model holds that human beings are attached to one another (and their communities of origin) virtually by mutual ties of blood. It implies an unquestioned loyalty purely on the basis of the intimacy of the blood tie. Thus, this form of identity is at birth and is natural and prior to any social interaction. In the original version, the theory holds that mutual ties of blood that somehow condition and create reciprocal feelings of trust and acceptance attach humans to one another.

Later conceptualizations of primordialism have taken a "softer" interpretation that suggests whether a blood tie actually exists between a person and his/her community is less important than the fact that he/she believes it does and acts in accordance with such a belief. This socio-biology perspective argues that ethnic, religious, national, political and other forms of identity, not necessarily based on blood, have been known to elicit high levels of uncritical devotion. When this "deep" bonding occurs, it is because a certain inexpressible significance is attributed to the tie of blood. Regardless of whether it is strictly biological or a combination of biology and cognitive functioning, primodialism is a "sentiment of oneness" and a "consciousness of kind" that emerges

from the sharing of a common geographical space, common ancestors, common culture and common language. These attachments, while irrational, are subjective but powerful in determining one's identity.

Others argue that identity is achieved and socially constructed, as opposed to primordial. In this sense, identity reflects situational context and it is flexible, not fixed. This alternative perspective leads us to a third model of identity formation.

(3) Symbolic Interaction

This model argues that social interaction and communication are central in building identity. It takes a more social-psychological perspective that incorporates both social and psychological factors in explaining how identity is formed (Yetman, 1991; Yancy, et al, 1976; Goffman, 1956). Drawing upon socialization theory, it argues that humans are born into a group, the family; live and learn in groups and institutions and communicate what they learned to the next generation. The processes in which these are played out are affected by specific actions and the historical context into which the individual is born. It goes on to contend that human identity is the product of communication; it is not regarded merely as a direct response to environmental stimuli, inner psychic needs or cultural forces. In this explanation of identity formation, social interaction is the key.

Since we are born into a social group, our understanding of whom and what we are must be related to the larger group of which we are a part. Our identity cannot be determined without considering other people we are directly and indirectly involved with in social interaction. Hence, the responses of others necessarily play an important part in the construction of our identity. Whatever else it may be, identity is connected to the ongoing appraisal made of ourselves by us *and* others. This identity is maintained and reinforced on a daily basis as a result of interaction with other people but always cognizant that it might change. In the end, our identity reflects the image we believe others have of us. However, identity is a fragile concept—temporal, situational and constrained and defined by those we encounter on a day-to-day basis. What is key to this model of identity is that identity is actively shaped and reshaped. Moreover, there is a multiplicity and flexibility of identities.

In the end, identity is dynamic not static; multiple not monolithic or homogeneous and is a social construction not at all naturally inherited. Identity is not a property of individuals but of social relationships and institutional structures. Critical to this notion is the extent of identity validation that is the basis upon which consensual roles are enacted. Identities are established when identity announcements (information

given by an individual to others) correspond to identity placements (categories that others place the person in) (Himelfarb and Richardson, 1991). The degree of correspondence between these two can range from no fit (leading to identity invalidation and role enactment confusion) to complete fit, resulting in consensus. Thus, identities are variable, ranging from stable and enduring to unstable and transient and because they are information-dependent are always constructed and potentially negotiable.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is an aspect of a person's social identity that is part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his/her knowledge of membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. Thus there are two components of ethnic identity: self-identification (the subjective) and the behavior and practices of affirmation and belonging (the objective). In short, individuals can use either (or both) of these two different ways to establish their ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity has been defined many ways and range from a positive personal attitude and attachment to a group with whom the individual believes he/she has a common ancestry based on shared characteristics and shared socio-cultural experiences (symbolic identity) to a more behavioral identity or outward expression of ethnic identity that requires an individual to speak an heritage language, use it frequently, choosing one's friends from one's own group, practicing endogamy and belonging to organizations of one's own group. The distinction between behavioral and symbolic identity is important in that it allows many variants of identity over time and within different situations (Peroff and Wildcat, 2002). The individual is enveloped in a specific cultural system and the identity emerges from place (See Table 1). Understanding that a spatial Aboriginal identity emerges from and is maintained in a particular place/ space requires an extension of our thinking beyond material objects to the relationships that underlie those objects. On the other hand, an *a-spatial* Aboriginal identity consists of individuals who are not now and may never have been part of a physically identifiable Aboriginal community shaped by a sense of place. Their identity emerges from an *a-spatial* mass culture and through appropriate symbols. Because these individuals have no "behavioral" actions to validate their Aboriginal identity (e.g., language, community participation), they express their linkage to Aboriginality through symbolic identity. The remaining two types of ethnic identity depicted in Table 1 reveal even lesser forms of identification with Aboriginality. In the case of assimilation, individuals would have

very little identification with Aboriginality and would not see themselves as having Aboriginal ethnicity.

Table 1
Outcomes of Behavioral and Symbolic Components of Ethnicity

		Behavioral	
		Present	*Absent*
	Present	spatial identity	symbolic identity
Symbolic			
	Absent	ritual identity	assimilation

The social nature of ethnic identity reminds us that religious, linguistic, cultural or somatic differences among a population are not reliable predictors of ethnic identification. Rather, the historical variations in ethnic identity observable in ethnicity and the variations in organizational bases observable provide evidence of the mutability of ethnic boundaries. Identity is "a production" and it is subject to the continual play of history, culture and power. The new view of ethnicity is that it is non-fixed, fluid and situational in character (Phinney, 1992; Adelson, 2000). Individual actors and other members of the group as well as those outside the group negotiate ethnic identity. These negotiations also occur within relations of power. Ethnic group boundaries, as well as the meanings associated with being a part of the group or outside the group, are shaped by differences in access to political, social and economic resources.

