

**FIRST NATION CITIZENSHIP RESEARCH & POLICY
SERIES: BUILDING TOWARDS CHANGE**



**FIRST NATION PERSPECTIVES ON
POLITICAL IDENTITY**

Taiiaki Alfred, PhD.
June, 2009

ABOUT THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is the national, political representative of First Nations governments and their citizens in Canada, including those living on reserve and in urban and rural areas. Every Chief in Canada is entitled to be a member of the Assembly. The National Chief is elected by the Chiefs in Canada, who in turn are elected by their citizens.

The role and function of the AFN is to serve as a national delegated forum for determining and harmonizing effective collective and co-operative measures on any subject matter that the First Nations delegate for review, study, response or action and for advancing the aspirations of First Nations.

FIRST NATIONS CITIZENSHIP RESEARCH AND POLICY SERIES: BUILDING TOWARDS CHANGE

First Nations have inherent jurisdiction over determining their citizenship, and have long rejected the Government of Canada's unilateral control over defining who does, and does not, belong to them. The AFN works to support First Nations through providing information and policy and analytical tools to make informed decisions and to actively participate in dialogues on options for reform.

This paper is part of a series on different aspects and approaches to First Nation citizenship. The positions and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author, and do not represent the Assembly of First Nations or the consolidated position put forward by First Nations in Canada.

For more information, please contact us at:

473 Albert Street, Suite 810
Ottawa, ON
K1R 5B4

Telephone: 613-241-6789
Toll-Free: 1-866-869-6789
Fax: 613-241-5808

or visit the AFN Web site: www.afn.ca

© Assembly of First Nations 2009

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on First Nations people's own concepts of the sources of their political and cultural identity, the contemporary manifestations of these identities, and their views on the meaning of being Indigenous, belonging to a community, and the relationship of these memberships and identities with the institutions of the Canadian state, with particular reference to the terminological representations and misrepresentation of these various identity concepts. It has been prepared with the aim of advancing the discussion and promoting understanding on identity today among First Nations people so that our governments can develop more effective responses to Canada's ongoing efforts to define Indigeneity narrowly and in ways that are instrumental to its still colonial objectives toward Indigenous peoples.

As with any respectful discussion about our experiences and ideas about ourselves, we must begin by acknowledging and recognizing the extent and depth of the pain and discord that the Canadian government's attacks on the unity of our people have caused. One simply cannot bring up the question of identity today without facing head-on the spiritual, psychological and cultural disturbances that continue to manifest in our communities and in every one of our lives as a result of what we have collectively experienced since the imposition of the *Indian Act* well over a century ago. As Bonita Lawrence puts it, "Identity, for Native people, can never be neutral issue. With definitions of Indianness deeply embedded within systems of colonial power, Native identity is inevitably highly political, with ramifications for how contemporary and historical collective experience is understood" (Lawrence, 2004: 1). It has been six generations now since our nations have had to deal with the legally and militarily enforced separation of our people from our homelands and sacred places, and of our families from each other. All of us have been affected in some way or another and to some degree. We have experienced colonization in this form as individuals, and the losses experienced by individuals, especially First Nations women and their children, who have been dislocated and alienated from their ancestral

birthrights in the land and the community by law and policy, are immense and multifaceted must be addressed if we are ever to rise up again as strong nations.

But an even more profound loss has also occurred. Generations of individual separations and losses have contributed to an erosion of the very foundation of our collective selves, our communities and nations. It is the damage done to the national consciousness of our peoples, the wearing thin of our nations' cultural and political foundations, and the weakening of our collective sense of community that present the most significant threat to our continuing existence as new generations of our people emerge and grapple with new realities in the struggle to survive culturally, politically and spiritually. Without a rooted, strong and cohesive *collective* identity upon which to base an individual's sense of self, our young people stand little chance of being able to maintain our nations' struggles for survival and to preserve our nationhood in any meaningful sense. Indeed, individual healing for those affected negatively by colonialism's cultural disruptions can only occur in the context of rooted, strong and cohesive communities.

In confronting colonialism and its effects, we should not surrender to the therapeutic instinct to personalize the harm and focus solely of how law and policy has disrupted our lives and those of our families. The real Indigenous imperative is to do what we can to ensure the survival of the generations that are emerging by doing what we can and must to regenerate the bases of our nationhood, our collective senses of self and the foundations of our communities. The words and thoughts in this paper respond to this imperative.

Another thing that must be acknowledged is the fact that many of our people are disconnected from the land and unfamiliar with their own Indigenous cultures, and because of this, they hold ideas about identity and their nationhood which reflect colonial attitudes and which have been shaped by the pressures of racism and assimilation. For too many First Nations people, the liberal-democratic capitalist mainstream is the norm and the reference point for their own and their nation's

identity. What it is to be Indigenous is largely confused or thought of in terms that are common to members of the settler society.

The scholarly conclusion on this issue is summarized by Lynn Chabot, who has researched the loss of traditional forms of citizenship and membership among First Nations. She writes that “self-identification and the open, kinship - and community-based methods of recognizing tribal membership has been, for the most part, superseded by externally imposed, culturally incompatible methods of acknowledging citizenship” (Chabot, 2007: 38). This is an established and acknowledged fact among Indigenous people and this paper will not delve further into the proofs or explanations of the history of colonization. Neither does the paper present a compendium of confusion or detail the range of defeatist thoughts on validating and accommodating colonialism that exists in Indigenous political circles and in the scholarly and popular press today, nor does it immerse itself into the deep pool of anxiety that is the focus and work of scholarship and literature on Indigenous people struggling with their personal identity crises or who are attempting to reconcile themselves to the surrendered fact of white supremacy and the permanency and dominance of settler society and its cultural mainstream. Rather, this paper aspires to make a purposeful statement and to bring forward a truly Indigenous voice on what it is to be a member of a First Nation today as a rooted alternative to being an “Indian” or an “Aboriginal” framed by white society’s laws, terminologies and concepts. It documents perspectives that have emerged from within Indigenous cultures and which reflect the views of people who have consistently demonstrated their commitment to preserving Indigenous nationhood and to regenerating their nations on the foundations of ancestral values and Indigenous cultural ground.

In this sense, the ideas on identity presented herein are a subjective treatment of the issue. The perspectives of those who participated in the research are notable for their explicit advocacy and advancement of contention with the colonial framing of Indigenous identity which is dominant today politically and culturally. The research conducted for this paper and the documented conversations it represents serve to

deepen understanding of these issues, and reinforce the conclusion I arrived at after a previous set of interviews and as part of an earlier attempt at conveying these issues intelligently:

There are many political identities across Native America, and even within single communities the dynamics of personality and psychology produce varying response to the colonial situation. The people who choose to work for or with the colonial institutions have constructed a political identity for themselves that justifies their participation. This is no excuse for being wrong - and they are - but it indicates the dire need for a stronger sense of traditional values among all Native people. In the absence of a political culture firmly rooted in tradition and a common set of principles based on traditional values, it is not surprising that individuals will tend to stray towards mainstream beliefs and attitudes (Alfred, 2009: 32-33).

A CRITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING FIRST NATION IDENTITY

A review of the academic and policy literature reveals a number of consistencies and dominant First Nations perspectives on terminological and conceptual questions surrounding citizenship, membership and status. The consistency among scholars on these issues is so clear as to form an obvious consensus centering on three elements:

- The political nature of Indigenous identity in Canada, and the emotionally, legally and culturally complex process of determining identity on collective and individual levels;
- The divisive and disruptive impacts on communities of the imposition of Euroamerican concepts and terms to govern Indigenous identities through the Indian Act and other colonial laws and policies; and,
- The distortion of the traditional bases of individual identity formation by colonial law and policy and racist nations embedded into the Canadian mainstream, especially the causal effects of physical and spiritual dispossession from the land in disconnecting people from their cultures.

The first element is basically self-evident to anyone with any degree of experience with First Nations communities and has been researched and explained as the focus of scholarly work in history, anthropology social work, and other academic disciplines for the past generation, so it is the second and third elements that will form the focus of this paper.

