The term “Indigenous” is used here to represent any person, tribe, or community that is descendent from the original pre-colonial people of any continent on earth. Yet, defining Indigenous is so problematic that it has motivated the writing of this paper in the first place. Regardless, the term “Indigenous” will be used here in lieu of, and interchangeably with, Native American, American Indian, First Nations person, Aboriginal, Native, Polynesian, Maori, and tribal. Regarding the geographic location, there is no inherent reason to place limits on specific areas beyond writing a manageable paper. In theory, any continental region with original inhabitants that have been subjected to colonial activity qualify as Indigenous people including people in Africa, the Philippines, Asia, Siberia, etc.
Introduction

Identifying of who is Indigenous to the Americas is a source of debate with far reaching ramifications regarding tribal recognition from a state and inter governmental organizations and individual recognition by a tribe. This paper briefly revisits concepts of Indigenousness to exemplify how social science academia has being overwhelmingly varied in defining who is Indigenous. The source of inconsistency in “being Indigenous” is explored as it is tied to what the title can bestow in terms of benefits in certain contexts and incur penalties in other contexts. Take, for example, the benefit of being Indigenous in the United States. Such a title could ensure a monopoly on hotel and casino patrons. On the other hand, being Indigenous in Nicaragua could ensure that a person’s access to political and economic institutions are limited based on the person’s ethnic identity. The varied treatment of who is Indigenous and the manner in which such Indigenousness is applied makes clear how inconsistent the title is applied. These problems are exacerbated when considering the inaccuracy of measurement, strong bias by institutions due to vested interest in Indigenous membership, and overly general conceptions that lump Indigenous groups into a larger category of minorities in general (in some cases) and as citizens of a given nation (in other cases) to the pretense that such groups have become extinct. In the chaotic mess of definitions of Indigenousness does exist the building blocks for a coherent conception of the term and this paper takes the initial steps in building such a concept.

So Much to Leave Out

For the sake of space, this paper will use a definition of Indigenous that will exclude a person’s membership in national citizenry, ethnic group membership, and/or other minority groups. Accordingly, the intersections of nationhood, ethnic groups, and minority groups (including diasporas) will be necessarily avoided. What can be dealt with here are the criteria by
which a modern Indigenous identity can be founded upon. Once the initial step in building a concept for Indigenous identity are established, the omitted concerns in this paper can again be revisited.

**What makes a person Indigenous? The United States Example**

One of the greatest debates in the history of US policy has been the definition of who will be an Indian. As US policy dealt with their own “domestic” Indian problem, they worked hard to exterminate the identity first by war, then by treaty. After treaties were signed and Indians disarmed, treaties were abrogated and the extermination policy continued. Allotment policies unilaterally determined which Indians were ready to become farmers and allotted plots of land to individual Indians. The surplus was then sold to corporations and individual European Americans thus reducing the Indian tribal land holdings by seventy-five percent in a period of 50 years. Next came the tribal termination policy which looked for the most “successful” tribes and removed any federal obligation commonly known as the “ward/trustee” relationship developed by the Marshal trilogy in Federal Indian law. Tribes that successfully ran saw mills or raised livestock, for example, were terminated meaning that their federal recognition as Indians ended, their land was converted from aboriginal title to fee simple title, and any health and education obligation the Federal government provided was cut off. Next came the Indian Reorganization Act era which forced tribes to write down their laws and develop constitutions in the image of European style governance. It was around this time in 1924 that the Indian Citizenship Act was passed allowing Indians to vote, (Getches, Wilkinson et al. 2005).

Oddly, the legacy of past US policy toward Indians was rescued by Richard M. Nixon who attributed his good treatment of Indians to his former high school football coach that allowed him to start in football games even thought the young Nixon was small. Nixon’s former
coach was an American Indian and he often referred to his football experience when discussing his positive American Indian policies, (Getches, Wilkinson et al. 2005). The self-determination era of Federal Indian law heralded in an era of increased cooperation between tribes and European government bureaucracies while decreasing the paternalistic approach, a characterization of previous eras. For example, the Bureau of Indian Affairs began to move away from functioning as an administrative oversight body and more as a liaison between tribes and federal government bodies. The main point, however, is not the outcome of these various policies. The US example is typical of how all European style governments deal with Indigenous populations. With little exception, all European style governments looked at the Indian population first as a problem that needed to be solved.