Historical Context

The process of colonization is part of Canadian history and its associated ideology is still linked to Aboriginal identity (Broad et al, 2006; Morris, et al, 2002). Consequently, the study of Aboriginal identity is not possible to understand without acknowledging the historical and ongoing impact of colonialism. The colonialization process extended over several generations. The first effect of colonialization was the destructive impact on the social and cultural structures of Aboriginal groups. Aboriginal social, religious, kinship, and economic institutions were ignored, rejected and replaced by Euro-Canadian institutions. In addition, colonialization involves the interrelated processes of external political control and Aboriginal economic dependence. Canada is among the wealthiest nations and it is often a noted irony that Aboriginal peoples

are among its poorest citizens. In fact, Aboriginal people argue that the wealth of Canada is built substantially on resources taken from Aboriginal peoples whose poverty is a recent creation (Frideres and Gadacz, 2008; Waldram et al, 2006; Hanselmann, 2001; Mendelson and Battle, 1999).

As a result of such transgressions on Aboriginal life, the forces of assimilation and the demise of Aboriginal family and community associations have eroded Aboriginal identity. Communal bonds have broken down among individuals and communities. Aboriginal leadership has been destroyed and the role of Elders diminished. Moreover, colonialism developed clear "color lines" that established the basis for determining who was superior and who was inferior. The end result of such a process was the ability to exploit Aboriginal people and control them. Through economic dependency, the destruction of culture (including language) and social control, Aboriginal people have had their "spirit broken." However, it is clear that the dominant society has not been able to completely destroy their culture and identity and Aboriginal people are using their fragmented culture and identity to re-assert their Aboriginal identity.

The importance of this process is the extent to which Aboriginal people have been influenced by historical trauma (Daniel, 1998; Morris et al, 2002). Historical trauma is multigenerational and cumulative over time. It extends beyond the life of an individual who has experienced the brunt of colonialization. The losses are not historical in the sense they are in the past but rather they are ever present, represented by one's economic position, discrimination, dysfunctional socialization and a sense of cultural loss (Duran, 2006). Hence, young people today, as descendants of an earlier generation that experienced first-hand the impact of structural dislocation, are susceptible to historical trauma and can exhibit manifest and latent attributes of such trauma (Broad, et al, 2006).

For example, the creation of residential schools resulted in a large number of Aboriginal people becoming socially dysfunctional (as a result of the impact and abuses) and unable to properly socialize the next generation and pass on their Aboriginal identity (Halvorson, 2005). In short, these schools were able to destroy or bring into question the Aboriginal identity of children. Young Aboriginal adults today refer to themselves as "residential school survivors" as they are the recipients of a socialization process through their parents who were directly exposed to the impact of residential school historical trauma (Archibald, 2006).

As such, Aboriginal communities were relegated to the margins of Canadian society and seen as "problems" with regard to incorporation,

social cohesion, integration, civilization and modernization (Champagne, et. al, 2005). Even today Aboriginal communities are seen as groups that must be brought into the collective of national community and culture. However, Aboriginal communities argue that they predate the formation of modern nation-states and thus have governed themselves from time immemorial as well as have maintained independent institutions, cultures and territories. As such, Aboriginal people seek to preserve their right to continue and develop their institutions, culture, religion and governments and to acquire Aboriginal identity (Sheffield, 2004).

Historically, Aboriginal people in Canada neither called themselves by a single label nor understood themselves as a national collectivity. The idea and the image of the "Indian" is a White conceptual-ization. Aboriginal people are real but the concept of "Indian" is a White invention. For example, the image of the "Indian" began when European settlers first visited Canada. As such, they were downgraded to the category of "other" which is the representative entity outside one's own culture. As a member of the "other," the binary opposite of "us" (meaning civilized), Aboriginal people quickly became defined as less than civilized. As such, all of their behavior was evaluated using "us" as the standard (Fopssett, 2001).

As a result of colonialization and historical trauma, Aboriginals are faced with the ever-present problem of assuming an identity and hoping that it will be ratified by others. However, Aboriginal people are forced, at times, to alter their personal identity to correspond with the image projected by the reaction of others (Adelson, 2000). They then come to see themselves as they believe others see them. Once this "master" status is created, it becomes the controlling factor in the way Canadians recognize people and the identity of the individual. For example, a central value of Aboriginal culture is individual respect and reciprocation. Canadians have often commented on the individualistic nature of Aboriginal culture and the fundamental respect and freedom they accorded one another in their daily life. However, if an Aboriginal person behaves in a manner that reflects these values, they will be de-valued by the members of the dominant society. As such, the lack of congruency between the individuals' behavioral identity and the dominant society's definition will adversely impact on the individuals' identity.

Aboriginal Identity

Ethnic identity is seen as historically emergent rather than naturally given, as multivalent rather than unified. Identities are seen as multiple, unstable and interlocking; there is nothing universal or natural about identity. Identity is presented as the subject positions, which are made

available and mobilized in specific historical context. For Aboriginal people, the various aspects of identity have been sites for the construction and reconstruction of subordination, conflict activism and political struggles (Churchill, 1999). As identities are not unilateral or constant, their salience varies with situational and political factors.