The primary problem with using European languages to define Indigenous identities is the limitation they impose on the translation process. English and French are, of course, shaped within worldviews that are concrete and definitive of the particular experiences and realities, the history and spiritual make-up of the places and people who originated them. As conveyers of Indigenous realities, the languages of the colonizer are incapable of articulating with any accuracy or sympathy. Indigenous cultures reflect a worldview that is illuminated by notions of fluidity, flux and an

abstract conceptual understanding - each Indigenous language developed in a cultural context and is able to articulate the subtleties and spirituality of the identities and realities of those particular people. This is the basic, technical, problem with using European terms to describe and label Indigenous peoples. But while misapprehension is the main problem, other problems arise from the way Europeans and Euroamericans have used their languages. Canada's colonizers never had any serious interest in the people who populated the continent they came to exploit. The disinterest, from a colonial position, that continues to define the relationship between colonial society and First Nations, perpetuates the degradation of First Nations people. There is an implied mocking of our political existence and a fundamental terminological humiliation in the simplified understandings conveyed through the European language words used in the categorization and marking of our people and nations for control and management by the state. All colonial terms are inherently racist; whether "savage" or "Indian" or "Aboriginal," all of these terms are inaccurate and dismissive of our true existences as ancient first peoples within our homelands, and they are instrumentally deflective of any consideration of the true history of our relationship with the land and with the newcomers who have populated it.

Yet given the need to engage across cultures using European languages - a tragic outcome of colonialism - what do we say in response to this history and in support of recovering a truthful and dignified language to represent our Indigeneity in contemporary terms? For most Indigenous thinkers, the answer to this question is to be found in the creation of a new discourse which challenges the received terminological frame and represents different conceptions through the use of new terms. Thohahoken, a Mohawk scholar, provides an example of the general thrust of this approach in his explanation of why he has a preference for using the word "Indigenous" over "Aboriginal" in his writing in English:

The word "indigenous" in my research most closely corresponds to our word "onkwehonwe". The word indigenous has Latin roots based on the terms "*indu-gignere*" which means "lives-in a place" roughly speaking. By contrast the word "indigent" has the Latin roots "*indu-*

igere" and roughly translates as "wants-in place". Settlers and colonizers are indigent people who could not live in their place so went to someone else's place. And they remain so today as urban dwellers (over half the world's population, 75 percent in the United States) and are dependent on others for their life and are therefore indigent. Certain people still remain "indigenous" but the continued pressure to subjugate us into extinction has created a large amount of indigence.

Michael Yellowbird's 1998 study of 345 members of the Association of American Indian and Alaska Native Professors group, of which a substantial portion of members at the time were members of Indigenous nations recognized by Canada, focused on the question of terminological preferences (Yellowbird, 1999). His conclusion was that most respondents preferred self-definitions and stated an identity that reflected their specific nation-based affiliation. Yellowbird's summary of his findings was that:

Any labels used to describe Indigenous Peoples must come from the self-definitions and identities of these groups. Ideally, labels should promote positive social and political interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. Labels should also promote solidarity among Indigenous Peoples while at the same time recognizing the diversity and sovereignty of each group. (Yellowbird, 1999, 17)

Yellowbird then went on to specifically recommend as the new terminological standard, in response to this ethical framing of the issue, the formulation which has become common since: nation-specific primary labels combined with the most generally acceptable overall term.

The process of reasserting identity and re-labelling ourselves as counteraction to colonialism can also be divisive of course if it is done in a way that is uncritical of the history of colonization and its effects on our people and on our communities. This is a special danger since it has been a central feature of colonization to divide communities in order to more effectively govern them from the imperial centre. Status based differentiation and arbitrary dislocation of families and individuals dilutes the spiritual and ethical core of our nations, and is exactly the process of

disconnection through misidentification and the sowing of discordant relations that was at the heart of the *Indian Act*. Under the *Indian Act* regime, our nations have fallen under the control of contrived foreign definitions, and our formerly distinct peoples, each with particular traditional practices were continuously undermined as collectivities. We should be aware and sensitive to this history and its corrosive effects.

The issues surrounding the Canadian legislation of Indigenous identity are exemplified in the Bill C-31 situation and the Canadian government's attempts at resolving their legalized discrimination against First Nations women in the *Indian Act*. Anishnaabe legal scholar John Borrows states, with respect to the Chippewa of the Nawash, that,

our community recognized that there was a deep and disturbing irony in relying on the *Indian Act* for our identity as Indians. They saw a profound contradiction in deriving their character from a government imposed system which dictated who was entitled to be Indian... most people in my community refuse to distinguish on the basis of prior status or recent registration. All extended family are members of the community, and it is their determination, and not the government's, which is regarded as legitimate (Borrows, 1994: 37).

This nationalist sentiment was reinforced by Hugh Baker of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council:

Nuu-Chah-Nulth people reject classification of our people as either 6(1) or 6(2); we reject the classification of our people as on-reserve or off-reserve. We reject the classification of our people as half-breed, quarter-breed, or full breed. We reject the classification of our people as non-status. We reject the classification of our people by anything other than their roots. (Borrows, 1994: note 92 at 37)

So why, the question begs, in spite of these commitments and the general understanding of the colonial nature of the *Indian Act* and its classification system, do Indigenous people still use terms such as "Indian" and refer to Indian status, and even focus political and legal action on expanding their power with that framework? As of 2006, half of all First Nations were still allowing the Department of Indian Affairs' Indian Registrar to determine membership in their communities. And among those

First Nations who have enacted their own custom membership codes, over seventy percent use rules either identical or equivalent to the *Indian Act* (Chabot, 2007: 38). A succinct answer to this paradox of working with a “mocking irony of external definition” is offered by Borrows:

despite all the limitations that *Indian Act* classifications produced, people are nevertheless pursuing their rights to status because it is also a source of positive identity. The short-term reliance on *Indian Act* status does set Indians apart from broader Canadian society and is symbolic of their distinctive culture, treaties and self-government (Borrows, 1994: 40).

Borrows' statements are borne out in the conclusions of the Canadian government's own research into the question of why people sought to have their Indian status recognized or reinstated under Bill C-31. In the first five-year period after the 1985 Bill C-31 amendments to the *Indian Act*, the reason given by applicants that were related to identity or cultural affiliation formed a full sixty-two percent of the responses, as opposed to only eighteen percent who stated that their reasons were related to political reasons of justice or rights (INAC, 1990: 15-20).

The general crisis of economic dependency is a factor impacting on questions of identity as well. The simple fact is that when people become dependent on others for their existence, whatever the cause, they stop being who they truly are. The growth and development of their own values and cultures is stunted as it is deflected and begins to respond to their subsumed position relative to the fiduciary in the relationship. In this situation, the people are no longer in control of themselves and their future and they develop reactive cultural forms and ideas about themselves in the context of economic deprivation, dispossession or forced economic exclusion and marginalization, all of which are typical of First Nations existences today. Given this, it is not difficult to understand First Nations people's adherence to *Indian Act* status because Indian status does offer a modicum of economic benefit in terms of a limited set of entitlements and tax exemptions, as well as residential access to Indian reserve lands. But perhaps the most important factor underlying people's reliance upon *Indian Act* status as a feature of their identities is that it is seen, ironically, as Borrows

points to, as a marker of distinctive identity, and, as a form of restitution or minimal pay-back for lands that were stolen through colonization.

Overall though, in spite of these pragmatic and perhaps desperate measures to hold on to a vestigial symbol of the nation-to-nation relationship, fully informed understandings of Indigenous identity in the context of colonial history and the present arrangement of power in Canada leads inevitably to the call for new political identities that reflect rearranged power dynamics and new arrangements of space. Political identities are always consequential to the organization of power relationships. The power dynamic not only defines the parameters of the political community, telling us who is included and who is left out, it also differentiates the bounded political community internally. Because of the continuing colonial relationship between First Nations and Canada, this has caused fragmentation of Indigenous identities, a process which serves as an effective mechanism of co-optation and assimilation. More importantly, the cultural confusions and dysfunctional accessions to colonial power have weakened and divided the Indigenous nations and prevented the development of solidarity among and between Indigenous nations movement as whole, stifling our collective response to our colonization. For Indigenous peoples to re-emerge powerfully again, as individuals, as nations, and as a collective force against the continuing colonization of our continent, we must have the courage to reassert our own self-identity and political ethic, which will empower us to redevelop our own thinking, thought processes and knowledge systems. In the end, our peoples' identities will be meaningless unless they are founded on the Indigenous values and reflect Indigenous teachings about the land, life and what it means to be in relationships.