**European International Relations Theory and Indian Policy**

It is the European tool box of governance that first relies on realist approaches that will better inform our understanding of colonial and tribal interaction. Based on the notion that all humans are by nature attracted to the accumulation of power (Morgenthau 1948), the realist approach justifies violence to secure European well being. Tribes were seeing as part of a larger conception of the world in which anarchy ruled. Put another way, since colonial actors could not appeal to a higher authority for security as they arrived in the Americas, colonial actors had no choice but to help themselves to attain security. Such an approach is exemplified by the various acts of war followed by treaty making. European insecurity, both in terms of perceived safety and economic well being, triggered further policy meant to solve the Indian problem. These concerns are exemplified by the theft of Indian lands, creation of laws meant to cripple Indian tribes in terms of their own economic and political well being, and contain the Indian “threat” to remote areas of land that could easily be guarded or were not likely to allow for a surprise attack
from Indians. The realist approach would regard this action as a move toward bolstering the absolute power of the US. Realists believe that all states act in reaction to external forces (tribes) and move to destroy the power of other actors (tribes). Independent of the tribal power base, colonial actors (US) also acted to increase its own strength in a move to gain more absolute power. It was after the Second World War that a refinement of realism occurred.

US Federal Indian policy also was shaped by the emergence of defensive or structural realism, (Waltz 1979). As US policy moved away from overt acts of genocide and toward self interested acts of tribal containment, so was the theoretical move away from human nature giving way to power and toward other concerns. (Note how structural realism informs US allotment and termination policies). Structural realism holds that states merely wish to survive in a world of states all competing for relative strength. Therefore, it holds that should one international actor gain power, it is likely that such a gain will cost neighboring states some power. As a result, federal Indian policy began to reflect a notion of protectionism on the part of the US. The US would not enact a policy unless it was sure that it did not harm the strength of the US and that the policy did not bolster the strength of the tribe. A final move, previous to and during the era of self determination comes from the liberal school of thought. A distinction is drawn among states regarding some as “good” and others as “bad”. Good states will cooperate with other good states and the rest will be rogue and must be contained. When applied to the IRA era, tribes became “good” when they adopted democratic principles by writing down their constitutions. During the self determination era, cooperation was the aim as liaisons between tribes and the US government emerged. Absent the European models for international relations are the notions of prejudice and discrimination since there never could be an Indian policy without first defining an Indian to begin with.
One Percent Makes the Difference

A poet once remarked that Indigenous people and Europeans are 99% alike but it is the 1% that makes the difference, (Alexie 1995). Such thinking informed the various international relations theories the US employed when dealing with tribes. None of these developments would have occurred had it not been for the US policy to distinguish between Indians and non-Indians. The policies of war, treaty, termination, allotment, IRA, and self determination are based on a history of identity distinction. US policies picked out who would benefit from their own structures of political and economic institutions and who would be excluded from participation. Today, the tide has changed, by once again determining how identity determines who can have exclusive right to burial sites (Riley 2004), who can have a monopoly hotel and casino business, as well as who can legally possess the remains of federally protected endangered species, among many other qualifications, (Getches, Wilkinson et al. 2005). The so what question was salient in answering the question of “why” in past policy making decisions yet remains salient today in determining “why” some people can avoid property taxes while others cannot.