As noted earlier, Aboriginal people have multiple positionings in the family, home community and state, which means they have multiple identities. The interplay of multiple identities is important and must be fully understood to appreciate Aboriginal identity. For example, when Aboriginal people struggle for access to resources, they present their identity differently than they would in a non-competitive situation because they have learned to use different identities in different situations.

Kramer (2006) argues that identity and its material embodiment are not created on only one side of a boundary between "us" and "them"; rather, identity and ownership are constantly being fashioned and valued via the recognition on the part of the outsiders. Like others, Aboriginal identity is forged in a crucible of interaction with outside others. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups have adopted the readily recognizable fiction that Aboriginal identities are essential and fixed: defined as "traditional," unchanged forms that replicate some "authentic" past (Cornell, 2000). Aboriginal peoples accept this fiction in order to empower themselves vis-à-vis non-Aboriginal society, while the latter accepts it as part of a continuing historical stance of condescension. This stance allows Aboriginal people to opt for an identity that attempts to resurrect what are deemed to be historically accurate or "authentic" cultural forms (Crosby, 1997). While some people would like to take this path, it is impossible to follow because all Aboriginal people live within a contemporary, non-Aboriginal dominated society that is different from the worlds inhabited by their ancestors. On the other hand, Aboriginal people may eschew the mantle of the "authentic Indian" and choose to live and give voice to an Aboriginal identity consonant with life in the contemporary social milieu (Kublu and Oosten, 1999). If this is the path, they run the danger of not being heard or becoming invisible and, of course, being defined as "not really Aboriginal." In the end, Aboriginal people maneuver between the two worlds and they situationally decide when to be "traditional" and when to be "non-traditional." This position views identity as "fluid," constantly being debated by Aboriginal people.

Coombe (1997) argues that the movement back and forth constitutes identity creation and it reveals the lack of existence of a static, reified Aboriginal identity. She points out that Aboriginal people have to use "double voiced rhetoric" in talking to non-Aboriginal society so that they use a language that "power understands." In the end, it is through

this movement between two different lines of rhetoric that contemporary Aboriginal identity is created and sustained. Identity creation is viewed (metaphorically) as the process involving the interrelationship between insiders and outsiders.

Nevertheless, Aboriginal identity is inclusive of all reality, both physical and metaphysical. There is an acceptance that the universe is unified, interconnected and interrelated. In Western ways of knowing, reason or rationality is the cornerstone of science to the exclusion of other human characteristics that may be metaphysical, such as spirit and faith. Aboriginal knowledge is that reason or human cognition may not be the sole source of knowledge and that faith and spirit may also play a significant role to human reason (Atleo, 2004). For non-Aboriginal people who have adopted the Western ways of knowing, the assumption is that knowledge can only be acquired through human reason. Any other experiences are secondary and not part of what is considered "evidence."

Aboriginal people have a distinctive vision of reality (epistemology) that not only interprets and orders the places and events in the experience of a people but gives direction and identity. Aboriginal worldview is such that it is regarded as a network of relationships. For example, Aboriginal people respect immanence—that is, knowledge of and respect for unseen powers (Graveline, 1998:52). This worldview provides people with a distinctive set of values, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and place; in the end, a distinct identity.

It is clear that Aboriginal identity is complex but ultimately it refers to Band, linguistic or cultural collectivities, and not personal identity. If you ask someone who he/she is, the answer will be in terms of tribal affiliation or the name of a specific Band or clan while the larger society considers Aboriginals to be a homogeneous entity. For many Aboriginal peoples, membership in the Canadian state is a secondary political identity (Guimond, 2003). The primary source of identity for many Aboriginal peoples is their community or nation. For example, if you ask an Indigenous person in Canada where they are from, most will tell you their Indigenous nation first (e.g., Mohawk, Haida, Métis, Inuvialuit).

While traditional identity is understood as an emergent category of identification, there are cases where individuals/groups are encumbered by "border identity." This is where identity lies between predefined social categories. Their existence is somewhere between Aboriginal and White. These individuals have a unique status as the grounding of their identity is based in both Aboriginal and the dominant culture. In these cases, individuals perceive their position as one of both oppression and advantage. As such, these individuals found they are able to "cross boundaries" (sometimes referred to as "passing") between Aboriginal

and White because they possess border identities. Their dual identities allowed them to fit in (and /or not to fit in either), however conditionally, in varied interactional settings.

However, when individuals identify with one group but not others, they immediately create boundaries. Some of these distinctions, called symbolic boundaries, are not problematic in that they are conceptual distinctions made by individuals to categorize objects and people over time and space. However, if they become social boundaries, they become problematic in that they are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities. In the past, the mainstream society has engaged in boundary erasure (forced assimilation) or boundary enforcement where clear social boundaries have been established (a form of apartheid). Aboriginal peoples have responded, more or less effectively, through techniques such as "regrouping." This involves shifting a symbolic boundary to a more inclusive level. Alternatively, it may involve promoting narrower boundaries as to who is considered an Aboriginal. These boundaries may change over time in terms of salience over time and space.