It is clear from this review of history on these issues that the imposition of the *Indian Act* displaced traditional notions of belonging, which were supportive of community and kinship structures as well as flexible, adaptive, and replaced them with race and gender-based notions of membership designed to reconstitute Indigenous people in ways acceptable to Euroamerican ideologies and undermine the viability of traditional

communities and cultures (Chabot, 2007: 32). Despite the near consensus on the critique of colonial concepts and on the true sources of authenticity for Indigenous identities, there is one major point of disagreement among First Nations researchers: differing views on the meaning, authenticity and utility of the concept of “citizenship” as a means of representing Indigenous collective identities. From the perspective of the persistently traditional views that are still prevalent in Indigenous community circles, the concept of “citizenship” as a framework for discussing affiliation in First Nations, though thoroughly enmeshed in the discourse of Indigenous sovereignty, has yet to become rationalized or fully rooted. It can be argued that this is because there is such a disconnection between this rights-based liberal philosophical orientation and the fundamentals of Indigenous teachings and worldviews. First Nations citizenship as it has been developed as a concept in Canada betrays the principle of autonomous nationhood, a core element of the political nationalism developed by First Nations in response to the colonization agenda (Alfred, 2005). By referencing Canadian constitutional authority and Euroamerican political philosophy in conceptualizing community that is on equal terms and coequal in form to that of the institutions of the Canadian state, First Nations governments have unwittingly embedded a notion of community governance that responds to and is shaped to conform to the imperatives of integration within a statist political structure rather than developing or regenerating Indigenous forms of community and governance.

The Mi’kmaq Confederacy’s statement to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples on citizenship serves as an example in this regard. Though an explicit attempt to define the constitutional framework for traditional Mi’kmaq governance, the 1993 *Constitution of the Mi’kmaq Commonwealth* lays out a notion of citizenship centrally oriented on defining and protecting the rights of individuals, and merges the inherent sources of Mi’kmaq nationhood, and their recognitions through treaty, with Canadian constitutional and provincial statutory protections of individual rights (Chabot, 2007: 44). Such formulaic, legalistic and state-centred conceptions of Indigenous identity are antithetical to Indigenous philosophies and ways of being, and yet the inevitable

result of political strategies attempting to represent Indigenous philosophies and governance systems in rights-based citizenship discourses.

In a 1982 presentation on how citizenship was being conceptualized by the Neskainlith before the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development, former chief Robert Manuel expressed his people's sense of nationhood in terms of Neskainlith governance being rooted in the family and kinship based decision-making process, and so far as the relation between Canadian identity and citizenship and Neskainlith identity and citizenship, he said simply that "our people remain citizens of the Neskainlith Indian Government and non-citizens remain non-citizens of the Neskainlith Indian Government" (Chabot, 2007: 44).

The Neskonlith example illustrates another facet of the incommensurability of the rights-based citizenship discourse with Indigenous governance. There is no agreement on the meaning of the term citizen among First Nations today; some use it as a marker of their Canadian citizenship as Aboriginal people inside of Canada, others use it to solidify the notion of their own autonomous and sovereign nationhood, and still others use it as the frame of reference for their syncretism and positing of a dual identity that validates both Indigenous nationhood and that of Canada.

Legal scholar Val Napoleon's advocacy of a rights-based liberal concept of citizenship (Chabot, 2007: 47-50) is emblematic of the convolutions necessary to reform Indigenous identities to bring them into concert with statist principles. Napoleon's work develops a notion of Indigenous citizenship that reflects the ideals of a form of liberal civic nationalism discussed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in terms of the concept of "dual citizenship," implying a rejection of lineage based identification and a patriotic loyalty to both their ancestral nations and to Canada, and commitment to Western democratic values and governmental processes. (RCAP, 1996, 2 (1): 237). Yet it is clear that for both pre-contact Indigenous identities and contemporary Indigenous identities rooted in traditional cultural teachings, it is the family or clan that forms the basis of collective identity, not the statist form of nationhood envisioned in Western terms. In fact, the concept of Indigenous nations

conceptualized along the state formation spectrum is itself a European derived concept and a reframing of traditional Indigenous nationhood and identities (Alfred, 2009). This form of a nation separates the people from their lineage rights and kinship-based obligations as the primary elements of their political identities and as the basis of their social and political organization. In place of this basic principle of Indigenous governance, it promotes a governing principle that replicates the state in categorizing and organizing of people by government institutions on the basis of rights that are generated by legal and judicial processes. This form of nationhood and citizenship is an assimilative approach to Indigenous identity, and as it is put forward in the contemporary Canadian political discourse, is part of a larger agenda, what has been labelled “aboriginalism” (Alfred, 2005: 126), or “the social and cultural reimagining of genocide.” It is based on the idea that what was integral to Indigenous peoples traditionally is now an irrelevant relic, and that if Indigenous are to have a viable future, it will be defined by and express itself in ways that accommodate the Canadian state, or, with their focus on rights and disregard for lineage, kinship based obligations, and Indigenous forms of direct democracy, reflect Euroamerican values and governing styles (Chabot, 2007, 19).

The fundamental problem with this and any approach to conceptualizing Indigenous identity that moves away from the traditional roots of Indigenous cultures is that the most important and valuable aspects of our cultures are abandoned or compromised in the interests of harmonizing governmentally and culturally with the demands and strategies of the colonial regime and the predilections of settler culture. If the objective is to conceptualize collective identity from an Indigenous perspective, rather than the perspective of First Nations people who work to build Canadian institutions and are immersed in European philosophies and worldviews, then the term citizenship is highly problematic. Of much greater decolonizing potential are words and concepts that truly reflect the values, ideas and models of Indigenous governance and which integrate Indigenous language-based notions of identity and modes of organizing and governing communities.

Sto:lo writer Lee Maracle provided a rooted and critical perspective on some of the issues she sees concerning the question of citizenship and Indigeneity. Her solicited response on these questions was generous in offering a concise treatise on the history of the Coast Salish experience with colonialism, which is without a doubt reflective of the broader experience of Indigenous peoples, and in any case instructive in setting these issues in a real historical and contemporary political and cultural context. As such, it will be quoted at length:

First, the Canadian government's referral to each Indian reserve as a "First Nation" is a farce. The reservation system is an insult to our right to nationhood. Reserves are generally for animals, and specifically for those humans descended from South Africans who were confined to Bantustans during the heyday of racist South African apartheid, and the dehumanized "Indians" of Turtle Island, secondarily. Reserves are confinement areas established to contain and diminish access and preponderance of those living there. In short, we were placed on reserves to cut all access to our original nation territories. The "Indian Act," established over a century ago, was intended to hasten the confinement of our citizens, legally limit access to our territories, and facilitate the appropriation of those territories not specifically allocated to us as reserve lands. It did so by narrowing consistently over the century and a half of its existence, the definition of citizenship.

In 1867, according to the late Harry Daniels, an Indian was anyone living among our people, related by blood from either line, male and female. This is essentially a nation-based notion of citizenship. That is, we were entitled as nations to include among our citizens any individual willing to integrate themselves into our cultures and communities. The first change altered citizenship to exclude those descended from women. Some of our societies determine clan through the male bloodlines, others through the female blood lines; others determine clan through both lineages. Bloodlines, while determining clan, do not determine citizenship, and Coast Salish people differentiated between citizenship and blood relation or clan. Within the Nation, any member of the 27 "friendly groups" who spoke a dialect of the Salishan languages was entitled to access to the wealth of the territory as free beings, so long as they followed the laws and practices of the local people and respected their land/sea and plant management, their laws, ceremonies and customs. In general, the men married into the community - though marriage was not required to become a citizen. When this occurred, the elder women of the clan

he married into set about to educate him in the language, law, customs and management practices. Once his education was complete and his loyalty to law, practice, ceremony and customs respected he was assigned to a clan, given a position and a name and he became a citizen of the nation. In the "Indian Act" this was referred to as adoption by custom. The change in language demeaned our national law, policy and practice. Families adopt; nations accord citizenship. This integration process in modern language is called Immigration Policy, but Canada cannot acknowledge our nation status as they would have to admit our colonial condition.

What interrupted this was the massive death through the epidemics which plagued Coast Salish people from 1731 to today. Three epidemics reduced my nation from 10,000 people to one hundred by 1940. As a result of the epidemic death, we were not in position to defend ourselves from the tsunami of migration of European settlers to our territories. Our ancestors protected our total annihilation by surrendering our authority over our lives, moving to small reserves, attending residential schools and converting to Christianity. In the course of our re-education, our systems of management, law, custom and integrative authority broke down, but the understanding of nationhood and citizenship, law, management, custom and integrative praxis was not "lost," as we are so often told.