Brief Overview of Defining Indigenousness

One of the consistencies in defining who is Indigenous is the lack of consistency in the resulting definitions. Many of these inconsistencies have more to do with an agenda to be accomplished and less to do with the interest of the potentially Indigenous group, (Sturm 1998). While it may seem logical for groups to self identify, as more Indigenous groups emerge from marginalization, they compete with other Indigenous groups within a European dominant state over limited resources. As a result, certain Indigenous groups have a major interest in keeping other Indigenous groups from being recognized as such since there can only be so many business ventures in a finite geographic area, (Grow 2003).
Another issue of relevance is the wish to disassociate one's group from Indigenous ties because of discrimination at the hands of the host state. Examples of such issues include research on modern Indigenous peoples in the Monterrey California area and their struggle to document their tribal existence after 200 years of policy meant to erase such existence, (Laverty 2003). More research highlights the use of New Mexico state and US federal policy to erase Indigenous identity which have largely failed mostly because Indigenous identity went underground, (Prindeville 2003). Also complicating matters is globalization and its impact on Indigenous group migration within the Americas. Indigenous communities, largely grouped as illegal immigrants belonging to their accidental state of birth or undocumented workers from the perspective of non-Indigenous Americans, have been migrating between the United States and countries in Latin America since before the U.S. had completed western expansion. These groups are rarely mentioned outside local community news organizations on topics of agriculture, crime, or population density, (Bragi 2005). Essentially, a Pandora’s Box exists in which state and national identity, along with class identity, coupled with religious identity have all worked to obscure Indigenous people in the Americas. It is no surprise, and no accident, that Indigenous people often do not know themselves who is Indigenous.

One of the few examples of Indigenous identity research breaks down identifiers into groups based on their professional agenda. Corntassel (2003) developed four categories of definitions of Indigenousness. While there is no development of the categories of identifiers, it seems that a “family resemblance” approach is at work in categorizing identifiers. The family resemblance approach involves a systematic comparison of traits shared by cases within a population. When the attributes of the cases are more common among the entire population of cases, it is enough of a reason to make a preliminary connection between the cases, (Collier and
The Corntassel scheme of grouping identifiers into common categories based on professional agendas is essentially a family resemblance approach although Corntassel never actually uses the family resemblance approach in the systematic manner it was intended to be used, (Corntassel 2003). Given that Corntassel is the closest one can get to a consistent method of identifying who is Indigenous, it is a good idea to start with his research and note how all other research either relies on a long, wordy definition, or otherwise leaves the definition to the imagination of the reader. As a result, there is no consistent way to identify who is Indigenous.

Corntassel concludes that there are at least three categories of groups aiming to define Indigenous: academics in theory and policy, academics in cultural studies, and intergovernmental organizations (IGO’s), Academic definitions of Indigenousness were probably rarely meant to have a life beyond the scope of the single paper they first appeared in. As such, it may be unfair to expect the academic world to have done a better job of defining consistently who is indigenous. On the other hand, the agenda in academic definitions are to build toward a consistent social science narrative. As such, given that many people have touched on the subject of Indigenous identity, it reasons that the body should have at least yielded a strategy of how Indigenous identities have been created and for what purpose. Regardless, there is often little concern over deeper analysis of the working assumption of Indigenousness.  

Corntassel categorizes another group as “Nationalism Research and Indigenous Identity”, (2003). This group appears to be a collection of cultural studies scholars, many of which begin with assumptions inconsistent with Indigenous culture. This second category appears to be another permeation of academic literature. Within the “Nationalism” group are “primordialists” and “constructivists” or “instrumentalists” approach to Indigenous identity. While primordialists

---

2 One departure from this model of definition is the use of Indigenous by the Minorities At Risk data set which has the specific goal of identifying Indigenous groups for repeated use by political scientists in their quantitative research.
rely on historical traces of identity that have survived into the modern era, constructivists allow for modern day reactions by dominated groups to identify as against a national dominant group. Corntassel cites at least one primodialist as listing criteria by which a group is considered Indigenous and, thereby, is implicitly fashioning conditions of necessity with little concern over indicators that express presence or absences of traits. Corntassel’s examples of constructivists’ Indigenous identity appear to take a family resemblance approach, (Collier and Mahon 1993). At the end of the day, it is likely a fair assumption that cultural studies scholars simply did not give their method of identification much thought concerning how it could be developed into a systematic and consistent operation.

Intergovernmental organizations (IGO’s) are yet another group attempting to define Indigenousness and included in Corntassel’s work (2005). One example of an IGO definition comes from the World Bank and their sufficiency approach to characteristics of Indigenousness. (The World Bank, however, does not call their checklist a sufficiency test.) One interesting implicit agenda initiative is the latitude with which the World Bank has laid out what groups can be identified as Indigenous. As a result, the indicators still must be judgment calls in a seemingly subjective manner making the measures susceptible to researcher selection bias. The selection bias problem also emerges in Corntasel’s overview of Indigenous organizations that attempt to define Indigenousness. The Indigenous organization category is apparently a non-tribal governmental organization with an interest in promoting Indigenous interests but this definition is extrapolated from implicit descriptions in Corntassel’s article; a clear definition of an Indigenous organization is not offered. Regardless, a core theme in Indigenous organization’s and their definition of Indigenousness is its broad boundaries that revolve around self identity. Such an approach is also susceptible to selection bias. Having outlined the varied and
inconsistent approaches to Indigenous identification, a new systematic approach can now be offered as an alternative.