However, these individuals always find they are initially responded to on the basis of their physical features, language and clothing clues and they, as individuals, have to correct or confirm the external definition. As such, their identity is subject to the definition of others, at least initially, as they enter into new interactional settings (Haig-Brown, 1998). Nevertheless, it also points out that Aboriginal people can alter their external identity (Taylor, 1999). However, it is too simplistic to say that individuals' appearance alone determines their identity. The effect of social networks in which the individual is situated is also an important consideration to understand the choice of identity. In the end, it will be the type of contact that an individual has with others in each of the dual cultures and/or the way in which an individual socially experiences Aboriginality that will mediate the relationship between one's social status and one's Aboriginal identity.

As a group of people, Aboriginal people share a history of genocide, a collective trauma, a history of dispossession of land, disenfranchisement, poverty and ill health, just to mention a few attributes. Moreover, among Aboriginal communities, individuality ultimately becomes subsumed in collective values. The basis of these values is invested in land, but not land as individual property right but as a right from the Creator. For Aboriginal people, a worldview is at the core of community identity. Although each community has its own variant, there are common elements that make up the worldview and serve to define a community's

identity in time and place. Because all things are viewed as interconnected, relationships among people also are critically important; the notion of religion and spirituality have a communal rather than an individual basis.

Part of Aboriginal identity is defined in relation to the colonizing culture and state government (Loring and Ashini, 2000). However, the ultimate claims to Aboriginal identity do not derive from contemporary nation-states. Aboriginal identity is not a grant from the nation-state and does not derive from colonial legal proclamations or the decisions of courts. Aboriginal identity derives from their relationship with the Creator, their occupation of the land and from their self-government according to their own way developed over the years.

The present day complexities of Aboriginal identity derive from the conflicting forces of the dominant society wanting assimilation and the cultural and community forces of Aboriginal identity. As a result, Aboriginal identities in communities have become complex and multidimensional. Yet, despite the impact of 500 years of colonization, many Aboriginal peoples retain significant aspects of an Aboriginal traditional identity. Defensive mechanisms have been devised over the millennium to counteract the assimilative forces that have impinged upon Aboriginal culture.

Aboriginal identity within communities is very different from the national community of the nation. National loyalties and identities characterize the modern nation-state but in Aboriginal communities, identities are often not region-wide and are not ethnic in the sense of "pan-Indian" identities. Aboriginal social and cultural institutional arrangements are local and specific. Aboriginals hold their own identities within their communities and cultures, meaning there are many different Aboriginal identities. Each Aboriginal community has a very specific creation story, institution relations, cultural epistemologies and community relations. Each is unique in its combination of cultural belief, political relations, and land and community relations. And in each case, these create the identities of the local members. As such, there are many different Aboriginal identities. Usually Aboriginal identity is "sub-regional" and not based on language families or major cultural groupings. They are often specific to a place that has historical roots with the land and a group history. At the same time, cultural and linguistic identities continue to play a major part of Aboriginal identities (Atleo, 2004). An Aboriginal person who has community connections will most often identify through this cultural/linguistic affiliation, such as Cree or Blackfoot.

Nevertheless, Aboriginal people also have developed numerous extensions of their community identities within the nation-state (Banner,

2005). They have created Aboriginal identities that will allow them to deal with and manage relations outside their communities. As noted earlier, they have become adept in developing "sub-identities" to deal with government officials, media and other external agencies (Nagel, 1996). Other non-Aboriginal people, e.g., Flannagan (2000), suggest they are not an ethnic group but are just an "interest group." Aboriginal people claim they are not an "interest group" but rather they are a "people." They posit that their identity is an alternative to the citizenship rights that other Canadians have (Cairns, 2000). They belong to an Aboriginal group that has preceded citizenship in the modern nation-state. Aboriginal people argue that they are a people who can stand outside this state-citizen relationship and may place their loyalties and interests elsewhere. Hence, it is not surprising that conflicts emerge between the two groups when one group sees itself as a "people" and the other sees them as an interest group. Aboriginal identity thus confirms that they are a people in their own right and thus the legitimacy of the state over them is called into question.

These political actions have drawn attention to Aboriginal peoples' assertion that they have the right to shape the political order of which they are a part, from their relationship with encompassing societies to the institutions by which they govern themselves—including the laws to which they are subject on their own lands (Cornell, 2005). Their identity is not based upon complete separation from others in Canada but rather they have envisioned "nations within" status that is a mixture of autonomy and participatory engagement at the same time. This reflects an arrangement that Aboriginal people use to characterize themselves as simultaneously distinct from, yet part of, a large social and political interaction.

Aboriginal people have always had a cultural identity but in the past it was largely taken for granted since it was anchored to groups and roles and it was not a matter of choice. When people live in an Aboriginal community, work with other Aboriginal people and socialize with other Aboriginal people, there is little need to be concerned with cultural identity except during conflict with other ethnic groups or government. However, the new generation of Aboriginal people has grown up without assigned roles or groups that anchor Aboriginality so that identity can no longer be taken for granted. People can of course give up their identity, e.g., enfranchisement or assimilate, but if they continue to feel it, they must make it more explicit than it was in the past and must even look for ways of expressing it.

Most people who do not live in an Aboriginal community (a-spatial) look for easy and intermittent way of expressing their identity; for activi-

ties that do not conflict with other aspects of their life. As a result, they refrain from exhibiting ethnic "traditional" behavior that requires an arduous or time-consuming commitment, either to a culture that must be practiced constantly or to organizations that demand active membership. In addition, because people's concern is with identity rather than with cultural practices or group relationships, they are free to look for ways of expressing that identity which suit them best, thus opening up the possibility of voluntary, diverse or individualistic ethnicity. Any mode of expressing cultural identity is valid as long as it enhances the feeling of being ethnic and any cultural pattern or organization that nourishes that feeling is therefore relevant, providing only that enough people make the same choice when identity expression is a group enterprise.