The Salish confederacy in the United States survived. The confederacy on the Canadian side of the border is in a weakened state, but the memory of it, the knowledge about it, the desire to re-construct it, remains. What has changed is access to our traditional lands. Canada maintains that all land outside of private property and reserve land belong to the crown. Without access to our national territory there can be no nation. A village is a village; no village is a nation. The Canadian government wants us to refer to each little reservation, these postage stamps, as First Nations, so that we will forget that once we managed, care took the lands of Washington State, British Columbia and Montana from Lillooet in the North to Siletz Oregon in the South and from Southern Vancouver Island in the West to Western Montana in the east. The possibility of reclaiming access to this territory still exists and will always exist.

So long as we are clear about the difference between clan, family, bloodlines and national citizenship and so long as we struggle for an end to colonial domination and do not succumb to the authority of Canada over our original confederacy, nationhood is possible. So long as we carry on reviving, not just our cultural and ceremonial practices, but also the systems of authority, management and law, nationhood is possible. So long as we refuse to reduce ourselves to

animalistic status on tiny reservations and continue to rebuild our original systems this is possible. So long as we do not accept the Indian Act reductionist language which narrows our future from nationhood and confederacy to village confinement, this is possible.

In such a passionate exposition of Indigenous concepts of belonging, "citizenship" takes on a fuller and more grounded meaning than it has in the right-based liberal discourse. Teiowí:sonte Thomas Deer, a Kahnawá:ke Mohawk artist and writer, was also asked to elaborate his concept of citizenship, rooted in Haudenosaunee culture. It is one that builds on Lee Maracle's historical perspective and takes a more political-legal angle on the question of citizenship and the appropriate terminology to represent our existence in contemporary terms. As with Maracle's, given the cogency and relevance of his response, it will be quoted at length:

Uniformity on the concept of citizenship is integral for all Haudenosaunee to assert their inherent rights as an Indigenous People. While Indigenous Peoples of the Western Hemisphere are often synonymous with the Red Race of American Indians, I use the term Indigenous People in order to illustrate that our people are distinct nations who are native to this land as we must be careful to not limit our identity as a race. We must recognize that internationally, only citizens of nations can have rights; not members of races. Indigenous Peoples of the Western Hemisphere are distinct primordial nations of the Americas and the fact that we have originated here and had established civilizations based upon law ultimately determines our status internationally. Therefore we are citizens of our sovereign nations who have inherent rights; not mere members of a racial group with ethnic privileges. I use the term "citizenship" because if we are going to continue to struggle for our inherent rights, this can only be achieved from a position that does not compromise our sovereignty as an Indigenous Nation.

Citizenship refers to an individual's political status in relation to the state. Through cultural origin, birth, or naturalization; a citizen's political status is often determined by their nationality within the state. The Haudenosaunee, as a sovereign people, are composed of citizens of Iroquoian origin. While the Haudenosaunee are Indigenous Peoples, the individual nations that make up the Haudenosaunee share distinct social, political, and cultural attributes that distinguish themselves from other Indigenous Peoples in the Western Hemisphere; giving their people a unique and defined identity as nationals of each individual member nation. The distinction between citizenship and

nationality resides in cultural background. One who is born into the culture of a specific people is a member of that nation, while citizenship is a member's political status and relationship within the state. One who is born as a Kanien'kehá:ka national is immediately a citizen of the Haudenosaunee. However, through the Adoption Ceremony, a foreign national may be naturalized as a citizen of the Haudenosaunee. Never is race the determining factor in determining either nationality or citizenship, although each Indigenous Nation has the right to determine its own standards for citizenship.

In order to consolidate their dominion over Indigenous Peoples in North America, both Canada and the United States have adopted certain policies designed to limit and restrict Indigenous Peoples by stripping them of their citizenship knowing well that it is this national identity that is host to our inherent rights. The United States and Canada therefore approach Indigenous Peoples on the basis of race as opposed to nationality or citizenship as a means to avoid and limit lingering fiduciary responsibilities and notions of Indigenous sovereignty. By identifying certain race-based privileges as rights, Indigenous Peoples are led to misinterpret what their true inherent rights are as citizens of their respective Indigenous Nation.

The use of citizenship here differs from that of both the liberal discourse and Maracle's. In this case, there is a conscious effort by Deer to articulate in English an ancient Indigenous philosophy of being and of community. And as with Napoleon's rights-based language and formulations the limitations and pitfalls of English legal conceptual tools become apparent. Maracle and Deer's views illustrate the disagreement between Indigenous philosophical understandings versus rights-based discourses. As well, they show the unfortunate futility of using a legalistic and politically situated English term to counter the hegemonic colonial discourse; in North America, it is a political fact that citizenship is the purview of, is overwhelmingly identified with, and framed by state, and any use of the terminology of citizenship itself risks being used to further statist objectives in the political arena.

In reality, conceptions of Indigenous citizenship, enmeshed as they are within the state, solidify colonialism's assumptions into Indigenous collective identities. Lacking an Indigenous root, aspects of identity and cultural choices are selected from a menu presented by Euroamerican philosophies and the bureaucratic and judicial machinery

of the state. Aboriginalism as an ideology and political agenda takes this intellectual paradox one step further. With aboriginalism, in the ostensible struggle to define an autonomous existence, truly independent bases of Indigenous nationhood are compromised in the negotiation of accommodation within the settler society's institutions. The constitutionalization of the status of Aboriginal citizens jettisons Indigenous authenticity to accede to Canadian government policies and embrace mainstream values and culture. So Indigeneity in its full expression as a land-based, politically independent identity is conceived as part of the historical past. Even if it admits colonialism as an historic event or process, this perspective cannot be relevant to future generations of Indigenous people as a viable alternative to the current reality of cultural confusion and colonial imposition because it abandons the very sources of independent existence our nations were founded upon: our ownership of our lands, the supremacy of our laws, and the autonomy and sanctity of our communities.

As it stands, there is confusion and cross-purpose usage of the terms citizenship and Aboriginal, which is actually preferable to the alternative, a triumph of liberal discourse and the hegemony of aboriginalism displacing Indigenous notions of nationhood and identities. If an aboriginalized notion of liberal citizenship were to morph from scholarship and its place as a political idea into a real cultural front in First Nations communities and become the main framework for Indigenous identity and an orienting principle for community-based struggles to reconstruct relationships between Indigenous peoples and the state, it would lead to irreversible erosions of First Nations as political entities and culturally distinctive communities.

So for the various reasons explained thus far, the current state of scholarly and policy literature on the whole presents a compelling critique of the historical development of the regime governing membership in Indigenous communities and the existing situation with regard to the meaning of Indigenous identity today, and contains a broad consensus supporting the rejection of current terminologies and, indeed, the entire legal-political conceptual framework for Indigenous identity in Canada. The

path undertaken by Indigenous governments to redress the colonization of Indigenous lands and identities, that of the development of strategies utilizing citizenship and aboriginality are highly problematic and unjustifiable from a perspective rooted in Indigenous philosophical teachings and a commitment to Indigenous' nationhood. But the scholarly literature and policy work done to date can only state and define the problem. Focused and authentic Indigenous perspectives on these questions are needed to define alternatives to the present situation.

FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES

Original research conducted among First Nations community members for this project illuminates First Nation perspectives on key issues identified in the review of the scholarly literature above. The range of perspectives presented below are drawn from the responses of participants in a focus group session, and the solicited views of interviewees in a set of focused interviews, involving a total of 51 First Nation individuals representing a broad spectrum in terms national affiliation, region, experience with Indigenous issues, and age.¹

The first set of issues discussed revolves around colonial misrepresentations of Indigenous identity. Interview respondents and focus group participants put forward a range of perspectives on the issue of using European language terminology to represent Indigenous identities in the context the historic and ongoing colonial relationship between Indigenous and the Canadian state. As first evidenced in the notably consistent conclusions of the focus group session, and later verified in the bulk of the interviews, the main components of the Indigenous perspective on this theme are as follows:

- Terminologies drawn from European languages ignore or distort true Indigenous identities;
- Current terminologies are false representations of Indigenous identities; and,
- The continuing use of these terms and concepts cause and perpetuate the alienation of Indigenous people from their culture.

¹ The focus group session was hosted by the AFN and held on February 11, 2009 in Ottawa, the minutes of which are available from the AFN. Participants numbered 30 (17 female and 13 male) with representation from all regions and a wide age range. Notable participants include Elders Elmer Courchene and Billy Two Rivers, Native women's advocate Jeannette Corbiere Lavell and former AFN Manitoba Regional Vice-Chief Ken Young. Interviews were open ended discussions on key issues drawn from the previous section conducted by the author via email and telephone in March of 2009. Interview respondents numbered 21 (12 female and 9 male) with representation from the Coast and Straits Salish (2), Kwagiutl – Quatsino, Nuu-Chah-Nulth (3), Nuxalk, Dene (2), Blackfoot, Anishnaabe (2), Munsee-Delaware, Cayuga (2) and Mohawk (5) nations.