**Toward a Consistent Concept Development of Indigenousness**

The Corntassel article (2003) is tasked with taking the many disconcerted attempts to define Indigenousness and make some sort of logical extension of the literature into a single definition. When the various traits of Indigenousness are collected and categorized, some clarity may return to the term Indigenous. Goertz (2005) developed a method by which terms, traits, and data can be managed to make concepts clear. The process of concept development involves carefully mapping three levels of a term. At the basic level are the actual terms used. At the secondary level are the actual traits that indicate the potential definition, and thereby the presence of a basic level concept. At the data/indicator level are the dichotomous variables that indicate presence or absence of the secondary level trait. The data/indicator level traits are analyzed for the most logical way of aggregating towards the presence or absence of a secondary level trait. Table 1 takes the various approaches addressed in Corntassel (2003) to define Indigenous and breaks down terms, traits, and indicators to give the previous literature some clarity.

---

3 This table is largely borrowed from Goertz (2005) in terms of organization but not in terms of substance.
### Table 1: Concepts and Measures of Indigenousness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creator</th>
<th>Secondary Level</th>
<th>Indicator/Data Level</th>
<th>Method of Aggregation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfred and Wilmer 1997</td>
<td>Aboriginal Conform to Culture Lack Autonomy</td>
<td>Original Inhabitant</td>
<td>None – n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Little access to institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaya 1996</td>
<td>Descendants of Aboriginal Lack Autonomy Connection to land Distinct Communities</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Little access to institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>tribal affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurr 2000</td>
<td>Conquered Aboriginal Share a culture No sustained state</td>
<td>Descended from dominated groups</td>
<td>Additive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riggs 1997</td>
<td>Cultural Level Historical Sequence Political Position Geographic Place</td>
<td>Scale – primitive to complex Age – who came first/second Dominator/dominated</td>
<td>None – n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingsbury 2002</td>
<td>Self Identity Legacy Tie to Land Intent</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Historical experience – disruption Time on territory Collective interest in autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith 1994</td>
<td>Collective proper name Myths/collective memory Common public culture Common laws/customs Territory/homeland</td>
<td>Dichotomous presence/absence Dichotomous presence/absence Dichotomous presence/absence Dichotomous presence/absence</td>
<td>Additive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank 1999</td>
<td>Attach Territory/Resources Self Identity Indigenous Language Customs/Laws Subsistence Economy</td>
<td>Dichotomous presence/absence Dichotomous presence/absence Dichotomous presence/absence Dichotomous presence/absence</td>
<td>Additive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holm et al. 2003</td>
<td>Sacred history Ceremony cycle Language Ancestral homeland</td>
<td>Dichotomous presence/absence Dichotomous presence/absence Dichotomous presence/absence</td>
<td>Additive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the interest of fairness, many of the definitions of Indigenousness are not, and were never intended to be directly tied to an indicator level for the purpose of quantitative analysis. However, this exercise in collecting and categorizing the various traits that appear in the literature is to develop a cogent method for identifying Indigenous people. Once the concept
building process has been at least considered, it is the first step in developing a more rigorous scheme of relating indicator data to a trait that is a part of a concept. Still, there are concerns to be overcome in that the word Indigenous could be used too broadly making it elastic enough to encompass any group. If such an incident were to occur, or perhaps it has already taken place in (Corntassel 2003), the term could become meaningless. Being cognizant of such concerns will help avoid problems down the road.