In other words, as the function of Aboriginal culture and groups diminish and individual identity becomes the primary way of being Aboriginal, symbolic Aboriginality becomes the primary way of expressing Aboriginal identity (Simard, 1980; Lipiansky, 1998). In this form, Aboriginality takes on an expressive rather than instrumental function in people's lives. Expressive behavior can take many forms and often involves the use of symbols. Thus Aboriginal symbols are frequently individual cultural practices that are taken from the traditional Aboriginal culture and then abstracted from that culture and pulled out of its original context. Symbolic Aboriginality can be expressed in a myriad of ways but it is a characteristic of a nostalgic allegiance to the traditional culture. It is a "love for" and "pride in" a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday behavior. Aboriginal people may sincerely desire to "return" to these imagined pasts but they soon realize that they cannot go back. Many of today's Aboriginal people have come to the conclusion that neither the practice of traditional Aboriginal culture nor participation in Aboriginal organizations is essential to being and feeling Aboriginal.

Those cultural patterns that are transformed into symbols are guided by a common pragmatic imperative—they must be visible and clear in meaning to a large number of others. For example, when the author once interviewed Harold Cardinal, he was asked why he always wore a buckskin jacket with traditional beading. He answered that in addition to being comfortable, it was a symbol of Aboriginality and recognized as such by anyone who saw him.

Behavior and identity are, however, determined not only by what goes on among the members of the group but also by developments in the larger society. How Aboriginal people are treated is of particular importance, as well as what costs it will levy and what benefits it will award to an individual as an Aboriginal are important. Historically the conse-

quences for "being Aboriginal" were costly, the penalties high and the reward low. At present, costs of being and feeling Aboriginal are low and while there may be some discrimination directed, in many cases the taking on of Aboriginal identity can be positive. Aboriginal art, theatre, literature and clothing have high market value today. Being able to speak an Aboriginal language is considered an asset and is highly desired in the labor market, particularly with regard to northern development. The use of Elders in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal events is extensive. With Aboriginality now being respectable, Aboriginal people find their identity an ideal attribute to use for immediate and future gains. At the same time, we find that some Aboriginal organizations take on the role of an ethnopolitical movement, using these varying identifications to translate them into an encompassing ethnopolitical perspective to the advantage of Aboriginal people (Roth, 2005).

Nevertheless, we find that there is a range of interethnic experiences and their relationship to differences in the expression of Aboriginal identity. We can identify four major types of identity, although it is understood that this is a continuum of identity and the categories are not truly mutually exclusive: (a) those who identify as Aboriginal as an obvious unquestionable reality; (b) those who identify as Aboriginal because denying it would be unthinkable, despite experiencing stigmatization; (c) those who identify as both "Aboriginal and Canadian" who find some advantages in being Aboriginal or both, and; (d) those who do not identify as Aboriginal. We now turn to the issue of ethnic revival.

The Revival of Aboriginal Identity

A number of factors have been identified by researchers which contribute to the Aboriginal identity renaissance that is quietly taking place in North America. Factors such as residence, education, and income, have all been identified as important correlates of Aboriginal identity (Chandler, et al, 2003). These factors are not always complimentary to each other and when these factors intersect, the resulting identity can be anything but strengthened. Nevertheless, Aboriginal communities across the country are taking steps to preserve and rehabilitate their own cultures (Mackey, 1998). The number and types of Aboriginal organizations has grown over the past three decades and they encompass almost every aspect of Aboriginal life (Frideres and Gadacz, 2008). They have introduced programs to promote young people's knowledge of the language and traditions, established "safe zones" in urban centres where traditional practices can be learned and shared, and developed Aboriginal educational centers (Couture, 2000; Blum, 2005). Aboriginal communities (both rural and urban) have argued that resilience (the capacity of

an individual/culture to cope successfully in the face of significant adversity or risk) must become a central strategy to deal with Aboriginal identity (Norris, 2000).

Others have noted that individuals or communities with little resilience are more likely to be "demotivated," have a sense of hopelessness and engage in deviant behavior, including suicide (Taylor, 1997; Chandler, et al, 2003). As such, a focus on strengthening the "protective" factors that will allow people to meet the challenges they face has been put in place. These range from family connectedness, support networks, community cohesiveness and a place in the larger society (Patrick, et al., 2007).

Others (Nagel, 1996; Coates, 2004; Battiste, 2000) have suggested that this reclamation of Aboriginal identity is evidence of an Aboriginal renaissance. This renaissance is evidenced in the revival of traditions, the search for connections with forebears, the development of creative expression, e.g., art, literature, and the persistence of symbolic identification. Moreover, they are using a variety of arenas to challenge how non-Aboriginal people and institutions have defined them, changing negatives into positives.

Aboriginal people have come to appreciate that they must identify themselves and not have others do it. They are careful how they represent themselves in public as a way of ensuring others understand their identity (Fleras, 1999). At the public level, it is not unusual to see the various Aboriginal sub-groups express or give the impression of solidarity and social cohesiveness. They understand that "unity" is a strategic factor in developing and sustaining Aboriginal identity (Cairns, 2000). Moreover, shared cultural and political identities as Aboriginals make it possible to be heard and to gain wider attention for their agenda as well as a means of making a difference on vital issues such as self-determination, land and resources. Thus the various Aboriginal sub-groups will use terms such as "we as First Nations" on occasion to illustrate the common historical experiences all Aboriginal groups have shared as well as acknowledging their resistance to external labeling. As Retzlaff (2005) points out, representing themselves as "First Nations" by the various sub-groups asserts autonomy and reinforces and promotes the notion that Aboriginal people are not only distinct as nations or a people but also share the effects of colonialism.