The comments of Christine Deom, a 63 year-old Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) lawyer, are a good introduction to First Nations people's perspectives on this issue:

I think that European words and concepts are loaded terms, very legalistic, whereas the Kanienkeha term for nation, *Kanakerahserake*, has a really solid unified meaning, "a place to resolve larger collective issues." The community terms are locative - as in *Kahnawakeronon* ("by the rapids"), or *Akwesasronon* ("where the partridge drums") or *Kanehsatakeronon* ("on the sand beach"), and I think they display the collectivity as community, very hands off, to all other communities. And yet they are allied together to a higher appeal in terms of broader identity which is a very elastic relationship. I wonder whether the provinces and Canada could be described as such?

Deom's comments point directly at the issue of the inability of English terms to convey fully and accurately the historical, cultural and geographic contexts of Indigenous community identities. And the irony of acceding to the supremacy of European language terms and concepts is not lost on Jodie-Lynn Waddilove-Corbiere, a thirty-two year-old woman from the Munsee-Delaware Nation

Imagine if we were to use our own words and concepts to define European people. For example, I have been told the words in my language that were used to describe European people at the time of contact translated into, "blue eyes with no soul." I speculate that this came from the direct contact and experiences my people, the Lenape (Delaware in English), had with Europeans. This is especially harrowing, as in 1782, the U.S. General Brodhead ordered a Colonel Williamson to teach the Natives on the Tuscaraw and Sandusky rivers of Ohio a lesson in revenge for the Iroquois' attacks around Fort Pitt. Williamson, with 160 militiamen, came across hungry Delawares gathering corn. Williamson told the Delawares that they would be escorted to food and safety. The Delawares, who are known to be very spiritual people and pacifists, followed. But instead of being led to food and safety, they were bound and charged with being murderers and thieves because they had in their possession horses and tools that were not typically owned by Natives. They were ordered into the mission and systemically clubbed to death with mallets. They were then scalped and burned. Two Delawares escaped. Today, in Canada, there are two small Delaware Nations. Now, is there any question as to why the Delaware came up with the translated meaning for Europeans, "blue eyes with no soul"?

Despite the power our oral histories and languages have to ground and unify our consciousness as Indigenous peoples, European colonial term continue to dominate our discourse and practices on membership and identity. Another aspect of this problem was expressed by Chiinuuks, a 38 year-old Nuu-Chah-Nulth woman, who explained how using English terms causes a reactionary shift in the focus and point of reference for First Nations identities:

I think the current problem lies in how we define ourselves in relation to whom. As Native people, there are those of us who are still trying to define ourselves in relation to white settler communities, in other words the oppressors. Despite the continued and illegal occupation of Canada, of our lands, some of us continue to both recognize and identify with the state by allowing its political and legal structures to define who we are for us. Defining ourselves with European words and concepts involves consenting to defining ourselves singularly in relation the white settler communities. In this way, we are required to recognize Canada's current status on our lands and simultaneously go against any definition understood in our Indigenous languages.

Chiinuuks' views emphasize the point that using English terms is not only alienating from a cultural perspective, but also directly contributes to the alienation of Indigenous peoples from their lands by reinforcing and legitimating the state's claims and position of power vis-á-vis Indigenous nations. But there is not total agreement among First Nations people on the inevitability of this dynamic. Bud Morris, a Kahnawá:ke Mohawk with many years of experience in band politics and administration, has a subtler take on this whole question, pointing to the contextual nature of words. His views represent another perspective, that which supports the contention that European words are incapable of accurate representation of Indigenous identities, but which downplays the inherent distinction between European and Indigenous languages in favour of a greater emphasis on the contextual and political aspects of the relationship:

I do not think the European words are the real problem, I think the problem is the intent: the construct of laws they have surrounded themselves with under the concept that they have the power to legislate over other nations. They intended to use words that limited our identities, such as Aboriginal, Native, Indian, band member, status

Indian. They could have chosen other words that suited our purposes better but they did not. We can select words to best identify who were if we so chose. For example, "I am a *Kanien'kehaka Kahnawakero:non*." Admittedly though, we have some challenges coming to common understandings about what certain words mean, but that is so in any language.

Morris' comments bring forward the element of self-reflexivity in the construction of discourses on identity, emphasizing the agency of both colonizer and colonized in the context of the political relations that underlie colonialism. The overall fact of colonial relations is something everyone agrees on; all of the interview respondents and focus group participants pointed to the obvious racialization of Indigenous identity in the *Indian Act*, to the exclusion of cultural practices and political rights of Indigenous peoples to extend membership either kinship wise or in political processes internal to themselves. This racial categorization flies in the face of traditional Indigenous cultures and philosophies.

It is well established now in scholarly, policy and community circles that First Nations have rejected the use of blood quantum as a means of calculating or determining membership in their communities (AFN-INAC, 2008). Beyond this, the narrow racialized conceptualization and limiting parameters of Indian status recognition, as it is formulated and enforced in law, compound the problem (Chabot, 2007: 32-37).

With regard to specific views on current *Indian Act* terminology, focus group participants expressed a range of negative reactions to the terms, including, in consolidated form, all of the following:

- "We should disregard them"
- Confusion
- They are demeaning
- They have no relation to being Indigenous
- They cause loss of culture
- They deny our relation to the land
- Misrepresenting

Among the focus group participants, three consistencies clearly emerged on current terminology:

1. They ignore the true identity of Indigenous peoples;
2. They are false representations of Indigenous identities; and,
3. They are culturally alienating.

Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi, a Kwakiutl - Quatsino woman who is a former band chief and currently a university administrator, responded as follows to the question on the effects of current terminologies on her life and that of her community:

The main issue from my perspective is that European concepts have been and continue to be divisive. When I consider these concepts, it is clear that they have been the driving force behind the *Indian Act*. For instance, "Status", "non-Status" and Bill C-31... These all signify "non-entitlement," which often cause us to play the game of dividing ourselves based on the European concepts. European concepts and philosophies compartmentalize us and we buy in to this process, and use their language as a way to categorize ourselves as to who we are, and then we're caught up in word politics and thoughts around blood quantum and what not. Young people are especially affected because of these words and European concepts that serve to cut them off from the community. And yet there are many people who I know who are not identified as "status" but live and breathe our culture and community reality more spiritually and traditionally than some of us who are "status" because they live in that community or place.

Her comments highlight what is in most people's minds the most persistent effect of the imposition and embrace of European terminology: the disunity and cultural alienation caused within families and communities.

Turning to the terminology which has developed in the wake of colonialism's dislocation of First Nations and as part of the Canadian state's attempt to consolidate a legal and political category that serves in the purpose of constitutionally containing and constraining First Nations identities, focus group participants were asked to discuss the term "aboriginal" and to reflect on its meaning in legal, political and cultural terms. There was slightly more variation in responses to this term than with

the responses to *Indian Act* derived terms - a few participants did express a benign attitude towards the word, simply citing its legal-constitutional meaning - but in general the responses were negative. Respondents' views, in consolidate form, were as follows:

- It is foreign
- It has no relation to the land
- It is meaningless
- It means nothing
- It is a politically correct government legal word
- It's confused
- It's what the white man calls us

Angela Grier, a Blackfoot woman expresses the general First Nations reaction to the term in her emphatic rejection of its legitimacy:

Aboriginal is a government appointed term that encapsulates the Indigenous races, alongside the Métis people, which is in itself controversial because they are not entirely Indigenous. The term was manifested without consultation by the federal government to oppress Indigenous peoples further, by removing their inherent identities and framing their identities in a colonial origin. It is a racist term that reduces the unique and sacred qualities of a people, a land, a history.

As a matter of fact, the authoritative source of English language definition and usage, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, does indicate that the term in its original and current usage refers primarily to the first inhabitants of countries colonized by Europeans and makes clear that the people it is referring to are thought to be "primitive." So Grier's and the other respondents' views, whether informed by tradition or education, researched or drawing on instinct or intuition, are technically correct. This is in spite of intense propagandizing and persuasive effort on the part of the Canadian government in its attempt since it was introduced in the discourse in 1982 to reframe the term in a positive sense. It should also be noted that the Canadian government's own terminological usage guide does not make any reference to the actual meaning or demeaning connotation of the term (INAC, 2002: 7-8).

Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi responded emphatically on the issue of Aboriginality potentially superseding older referents for her community's identity:

Immediately it raises the thought of government. In my job, it's used front and center. It's used everywhere in government now, in data and stats, both provincially and federally. I consider myself a "Native woman". The other concepts, like "Indigenous," are considered to be politically correct in academia primarily, but when I go home to my community, I still hear many of our elders and our leaders use the word "Indian" because the older generation isn't using the term in a negative sense - they are saying "Indian" with pride and dignity, especially when I talk to my father. I'm not going to correct him am I? It's the same battle again because of the European compartmentalization that our people have learned to mimic and delve into word usage, which is senseless and divisive. In my opinion, let an individual identify who they are based on their own understanding of who they are. Who is right- the man and woman from the community, with cultural knowledge, the governments, the university, or the academic? The government refers to us as Aboriginal, the university world says we are Indigenous, others refer to themselves as Indigenous and to others they call themselves Indian. I don't think any organization, whether government or academic, has the right to dictate who I am, who my father is... Aboriginal is the convenient word of the day to categorize us as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. For a period it was politically correct to identify as Indigenous and Native. What will we be tomorrow? For me it isn't the prescribed term, it is my lineage, my language, my name, my father's name and my mother's name that defines for me and others who I am and where I have the right to stand.

Her words express the frustration First Nations people feel in being subject to any externally imposed label and conception of identity, and the lack of respect shown for the fundamental right of Indigenous peoples to determine their own identities on the individual and community levels. Janet Marie Rogers, Mohawk poet, elaborates further on the reaction to the term:

Whenever I see this word, I feel like I missed some very important memo from headquarters - it seemed like all of the sudden one day people starting using this word to define Indians and I had no idea where it came from. How did everyone come to agree this new word how we wanted to be referenced to? I never use this word. I dislike this word. When I hear other Native people using this word, I cringe. I try to

correct them, but they are usually government Indians who full-heartedly adopted this word to be their own. Being a poet and writer, words are extremely important to me, and I understand the impact each vibration of energy each word has. So to see this word "Aboriginal" tacked onto conference titles and such, I get concerned for the impressionable young native youth.

The need to deconstruct current terms and rebuild Indigenous identities on traditional and rooted foundations is reflected across the spectrum of experience, as evidenced in the view of 23 year-old Brandy Doolittle from the Cayuga Nation:

The words that are being used to define and represent our identities as Indigenous people are very biased and racist. Words that are being used currently can, and usually are, taken out of context and used in a negative way. As Indigenous people, we should be working towards turning this around so that we are not "labelled" in a manner that is demeaning.

Again, the feeling of First Nations alienation from the substance of the term and from the cultural and political process that produced it is quite evident. In her response to the overall question of representation, Nuskmata (Jacinda Mack), a woman from the Nuxalk Nation, takes us beyond our reaction to being misrepresented and elaborates the culturally-rooted response which allows her to maintain connection and feeling of cultural authenticity in the face of the continuing terminological and political assault on Indigenous nationhood and identity:

For me personally, European words and concepts and our indigenous identities are inherently in conflict because our language is a representation of our worldview, and often there is no direct translation, so things get appropriated or even translated wrong. As a Nuxalk woman, my identity is intrinsically tied to the land, because our *Smayustas*, our creation stories, contain our names, responsibilities, prerogatives and place names, so it's all one piece, there is no distinction between homeland and identity. My dad's Nuxalk ancestral name was *Nusq'lst*, which is a place, name, a person, and signifies crests, songs, and dances. It is in Nuxalk lands, in our home villages, that our ancestors' blood rests, quite literally. It doesn't matter where I happen to live, when asked who I am and where I am from the answer is always, Nuxalk. It's these stories, those lands, and those ties to our families and responsibility to potlatch that are political. To keep our language, to keep our traditional knowledge, to keep our potlatch

system, and to continue our connection with the land and our families and know our history, that is all political because it is a statement of survival, a statement that we are first and foremost Nuxalk. It doesn't matter that my status is registered under my mom's Secwepemc band, I am also still Nuxalk. I know who my family is, my community accepts me, and I contribute to our social, cultural and political systems. Each Indigenous nation has its own way of expressing its worldview, its associated responsibilities and rights, its membership. It's tied to language and land and is inherently unique to that part of the world. "Aboriginal" to me is more of an academic and political construct of "Other," another word to separate the first people from whatever land that settlers have come to occupy. When we use it, it is usually within these contexts. It has not been my experience to say, "I'm aboriginal. You are aboriginal." It is "I'm Nuxalk. What nation are you from?"

Nuskmata's response reminds us of the active and challenging work which needs to be done on the multiple levels of our identity - individual, family, house, clan, nation - to bring the tangled strands of our Indigenous identities back into a unified whole.

Her answer leads into another discreet aspect of people's responses to these issues: self-conceptions of Indigeneity. There are of course Indigenous alternatives to colonial misrepresentations that still exist, or which have been recently developed, and a variety of these were described by the focus group participants and interview respondents. As with the criticisms of current terminology and concepts, there was consistency among people, reflecting in this case a consensus that Indigenous identities are manifestations of particular relationships between people and between people and the earth revolving around the key aspects of lineage, land and culture.

Focus group participants agreed on the basic elements in the self-definition and self-conception of their Indigeneity, which are:

- Place
- Culture
- Clan
- Lineage
- Way of life
- Oral history

Summarized, the consensus position of all of the respondents on this question is as follows: Indigenous self-conceptions are based on lineage, culture and place/land. And there is fundamental agreement that it is the essential and sacred relationship between people and the land tied to specific places which is the source of the languages and cultures, which are in turn the bases of Indigenous identities.

Respondents were most animated on the question of what the most important focuses should be in developing or reasserting Indigenous alternatives to colonial constructs of identity. As demonstrated by the responses in the focus group and the interviews, it is a common belief among First Nations people that within each geographical territory lay the tools, gifts, language reference points and origins of that nation. These combined produce our unique cultures, or ways of living. The relationship between human beings and the other elements of the natural world manifest in our territories are crucial to the formation of our national identities.

The perspectives of Indigenous people who still practice their ancestral ways on the land and in spiritual ceremonies are particularly clear and intense on this question. From this perspective, the foundation of Indigenous peoples lies within our spiritual functioning. To have ancestral practices - ceremonial, social and land-based - still intact and serving their purposes today, people had to have maintained their ethics and a highly sensitive and thoroughly internalized Indigenous consciousness. Those ethics derive from the relationship between spiritual forces, humankind, the land, the animals and the other elements of the natural environment - sometimes called Natural Law. These laws and ethics were developed by the observation and experiential learning systems between that people and their natural environment. The experiential learning was conducted over generations, which allowed for an interaction with the natural elements, which is a spiritual process - all nature is viewed as alive and imbued with spirit. A kinship form of relation, defined in terms of respect, responsibility and obligation was generated between and amongst Indigenous people and their natural environments. This is the reality and the character of our ancestral cultures. Our societal goals flowed from this: to harmoniously and

peacefully coexist with the natural world, to demonstrate respect, and work to protect and live with it as a relative. Indigenous identities reflect these goals.

The dispossession of our peoples and the territorial displacement of our nations from our traditional lands disconnected us from the physical and spiritual resources essential to our livelihoods, cultures, and identities. This disconnection is the root cause of the devastating psychophysical harms suffered by all Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island since the European invasion. So relationship to homeland is essential to the identity of Indigenous people; this is an obvious connection to Indigenous people since we know that our ancestors thrived, and we also know the aftermath of the loss of land and how our relationships have been degraded, bringing our peoples into basic survival mode in our modern day existences.

It is clear that Indigenous lands and Indigenous identities go hand in hand. The focus group results on this issue were remarkably consistent, with no variance at all between sub-group responses. All participants agreed that identity is essentially rooted in the land, and land is the sacred source of both identity and culture.

Simply and powerfully stated by 37 year-old Mississauga Anishnaabekwe Leanne Simpson, “Our homeland is our identity, and our identity is our homeland. The relationships we nurture with the land, waters, plants, animals, and the ecological and spiritual forces within our territory are the foundation of who we are as a people.” Chiinuks expanded on the view that there is an essential connection between the natural environment and Indigeneity:

We Nuu-chah-nulth call ourselves *Quu’asminaa*, which means, “real human beings,” not because we are more human than other human beings, but because we recognize and respect that there are a multitude of other non-human beings. By calling ourselves *Quu’asminaa* we are reminded that it is our daily responsibility to live our lives in relation to the all life, or *Haahuuthlii*, the land, sea, sky, mountains and all other non-human beings, including the spiritual world. This is a concept which we call *Hishuukitsawalk*, “everything is connected”. Further, the concept of land is described spatially, in terms of where

Naas, “all creation, or the Creator,” put us on the land. For Nuu-chah-nulth, Naas put us on the hahuuthlii.