**Concept Stretching and Indigenousness**

One of the keys of making a concept less apt to subjective bias is the ability to maintain its level of generality. When a concept has become too general, it is explaining everything and, thus, explaining nothing. Conceptual stretching has been looked at in sociology to better equip researchers with tools to make more convincing arguments about linking indicators to concepts, (Sartori 1970, Collier and Mahon 1993). Goertz (2005) adds that a natural zero point for dichotomous variables is also useful in identifying ideal types for the purpose of determining presence or absence of a trait. These approaches can be combined to make convincing arguments about the validity of indicator data pointing to concretely defined traits that build up to the presence of a concept.

Utilizing the four traits of peoplehood, concepts of sacred history, territory place, language, and ceremony cycle can be placed along a continuum of peoplehood, (Holm, Pearson

---

4 The term “continuum” is used in a quantitative method approach to small N case study style research. The continuum will rely on the quantitative method approach found in interval variables which are capable of containing a natural zero, are ordered from zero to one, there is equal space between increments along the continuum, there are an infinite number of spaces within the zero to one spectrum, and both zero and one represent cases which are theoretically difficult to prove exist. The idea is to consider a concept not as a dichotomy of presence and absence. Rather, it is to consider how to construct the ideal-typic concept. Such an ideal would be the perfect case that would exemplify the very essence of the concept being studied. The ideal-typic case need not exist in the real world because it only serves as a reference point. The perfect case is placed at the “one” position on the concept continuum. On the polar opposite is the ideal-typic non-case; a case for which one studies the very essence of the absence of the concept. This is probably the most difficult idea to grasp because it essentially asks the researcher to
et al. 2003). Depending on the level of generality, these traits can be placed over various cultures as a test of peoplehood. With these various caveats in mind, let us turn to Figure 1 which was originally used to express peoplehood, (Holm, Pearson et al. 2003).

Figure 1: Peoplehood as first expressed in (Holm, Pearson et al. 2003).

Figure 1 depicts the four traits of peoplehood: language, sacred history, place territory, and ceremonial cycle. To be clear, these four traits are found in all human groups at some point along their history. When concerned with the Americas, the geographic area that is today North,
Central, and South America along with all the islands in the vicinity of the Americas, there can only be one set of human groups that can call their peoplehood derivative from that particular geographic area. Modern day Indigenous people are called that because of the four interlocking traits that establish peoplehood. Put another way, people are not Indigenous to the Americas because their connections to place territory are in a geographic area that is not the Americas. Further explanation of these traits is necessary.

While there is no reason to start with any one trait, we will start with place territory because we are most interested in the geographic area known as the Americas and how that geographic area contributes to the identity of Indigenous people. The place territory of a human group gains its special significance by virtue of the other three traits of peoplehood. Sacred history, for example, attributes to the place territory its significance especially if a creation story is involved with a particular geographic area. All Indigenous people of the Americas have a special tie to a specific place in the Americas that is revered and respected in a way that other places in the Americas are not. In retelling the sacred history, certain ceremonies are performed in unison with seasonal cycles. The changes in the environment signal the change of a season and, in some cases, may signal the time to perform certain ceremonies. These ceremonies entail the use of specific language that, not unlike a prayer, has a special significance within the context of the ceremony. Such specific language may only be known to certain members of the human group as well as certain aspects of the sacred history which are passed down only to certain members in the group pre-determined to be life long guides to the performance of the ceremonies. The peoplehood scheme may be better understood via example.

The Black Hills of South Dakota is the place of origin to the Lakota. Their sacred history tells the story of their origin taking place in the Black Hills, and was once celebrated by
ceremony in which specific language was used. The Black Hills are so sacred to the Lakota that they sued and won a $17 million settlement over the violation of the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1878 which guaranteed the Black Hills to the Lakota. The settlement has never been accepted and remains in trust because the Lakota want their sacred space returned, (Getches, Wilkinson et al. 2005). Even today the Lakota continue to push for return of the 7.3 million acre region citing their very peoplehood (they don’t call it peoplehood) as the impetus for the return of the land. Yet, even the notion of peoplehood, as it has been used in the past, is subject to further scrutiny. There is no one to say that the notion of Indigenousness has not been stretched in this case to include groups that are not really Lakota. To avoid future problems, a concept of Indigenousness must be rigorously developed so that it can be replicated by others and transparent enough to withstand academic scrutiny.