Over the years Aboriginal people have been forced "inward" upon themselves as families and communities. In turn, substantial cultural resources have been developed among these communities to survive and develop elements of an autonomy and opposition in order to survive in such a society. Olzak (2006) refers to this as a "*war of maneuver.*"

This strategy developed by Aboriginal people is an attempt to preserve and extend a definite territory, to combat violent assaults and to develop an internal society as an alternative to the repressive social system they encounter on a daily basis. Recently, this strategy has been replaced by a "*war of positions*" in which Aboriginal people are now using political strategies to achieve their goals. Aboriginal people, since obtaining the vote in the 1960s, have undertaken sustained strategies in the mainstream political process, e.g., Meech Lake, the use of the courts, overt conflicts—Oka, Caledonia, Gustafson Lake—to resolve differences.

Over the past quarter century, there have been numerous structural and organizational changes that have both changed the dominant society's perception and definition of Aboriginal and allowed Aboriginal people to develop strategies and processes by which they could develop their own Aboriginal identity. The main theme of Aboriginal revival is the rediscovery and reassertion of the importance and value of cultural pluralism as well as a coincidental rejection of Anglo-Saxon conformity and the "melting pot." Over all, three basic elements precipitated the movement: (1) a sensitivity to and appreciation of the importance of multiculturalism; (2) a self-conscious examination of one's own cultural heritage; and (3) state actions (external forces) that deal with the definition of who is an Aboriginal (e.g., Bill C-31). This consciousness raising was expressed in a number of ways, e.g., increased interest in the literacy, intellectual and artistic culture of one's Aboriginal background and increased use of one's ancestral language. Aboriginal identity revival is also reflected in the increased academic attention to ethnicity and Aboriginal people in particular.

The decade of 1965-75 was an important watershed of events that led to the development and sustainability of a "counter-ideology" publicly communicated by Aboriginal people. However, it must be made clear that Aboriginal identities are not just oppositional to understandings and views created by the mainstream society. This time period produced a paradigm shift stimulated by the government's proposed *White Paper*. The Aboriginal response through the publication of *Wabung*, *The Red Paper* and *The Brown Paper* produced a bonding of Aboriginal people across the country. In addition, it allowed for Aboriginal organizations to form linkages with other non-Aboriginal associations that were prepared to accept the alternative ideology being presented by Aboriginal people. The result was the emergence of new Aboriginal narratives that made public an Aboriginal point of view. The contemporary responses by Aboriginal people were manifestations of an age-old struggle. However, two things were different than in previous times. First of all, linkages were established with other organizations that provided Ab-

original communities and organizations with additional human resources, money and assistance with publicizing their concerns. Second, the radicalization of the Indigenous movement offered an intellectual context within which communities could situate the struggle (Collignon, 1999). At the same time, domestic Aboriginal organizations and individuals began to develop transnational networks and alliances that traversed the boundaries between the state, markets and civil society. These events dramatically transformed the terrain in which Aboriginal people carry on their lives. This terrain has continued to be changed both by Aboriginal people as well as outsiders (Blaser et al, 2004). For example, linkages with international human rights networks began to develop and collaborative efforts to secure their rights were undertaken in a worldwide arena. As a result of the national and international publicity of Aboriginal issues, Canada was subject to "shaming" by international parties and brought about change in the Canadian government's orientation toward Aboriginal people (Coates, 2004).

The Supreme Court's decision in 1973 gave further support to Aboriginal peoples that they existed as a group with a distinct identity. The *Berger Report* on the northern pipeline also provided a milestone of events that convinced Aboriginal people that they were distinct and had value to give to Canadian society. A series of court decisions after 1980 confirmed the value of Aboriginal culture and the need for the government to ensure they exercised their role of protector.

Today, Aboriginal people are engaged in revitalization or revival of their culture supported by Canadians. An increasing number of indigenous peoples are developing adaptive strategies, constructing internal processes in their communities while responding to the challenges and opportunities of external forces. For example, the recent opening of the "Blackfoot Crossing" museum is just one more indicator that the repatriation of Aboriginal artifacts has added to the Aboriginal revival. This does not mean turning back the clock but selecting traditional cultural aspects and integrating them into the new ceremonies (e.g., sundances, fasting, potlatches, sweat lodges). Aboriginal people suggest that while some aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture are disappearing (e.g., songs and stories) and others are changing (e.g., ceremonies), the fundamental nature of their culture (e.g., world-view) remains strong. They conceive of their primary identity as Aboriginal and see their biculturalism in positive terms.