Nick Claxton, from the Tsawout First Nation on Vancouver Island, expressed it this way:

The relationship between homeland and identity is critical. Today, our “Indigenous” identity is rooted too much in the reserve system and *Indian Act* band system. Under this system, there is no opportunity to have a relationship with our traditional lands, and an identity that is founded on this relationship to the land. In our traditional societies, just about every aspect of our traditional identity involved our environment.

The translation of this spiritual and philosophical orientation into cultural practice through ceremony was explained by Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi:

Ceremony tells me who has ownership to the land, rights to certain clam beds, berry patches or whatever has been passed down from generation to generation- we learn about this primarily through ceremony and social practice. Ultimately, this is our law. Ceremonies are our way to record our laws, protocols, names, rights to songs, dances, and where names come from. In our potlatch ceremony the dances and dancers identify for us where people come from and our extended. For example, the big house is the visual explanation of who people are and how we are connected; when people stand up during certain dances it reinforces who we are connected with by family and the tribal system. Therefore the ceremony frames our social, legal and hereditary political position and we learn this from our songs, dances and practices.

The essential link between land, ceremony and identity is developed further by Cliff Atleo, Jr., who is a 35 year-old Ahousaht of the Na'cha'uaht Nation and Kitselas of the Tsimshian Nation. Atleo explains the aspect of the specificity of such a conception referencing particular places:

If we are strictly adhering to Nuu-chah-nulth laws, my father would say that a *Ha'wilth*, a hereditary chief, cannot be a Ha'wilth away from home. He is who he is only when he is living amongst his people and able to fulfill his responsibilities. If I take this interpretation of our laws, I would have to say that I am less Nuu-chah-nulth because I am not living at home at the present time. Now, some people would feel very touchy about this idea, but I think it has merit. I am not saying people should feel bad for being displaced from their homelands or for even choosing to be somewhere else. What I am saying is that many of

our people cannot live at home for lack of housing or a means to sustain them. In this regard, because of colonialism and settler encroachment, many of us are prevented from living Nuu-chah-nulth lives, and in a way, prevented from being Nuu-chah-nulth. To say otherwise would ignore the colonial legacies that we still live with. This also means that if we are to live more authentic Indigenous lives, we must return home or at the very least re-establish a connection with our homelands. Being Indigenous is very place-based in my view. It cannot be any other way.

Reflecting the real differences that exist among different people on this issue of the geographic specificity of Indigenous identity, 24 year-old David Hill of the Cayuga Nation says:

The way I see it people are in relation to the land wherever they go. My traditional territory is at Grand River, but I still feel my identity carries me and my spirit with the land wherever I go. No matter where I've been, even if I do live as far as Vancouver Island, I'm always in relationship to my homeland.

Somewhat of a pragmatic balance between these two perspectives is offered by 32 year-old Brock Pitawanakwat, an Anishnaabe from the Whitefish River Nation, who speaks to the generalized reality of contemporary Indigenous people's mobility, especially among younger generations, and its intersection with traditional senses of homeland as the source and exclusive locus of Indigenous identities:

For Indigenous peoples I believe homeland and identity are inseparable. In so many of our languages, we name our communities after the landscape. I feel a connection not only to my reserve community but the territory of all Anishinaabeg and allied Indigenous nations. I do believe that we can reconnect to the land when we move, but our strength resides in our homelands.

Okanagan educator Jennette Armstrong has also spoken to this issue in her description of the relationship between the land, identity, and her N'silxchn Language:

As I understand it from my Okanagan ancestors, language was given to us by the land we live within... I have heard the elders explain that the language changed as we moved and spread over the land through time. My own father told that it was the land that changed the language because there is special knowledge in each different place...Not to

learn the language is to die. We survived and thrived by listening intently to its teachings... (Lawrence, 2004:38).

Armstrong's words orient us toward the final theme that emerged in the focus groups and which was dealt with in the interviews: What is it to be Indigenous from within Indigenous cultures? Clearly, there are a range of the spiritual, ceremonial and land-based practices that are crucial to the formation of authentic Indigenous identities that vary across cultures and evolve over time. Yet the point that Indigeneity is a function of the relationship between identity and cultural or other kinds of practices is not disputed. It is one's practice that determines one's identity. Focus group participants and interviewees recognized the changing nature and character of these practices in agreeing that Indigenous practices include all traditional ceremony and land-based cultural activities. Elaboration on this is provided by the Mohawk scholar, Thohahoken:

Indigenous culture is a "performed" culture. Most Indigenous people exist as a theory of a people that is expressed in ceremonies, stories, dance, language, and gardening. The knowledge of Indigenous people exists in this form, and some people are trying to put the theory into practice.

Brock Pitawanakwat reflected on his personal experience with practicing Indigeneity:

When I was living on my reserve, I was amazed at how connected my relatives were to that space. I was very fortunate that they understood what I was missing and took me fasting, fishing, hunting and just exploring. I helped with the family sugar camp and was able to spend days and nights out there working with my family. Words cannot convey how much that meant to me having grown up in a city thousands of kilometres from my relatives and my homeland. Maybe if I had the opportunity to participate in those land-based activities on the prairies, where I grew up, then I would feel more rooted here... I don't know that answer. I can say that the one year I spent on my reserve, living with and learning from my relatives, gave me a better sense of what it meant to be Anishinaabe than all those years I spent being an urban Indian in Regina.

In a psychological, physical, and spiritual sense then, practicing Indigenous cultures is the way to regenerate Indigenous identities in the face of all of the efforts of the state to dissolve community and to weaken individual senses of self. But the question

remains, what specifically is it that Indigenous people do that distinguishes them from those who live and practice their culture within the North American mainstream and makes them authentically Indigenous? This is not a theoretical or philosophical question for people like the Mississauga scholar and activist, Leanne Simpson, who roots her views on being Indigenous solidly in the lived experience of interactions her and her family have with the land of the ancestral community. The orienting features of this notion of Indigeneity are practices done to live out the mutual respect and obligations inherent within Indigenous cultural teachings. Her list is exhaustive:

I cannot possibly name all the practices and ceremonies, not even for one of our 13 months, not even for one nation. But here's a partial list of what my family and I do, from birth: pregnancy ceremony, birth ceremony, breastfeeding ceremony, placenta burying ceremony, naming ceremony, belly-button stump burying ceremony, walking out ceremony, fasting/vision quest, language speaking, full moon ceremonies, water ceremonies, sweat lodge, fasting, shake tent, round dance, sap cleanse, sugar bush, hunting, trapping, fishing, medicine gathering and using traditional medicines, plant gathering, gardening, berry picking story-telling, performance, drumming, singing, dancing, traditional political, gatherings clan ceremonies, spirit-helper ceremonies, traveling traditional water routes, running, canoeing, looking after *Nishinaabe Aki*, honouring the relationships in *Gdoo Naganina/Our Dish/The Dish with One Spoon*, and, living *mno-bimadiziwin*.

Basically, being Indigenous is just a straightforward commitment to do these things or their cultural and geographic equivalents in other places on the land. This conclusion could not be illustrated more effectively, nor all of the themes dealt with in this paper conveyed more simply and profoundly, than through the following conversation between 80 year-old Adeline Dickie and her grand-daughter. Adeline is a Dene women who grew up on the land in northern BC and now lives in the Slavey reserve community of the Fort Nelson First Nation. Her thoughts and words provide us with ample motivation and guidance in thinking our way through the colonial confusion of contemporary Indigenous identity issues to the recovery of the true sense of ourselves in ancestral terms which is so important to the continuing existence of our peoples as nations in our homelands.

What do you think about using European words to represent us?

I don't know why they call us "Slavey." I don't know what a Slavey is. Maybe because we live a hard life they think were slaves. I like to be called Dene; I don't like Slavey. I'd rather be called "Indian" than Slavey. Slavey is not a bad word, it's just not right. White people think we're dumb, but they are dumb; they can't live in the bush. I don't like white people to tell me I'm "Indian" when I tell them I'm Dene. I tell them they aren't welcome here. They also think that we chew on moccasins and eat moose hide when we're hungry. Just dumb! I hope white man don't read this...

What is the relation between our homeland and being Dene?