Social Science Concept Building Method: A Research Design

For all of its good, the peoplehood concept as it stands serves as a great advance in determining who is Indigenous. It is a great step forward compared to the currently used blood quantum method in which people are forced to use only one trait (blood quantum) to establish ties to an Indigenous tribe.⁵ These blood quantum designs are inherently colonial and, therefore, biased in favor of diminishing the actual population of American Indians. The blood quantum

---

⁵ The blood quantum method of identifying who is Indigenous is based on the number of relatives that can be directly tied to a tribal community. In the US, a concerted effort was made in the era of reservation allotment to get a count of the Indigenous population. Today, if a person wishes to be recognized by a tribe, that person must prove that they have enough relatives in their history that can be traced back to this era. The minimum threshold is set by the tribe and can range from ¼ to 1/64. In the ¼ example, it is simply meant that a person can trace their lineage to a group of Indigenous ancestors in a number of forms to the extent that the total number of ancestors equal 1/4. Put another way, and in its most simple configuration, a person that is ¼ Indigenous may demonstrate this trait by proving that a single grand parent is a full blood Indigenous person. Since a grand parent generation relative is contributing ¼ of a person’s ancestral ties, it is concluded that such a situation would satisfy the ¼ blood quantum criteria. Of course, such a system relies on the substantiation that the grandparent is the child of two other full blood Indigenous people. Note that blood quantum has nothing to do with other traits of Indigenousness such as attachment to territory, knowledge of sacred history, involvement in ceremony, and or knowledge of specific sacred language. All that matters is an accident of lineage.
method also does not recognize a person if that person belongs to a tribe the Federal government does not recognize. Finally, such a design ignores the well known phenomena of “traditional” tribal members purposely evading being counted by census takers who visited the reservations. As such, we can neither be satisfied with just one or another scheme of determining Indigenousness. Rather, several need to be considered and combined in a systematic fashion that is transparent and replicable.

The Goertz method of concept development is a well developed model by which complex and ill defined terms can be properly represented and formally expressed in order to increase consistency in its use and make clear distinct characteristics. Based on the notion that deep knowledge of specific cases will aid in making concept building decisions, the Goertz model may be susceptible to selection bias yet, given its transparency in development, such a bias would be more easily pointed out by observers. Social science concept building is a method of social science inquiry created to disaggregate ill defined concepts in social sciences, (Goertz 2006). The most important benefit of this approach is that consistency in identification would more easily attained. Researchers would more easily catch their own inconsistencies, and readers could more easily replicate and build upon past research.

Relying on the rules of philosophical logic, the social science concept building method encompasses a number of tools meant to simultaneously keep logical arguments consistent and also clarify terms that are confusing or used very broadly. The basics of the concept building method involve breaking concepts into three levels of aggregation. The “basic” level is a name and can be as arbitrary or as precise as one wishes it to be. The actual meaning of the basic level term comes from other levels. The “secondary” level of a concept is put together as a set of necessary and/or sufficient conditions. Depending on the complexity of the concept, the number
of secondary level necessary and/or sufficient conditions can expand to any number although too many conditions may be an indication that the concept is really two separate concepts. The secondary level conditions aggregate up to the presence or absence of the basic level concept. The data/indicator level is the basis for the entire concept allowing a researcher to tap into some observable condition. Concepts are most useful when they are built from the data/indicator level up meaning that careful thought is given to what the presence or absence of a condition really means. Other times, it may be necessary to build a concept from the middle outward. Concepts of Indigenousness are one such concept.

As will be stated time and again, the various decisions to be made concerning concept building will necessarily come from a researcher’s knowledge of the cases under scrutiny. Concerning Indigenousness, there cannot be a rebuilding of the concept from the data/indicator level up because so much of US policy was created to destroy such data/indicators. In fact, all of the data/indicators that once contributed to the presence of an Indigenous group or person were systematically replaced by a single trait; blood quantum. Since research on Indigenous identity has only now started to grapple with the realities of various inconsistent definitions as well as confusing usages of the term, it is now possible to build the concept of Indigenousness from the middle up and down. That is, a concept of Indigenousness must today be constructed first at the secondary level followed by a search for the proper use of data/indicators in the context of colonial and globalization activity. The best place to start a concept of Indigenousness is from the concept of peoplehood, (Holm, Pearson et al. 2003).