Prior to the 1950s, practicing cultural activities (e.g., speaking an Aboriginal language, hosting gatherings or traditional ceremonies) was defined as inappropriate, forbidden or illegal. This period of severe oppression was followed by the beginning of a period of enlightenment

(e.g., doing away with the anti potlatch laws, giving the vote to Aboriginals). However, it would not be until the 1970s, when multiculturalism was declared a national policy, that a full resurgence of Aboriginal identity emerged. First of all, there was a major infusion of funds for ethno-cultural groups to engage in "ethnic" activities. Later, organizations (e.g., Friendship Centres) were funded to support cultural activities. Finally, the policy itself gives respect and credibility to minority cultures. With this beginning, Aboriginal people began to revitalize their identity through first of all supporting the emerging "pow wow" circuits that had developed in Western North America. By the 1980s, a number of ceremonies, such as pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, sundances, smudging, sacred fires and naming ceremonies, were actively engaged in by Aboriginal people and given legitimacy to the larger society through the Multiculturalism Policy (a policy that Aboriginals are not interested in supporting because they feel it is not directly relevant to them). Nevertheless, as multiculturalism became an accepted policy and practiced by Canadians from all walks of life, Aboriginal people found more opportunities to engage in cultural activities and their sense of identity grew. At the same time, non-Aboriginal Canadians have become more supportive toward Aboriginal culture. In 2004, an Ipso-Reid survey found that over 60% of Canadian non-Aboriginal adults felt Aboriginal culture needs protection.

Being an Aboriginal is ascriptively delimited but the shifting of flexible ethnic boundaries may originate from forces outside the group in question as well as from within the group. When there exist social and political definitions that emphasize a particular boundary or affiliation (e.g., Aboriginal), *and* when members of such an identified group perceive economic and or political advantages to be derived from emphasizing that particular boundary, then there exists a strong likelihood of mobilization on the basis of that designated identity. Group organization depends on commonality of interests as well as the extent of unifying structures within the group. Thus ethnic mobilization is defined as the process by which a group organizes along ethnic lines in pursuit of group ends. And this process will begin when a choice provides social, economic or political advantage. Aboriginal identity, then, is a function of the degree to which one's ethnic affiliation provides one with necessary and important resources. While economic organization and processes play an important role in Aboriginal identification, group formation, conflict and collective action, as well as the political orientation of much ethnic activism, suggest a similarly important role played by political organization and processes.

On the other hand, others argue that an Aboriginal revival is not

taking place. These individuals propose that Aboriginality may well be an artifact of the national census rather than the social reality it is claimed to be. Increasing numbers of Canadians are of mixed ethnic heritage and for these individuals it becomes problematic as to how they resolve the question of Aboriginal identity. Instead, they argue that today's Aboriginals have become more visible as a result of upward mobility and they are adopting the new form of identity referred to as "symbolic" identity. In the first instance, it is noted that the recent upward social and economic movement of Aboriginals has finally enabled a cohort of them to enter the middle class where they have been noticed by the national mass media which monitor primarily these strata. In the process, they are becoming more noticeable to other Canadians (Smith and Ward, 2000). Thus the newly visible Aboriginals may not participate more in "ethnic groups and cultures" than before but their new visibility makes it appear as if Aboriginality has been revived.

A second question focuses on how the new generation of Aboriginal people is able to establish new Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal culture is now only an ancestral memory or an exotic tradition that can be enjoyed in a museum or at an ethnic festival. However, this new generation of Aboriginal people is less interested in their Aboriginal cultures and organizations—both sacred and secular—and is instead more concerned with maintaining their Aboriginal identity with the feeling of being Aboriginal. They are interested in finding ways of feeling and expressing that identity in suitable ways. (Identity is the socio-psychological elements that accompany role behavior.) Aboriginality today is less an ascriptive and more a voluntary role that people take on alongside other roles. At the same time, Aboriginal people want to be identified as such by others, particularly on the basis of name, but the behavioral expectations that once with identification by others have declined sharply so that individuals have some choice about when and how to play Aboriginal roles. As such, ethnic identity can be expressed either in action or feeling or both of these dimensions (See Table 1).

In the end, they argue that Aboriginality has become more visible but many of the symbols used by today's Aboriginal people are also visible to the rest of Canada, not only because middle-class people who use them are more visible but also because the media are more adept at communicating the symbols than the traditional Aboriginal culture and organizations. The media have difficulty in communicating the clan structure, the role of extended families, sharing practices and secret societies. However, media clips of Aboriginal dancers, leaders in traditional headdresses, and drummers are easily captured and disseminated to the public. In the end, the visibility of symbolic Aboriginal identity pro-

vides further support for the existence of an Aboriginal revival but what appears to be a revival may only be the emergence of a new form of assimilation that is taking place. That is, individuals are losing their objective, behavioral components of culture so evident in every day life and expressing their "identity" through the use of symbols that are temporal, episodic and non-reflective of culture (Antone, 2004; Snow, et al, 2005).

An alternative macro perspective is the social movement school of thought. Social movements can be thought of as collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture or world order of which they are. These "recognition struggles" and "process" theories of social movements are currently being applied to ethnic identity in Europe and North America, although as noted above they have not been utilized as an explanatory model for Aboriginal identity. These social movement conceptual-izations focus on the intersection of collective identities and the entire field of collective action. However, until present, social movement theory has more to say about "struggles" than how they are aided or hindered by recognition of the identities of participants. Current social movement theory has not resolved the issue of whether the role of collective identities is a process of mobilization and primarily one of "rediscovery" suppressed by a system of political dominance or a result of a creative process based in the ongoing interpretive work of the movement (Olzak, 2006). Nevertheless, this approach places a major emphasis on the negotiated relationship between the individual and various collective levels of social movements. While incorporating much of social constructionism, the more recent work reflects additional issues that arise from mobilization based on identities that have at least some portion of their origins in the history, myths, symbols and collective memories (Mueller, 2003).