Northwest Territory Dene are more Indian than British Columbia Dene; everybody around here are *tahni Dene*, halfbreeds. Only us, the older Dene from *Mbehcholah kue* [Ft. Liard], are Dene. Dene that live in Denendeh, the Northwest Territories, are more Dene. Old people there are going away and the young people are taking over; only thing is the language is dying out. Not very much people talking *Dene K'e* anymore; but the young people there are tanning moose hides and trapping still. They can still live in the bush. Even though some of them are halfbreeds they are really Dene, know how to live in the bush, tan hide, really take care of themselves in the bush. Here in Fort Nelson lots of halfbreeds and some people don't know how to live in the bush anymore; they aren't as Dene as those who know how to live in the bush.

What are the ceremonial or other kinds of practices that define what it is to be Dene?

Drum dance. Even though white people go to drum dance, they always just get drunk. Dene don't get drunk at drum dance. The drum dance helps Dene pray. We also use drums to pray when people are sick or sad. Outside drum dance is better than inside drum dance, inside drum dance is just for show; sometimes in the wintertime we have to do it inside, but outside in the wintertime is really Dene way. Living in the bush is really Dene. In the fall time you start hunting moose for winter, winter comes you start trapping again, then you just travel around and visit and trap, only come into town to get some supplies then go back to the bush. In the spring stay in the bush and hunt beaver, keep on moving, cut wood; when it rains we just stay inside; when the rain stops we move camp again. In the summer time we stay in camp, we stay close to the river, we tan the hides, make dry meat, we do all our work in the summer and fall. Can't do no work in the wintertime. We always tell stories, stories about what to do, and stories about long time ago; we keep it up so we don't lose the stories. Just tell stories all the time,

when we're working, when we just sitting around, before bed so we dream about it. We tell stories about how other people got themselves in trouble and how they got out of it or when they didn't. We tell more stories when we're out in camp than in town. I still tell stories now; I tried to tell some people, but they don't want to listen to long time ago stories, they want to live only in today. But the stories are true. Our stories tell us what's going to happen outside. We knew that there was going to be lots of snow this year because of our stories about how the moose were acting in the fall time and how the moon was tilted. Our stories are about our land and help us know what to do and how to live good.

What does the word "aboriginal" mean to you?

I don't know. The band started talking about that around the same time they starting talking about "go-shee-ay-shon" [negotiation].

Do you think you're an Aboriginal?

No. I don't know what that is.

REARTICULATING INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES

Knowledge about the way to be Indigenous is present and clear in our communities. What we lack is a conceptual and terminological framework for rearticulating Indigenous identities. The objective of regaining our physical, social and political spaces can only be achieved if we recommit to culturally-rooted alternative concepts and words for ourselves that counter liberal-legalistic frames designed to advance our deculturation and assimilation. There is great frustration at the situation facing our people, in the wake of generations of language loss and disconnection from homeland and cultural teachings, as Janet Marie Rogers, the Mohawk poet, expressed this sense in her interview:

I have always been of the understanding that he who wins the land gets to name the things in that land - so through deceitful acquisition or other aggressive means, we are being defined by the colonizer. Our original names have been bastardized to suit their tongues and of course our languages are all but lost. When we attempt to define things foreign to ourselves, using our language, something gets lost on the translation of it. How can you capture the essence of something if you don't have the vocabulary to define it?

The sense of loss, combined with the recognition of the need to take regenerating action on a personal and collective level is articulated here by Brock Pitawanakwat:

The Indian Act band council system freezes in time the band to which we belong, whereas traditionally Anishinaabeg were free to come and go as they wished and could switch communities or strike out on their own. Today, I wish I could belong to a Winnipeg Anishinaabe First Nation that would provide a sense of community and shared programs and services where I live and work, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. If I moved to Ottawa - still in Anishinaabe territory - I would like to join a similar Ottawa Anishinaabe First Nation, and so on... Since I cannot wait for a Winnipeg Anishinaabe First Nation to be funded by government, I am doing what I can to create one.

In response to these realizations and the expressed views and sentiments documented in this paper, Indigenous people should be radically challenging the inaccurate,

colonial and offensive terms in use today. One way to promote these responses is to reorient our thinking away from the both colonial and rights-based discourses and reframe Indigeneity in a way that negates the destructive and assimilative effects of both of these approaches.

The notion of “peoplehood,” proposed by the Cherokee scholars Tom Holm and Jeff Corntassel, describes Indigeneity in terms of relationships revolving around the main elements of ancestry, living history, ceremonial cycles, language, and homeland. (Corntassel, 2003; Holm and Corntassel, forthcoming). This model and framework for conceptualizing Indigenous identities allows for, even requires, the localized and rooted variations on identity which were common features of Indigenous peoples cultures in the pre-contact context. As well, reflecting the scholarly critiques, international norms and conventions, and the perspectives of Indigenous people such as those presented in this paper, our people should be developing terminological standards that use specific Indigenous language names as our primary reference terms, and the word “Indigenous” as the English-language general reference to take the place of “citizenship,” “membership,” “Indian status,” “Aboriginal” and “First Nation”. This shift would signal at least a terminological decolonization process, and move Indigenous and colonial governments toward historically accurate, politically just, and culturally authentic terms. Specific Indigenous self-references will have to be taken from and understood within the various Indigenous cultures from which they emerge and refer to. As far as the English language term, a working definition of Indigeneity, drawing on Holm and Corntassel’s peoplehood concept, is offered below, founded on the common interlocking and interrelated concepts that exist among peoples who:

1. are ancestrally related and identify themselves, based on oral and written histories, as the original inhabitants of their ancestral homelands;
2. have their own social, political and economic institutions and reflect their distinct ceremonial cycles, kinship networks, and evolving cultural traditions;

3. speak unique or distinct languages through which Indigenous cultural expressions persist as a form of identity; and,
4. distinguish themselves from settlers and other people through their unique and spiritual relationship with their ancestral homeland and sacred sites.

There is a growing sense of impatience for movement on these issues among the younger generation of leaders in Indigenous nations, and an emerging recognition of the imperative of taking communities, and a real drive to take multi-front action to rearticulate our identities using Indigenous languages and Indigenous conceptual frames. The perspective of Jodie-Lynn Waddilove-Corbiere illustrates this developing consensus among younger First Nations leaders, and highlights the importance of returning to a rooted and self-possessed articulation of our identities:

If our young people are to understand who they are, we have to learn, use and promote our own expressions to define and represent who we are. This is not a radical concept. In today's society, individuals, communities, and nations, etc., have the right to define themselves according to their own expression of who they are. So why would we use European concepts to limit, disfigure, and distort our ancestors' teachings of who we are? The answer is simple: we shouldn't.

The central lesson brought forward in the perspectives of all of the people who participated in the research for this paper is that if we are to survive as distinct and autonomous nations, we must move away from the reactive postures that are guiding our nations' thinking and behaviour on the crucial questions of membership and identity. It is abundantly clear that Indigenous people are calling for an effective opposition to the state's continuing efforts to define our peoples out of our birthrights and out of a future existence, and that our strategies should include reorienting the discourse and recasting the terminology on Indigenous identity to reflect Indigenous language and nation-specific terms as well as an explicitly decolonizing broader term.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alfred, T. (2009). *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press.

_____. (2005). *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. University of Toronto Press.

Assembly of First Nations - Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2008). *Indigenous Registration (Status) and Membership Research Report*.

Borrows, J. (1994). "Contemporary Traditional Equality: The Effect of the Charter on First Nations Politics". *New Brunswick Law Journal*, 43, 19.

Chabot, L. (2007). *The Concept of Citizenship in Western Liberal Democracies and in Indigenous: A Research Paper*. AFN Draft.

Corntassel, J. (2003). "Who is Indigenous? 'Peoplehood' and ethnonationalist approaches to rearticulating Indigenous Identity." *PostColonial Studies*, 9 (1), 75-100.

Corntassel, J. and T. Holm. (forthcoming) *The Power of Peoplehood*. University of Texas Press.

Garrouette, E. M. (2003). *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*. University of California Press.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (1990). *The Impact of the 1985 Amendments to the Indian Act (Bill C-31): 2) Survey of Registrants*.

_____. (2002) *An Evolving Terminology Relating to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*.

_____. (2005) *A Select and Annotated Bibliography Regarding Bill C-31, Indian Registration and Band Membership, Aboriginal Identity, Women and Gender Issues*.

Lawrence, B. (2004). *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*. UBC Press.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996) *Report*.

Yellowbird, M. (1999). "What We Want to Be Called: Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives on Racial and Ethnic Identity Labels." *American Indian Quarterly*, 23 (2), 1.