**Expanding/Contracting Peoplehood**

The use of peoplehood in academic research is quite new and untested meaning that it is now possible to stretch it into areas that it may not apply to. There have been applications of
peoplehood to territory disputes between two Indigenous tribes, (Holm 1989), American Indian Education (Holm, Pearson et al. 2003), and also to archeology, literature, and political science, (Holm and Corntassel Fourthcoming). Yet, peoplehood as it stands, remains a slightly slippery concept because there is no criteria by which one can be locked into a single definition of what Indigenousness is and what it is not. Second, the figure 1 depiction of peoplehood is problematic because it explains everything at once leaving one to wonder if and how one trait may contribute more to a given context than others. Obviously if research is concerned with territory disputes among modern Indigenous people, (Holm 1989), the model will have to rely more on the place territory component than on the other three components. Another problem is the level of generality which may exclude bodies of water from being included in the peoplehood concept. Also, the concept of Indigenous is necessarily more precise that the concept of peoplehood requiring that all of the traits in the Holm diagram must necessarily be narrowed to only depict Indigenousness. As such, this paper will begin the baby steps of what will be a long process, for future researchers, to develop a truly all encompassing concept of peoplehood that captures all people and narrows to exclude certain groups while retaining others.

The concept of peoplehood is a good place to start. It is necessarily parsimonious enough to be applied to the Indigenous people of the Americas. In figure 2, the concept is fully laid out with only the basic and secondary levels. The Goertz method is an improvement over the Holm process because there is now an ability to fine tune the concept to fit particular situations or to make the process general enough to fit over a broader subject. For example, in the research on Indigenous territory conflict, (Holm 1989), the concept can be reconfigured to utilize logical “and” in the place of “or” for the “place territory” condition. In the case of the research on
Figure 2: Concept of Indigenousness - Below is only the basic and secondary level – Still left to be developed are what will count as data indicators.
American Indian education (Holm, Pearson et al. 2003), it may be necessary to call attention to all of the aspects of peoplehood by using the logical “and” to make clear that all of the aspects of peoplehood need to be present. Yet there still may be problems within the actual concept building itself. To be sure, how can we be clear about the level of generality across the conditions expressed at the secondary level of the concept?

The concept building method offers a second tool for social science research, (Goertz 2006). Given the reliance on conditions that aggregate up toward a basic level concept presences or absence, we should be clear that we are dealing with, in some cases, the dichotomous presence/absence of a concept itself. Yet we could also be dealing with the continual level of presence of a concept that is expressed as a concept value between 0 and 1 where 0 means the concept is not present and 1 is fully present. Such a scheme is valuable because it avoids assumptions about “either/or” language and forces the researcher to fully understand whether they are dealing with a single continuum that goes from one polar opposite (negative) to the other (positive) or whether it is better to present a concept as fully present (1) to fully absent (0). Once again, these concerns will be based on a deep knowledge of the cases to be researched. And given the way the concept of Indigenousness has been treated by the previous research, there simply has not been any thought given to the matter. Due to space limits, we can only consider one of the conditions at the secondary level to make the point clearer.

It is possible to take a secondary level condition and determine how it fits within the basic level concept continuum. Figure 3 indicates how Indigenous sacred history, a condition for Indigenousness in the Americas and peoplehood more generally, can be placed in the concept continuum of Indigenousness, a basic level concept, and the ladder of generality simultaneously. At the top of the graph is the general category of oral history and spans the entire Indigenous
continuum. Below that is sacred history, a subset of oral history, and originating in Indigenous and non Indigenous culture. A subset of oral history is the Indigenous creation story. A subset of this is the specific tribe’s creation story. Just to differentiate, I include a tribal fishing story to indicate how a sacred oral history can also be non-creation. Note that each of the concepts are secondary level and categorized on an Indigenous/non Indigenous scale i.e. the basic level concept. Tools like these offer much more clarity and consistency across conditions but this research is not without its limits.