The work of Melucci (1995, 1996) has been most influential in bringing the concept of "*identization*" and the construction of social movement identities into the field of identity formation. In this approach, collective identity is all encompassing (e.g., the collective identity is the movement and the movement itself is process). Others such as Snow and Benford (1992) argue that collective identities are constructed from available cultural material by social movement organizations and have a major influence on the course of collective action. Finally, Gamson (2000) also discusses identities in terms of "framing" but focuses on antecedent identities that precede collective action. He argues that the locus of

collective identity is cultural and manifested through the language and symbols by which it is publicly expressed. Della-Porta and Diani (1999) attempt to integrate the above social movement theories as well as symbolic interactionism and argue that identities are developed and sustained through models of behavior, objects, and narratives combined in specific ritual forms. They argue that instead of a single homogenous identity, there is instead a multiplicity of identities and allegiances. Identities are formed and reformed through reconfiguration of the various cultural elements—both public and private. In turn, these ritual experiences are important for framing and re-framing individual identities. As such, through these processes, identity is activated and given meaning. In addition, these experiences provide a major source of continuity linking experiences and events over time and space for individuals.

These theorists argue that social movement identities are a major source of social movement continuity. However, they go on to point researchers in new directions in identity research by focusing on issues such as the centrality of adversarial relationships, the negotiation and construction of identities, the lack of autonomy that most collectives face in being understood in the way they understand themselves, the potential of identities as a source of continuity for movements over time and space, and the often ignored role of the state in reinforcing or suppressing identities that might serve as a foci for mobilization.

Summary

The embodiment of Aboriginal identity revival is comprised of a disparate group of communities, involving scholars, professionals and community activists. These individuals, starting in the 1970s, came from Aboriginal communities across the country and began to organize activities for the purpose of undermining existing unjust social relations and power structures (Li, 2007). Their secondary goal was to contribute to their own community's well-being and to bring about radical changes in Canadian society. In the process of their activities, they produced a new Aboriginal consciousness. It is important to remember that identity issues were of considerable interest for Canadians during the 1970s. Quebec identity, Canadian identity, ethnic identity were central concerns for Canadians during this time and it was also the beginning of an awakening of Aboriginal identity, although it was not given much media attention at the time.

To be sure, initially these individuals were not acting in consort with one another, evidencing some grand plan to transform the cultural landscape of Canada or to create a pan-Canadian Aboriginal identity. In most cases, there were compelling unique circumstances that led them to

take action. Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society* (1969) emerged out of the government's unilateral imposition of the *White Paper*. Howard Adams' *Prison of Grass* (1975) emerged out of the plight Métis people faced in attempting to gain federal recognition. Later, David Ahenakew's work on *The Fourth World*, Dick Fidler's analysis of *Red Power*, Harry Daniels and Don Whiteside all contributed to the recognition of inequalities and recognizing culture's controlling and liberating power. Each one of them carved out a terrain in which a discursive battle was waged. These individuals reaffirmed culture as a vehicle of social change and their work had profound social implications over time. Consciousness was raised, communities were formed and mobilized and a vigorous Aboriginal cultural identity gradually came into being. This is not to say that prior to this point in time cultural activism in the Aboriginal community did not exist. Certainly, local community leaders had been active in dealing with inequalities, social justice and culture since the late nineteenth century.

The early work of Aboriginal activists dealt with "decolonized sensibilities," seeking answers and solutions related to their feelings of self-doubt and alienation from Canadian society, their disconnection from Canadian history and their traditional culture (Li, 2007). Aboriginal people, until recently, have been denied from participating in the intellectual and aesthetic production of culture. They concentrated much of their daily efforts on survival and it is only recently that they have the luxury of participating in the national cultural sphere. Furthermore, Aboriginal people found that entering the cultural production sphere was organized according to the dominant society's worldview, which meant that Aboriginal people were not part of it. Hence, Aboriginal authors, artists, academics, and performers of all types were systematically excluded. Only recently have Aboriginal people such as Alex Janvier, Jeannette Armstrong, Daphne Odjig, Tom Jackson, Jamie Robertson, Sandra Laronde, Drew Haden Taylor been allowed onto the main stage of cultural production and recognized for their efforts. These activists are now role models for young and old Aboriginal people and instill pride in Aboriginal identity for all.

Historically, claiming to be "Aboriginal" signified a political awakening. Today, taking on a positive Aboriginal identity still has political connotations but it is an increasingly appealing identity category for young Aboriginal people. However, Aboriginal identity today is not "identity politics," which refer to the emergence of political and cultural expressions from formerly silenced and displaced groups that now reassert and reclaim suppressed identities through the construction of counter-hegemonic narratives and social practices. Aboriginal identity today is

about: (1) reclaiming suppressed culture and forging new identities; and (2) projecting an Aboriginal identity into the mainstream society and becoming part of the nation-building process (both First Nations and Canada).

We also find that spatial identity is much more influential than a-spatial identity. This is reflected in the differences between rural and urban Aboriginal people. Rural Aboriginal people have the ability to develop spatial identity and to have it reinforced on a daily basis. However, this is mediated by the socio-economic status of the individual and/or community. We find that for those in low socio-economic status, identity is secondary to trying to survive. We also find that collective political interventions and coalition with other visible minorities have been recognized as strategies in developing strong Aboriginal identity. Finally, the creation of Aboriginal organizations and the plethora of Aboriginal publications have added to the new emergence of Aboriginal identity.

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