Figure 3: Secondary level traits placed within a ladder of generality and a concept continuum of Indigenousness.
Limitations

There are several limitations involved in this research design. Basic research issues involve the obscurity of the methods used. Social science concept building (Goertz 2006) is relatively new and has not been used, to my knowledge, in any political science research. Rather, the concept building method seems more at home in sociological research. Second, the reliance on the comparative method (Ragin 1987) is more in line with sociology (political sociology to be fair) research than with political science. A third issue involves the potential to use Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Ragin 2000) in this research design. QCA is largely unknown not only in political science but also in sociology. A forth issue involves reliance on “set theory” which is also derived from sociology. Other limitations exist which have to do with the research question itself.

There are many problems to be found in research which aims to uncover criteria after a 200 year track record of policy which aimed to destroy such criteria. The main question now may be “what is left to observe”? Such a problem prevents the social science concept building method from being used in a manner most consistent with avoiding issues of selection bias. Given this problem, it will be necessary to build the concept not from the data but from the secondary level conditions. Another problem involves the enormity of the problem as it exists and the few people in the world either willing or capable of treating the research question in a systematic way. The majority of the literature on Indigenous identity is quite simply flawed to the point that they may prove more harmful than enlightening. As such, any research design that attempts to be more systematic regarding the identity of Indigenous people has the problem of not only remaining internally consistent, which is completely accomplishable given the tools outlined in this research design, but must also demonstrate how poorly past conceptions of how...
Indigenous people are identified remain a hindrance to the self determination of Indigenous people.

**Conclusion**

This paper is a baby step in the complicated task of taking the term Indigenous, developing the traits that contribute to Indigenousness, and developing the indicators that support the presence or absence of those traits. It recognizes the inconsistency with which the term Indigenous has been used throughout the literature and attempts to make sense of the various uses. Using concept development methods, it is conceivable and manageable to take on the task of developing a coherent concept labeled Indigenous. The effort has a good chance of being objective in measurement and avoids the trap of selection bias. The term Indigenous can be organized in such a way that avoids conceptual stretching and convincingly conveys presence and absence of traits that support or refute its existence in society. The solution provided herein has implications in policy arenas around the world.

Since each state has its own criteria by which it chooses to recognize a tribe, it is important that the criteria by which groups vie for recognition be on some level playing field. In many ways, the US federal Indian policy has had a schizophrenic history because it was initially set up to destroy tribalism. After hundreds of years of policy implementation, the tide has turned pushing for Indian tribes to utilize the same policy meant to destroy them as the apparatus by which tribes are forced to prove they still exist, (Getches, Wilkinson et al. 2005). A serious new approach to identifying Indigenous actors as groups and as individuals necessarily must come from a perspective as devoid of value judgment as possible in order that a fair and equitable approach to determining federal recognition be utilized. Policy implementations also stretch into the international arena. As more Indigenous groups gain access to resources, mostly in the form
of support from NGO’s, they continue to push for a world wide self determination approach. One of the most exciting developments in international legal history is the development of human rights protections being instilled in international institutional regimes. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) currently works to ensure that Indigenous issues remain salient to policy makers who are typically more concerned with economic development to the detriment of cultural concerns such as the degradation of sacred environments, pollution of ecosystems which contribute to Indigenous subsistence economies, and human rights violations involving Indigenous protestors and activists, (Anaya 2004). As such, Indigenous peoples are now becoming recognized based on several criteria but there is also many which fail to be recognized by multinational corporations, world bank policy makers concerning development projects involving Indigenous land, and intellectual property of Indigenous people concerning medicinal and agricultural knowledge. A clearer way of identifying who is Indigenous for policy makers keeps those honest who wish to diminish the actual population of Indigenous people further.

Bibliography


Prindeville, D.-M. (2003). "Identity and the Politics of American Indian and Hispanic Women Leaders." Gender and Society 17(4): 591-608. This article examines the influence of race/ethnicity and gender identity on the politics of American Indian and Hispanic women leaders. The data are drawn from personal interviews with 50 public officials and grassroots leaders active in state, local, or tribal politics in New Mexico. Borrowing from Tolleson Rinehart's model of "gender consciousness," the author creates a classification scheme for assessing the role that race/ethnicity and gender play in the political ideology and motives of the leaders. The findings reveal that racial/ethnic identity is generally more important to Native leaders and grassroots activists, while gender identity is somewhat more salient for Hispanic leaders and public officials. Her classification system for measuring racial/ethnic and
gender identity is useful for analyzing qualitative data and may be helpful to other researchers.


