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CHAPTER 13

Wena ka tapaymish ekwa kakway ka dipayhtamun? (Who Claims You and What Do You Claim?)

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INTRODUCTION

Settler Canadians claiming to be Indigenous peoples is not a new phenomenon. There are many well-known stories ranging from British-born conservationist Archibald Belaney (aka Grey Owl) claiming to be Apache in the early 1900s (Chapin, 2000), to writer Joseph Boyden's shifting claims of various Indigenous identities through the early 2000s (Moreton-Robinson, 2021). But what is perhaps new is the alarming increase over the past decade or more in the number of Canadians claiming Métis identity, in particular (Gaudry, 2018). From 1996 to 2006, for example, there was a "dubious increase" of over 100% in the Métis population (Andersen, 2014, p. 60). Lewis (2017) explained this phenomenon in the following excerpt:

As discussed by Andersen (2014) and Vowel (2016) the legislative and legal legacy of colonisation has and continues through the courts to define Métis along racialized lines rather than through Indigenous nationhood. The Canadian government's historical practices and policies of racialization in defining Métis as mixed race of European and Indigenous bloodlines essentially suggest that "anyone with even the most tenuous claim to a First Nations ancestor" (Vowel, 2016, p. 43) can often claim Métis, and that "the concept of hybridity can be used to find Métis wherever we look (Andersen, 2014, p. 58). (Lewis, 2017, p. 119)

Along with these individual claims has also come the creation of an increasing number of community organizations with the sole purpose of pursuing political and legal recognition of Indigenous status based on tenuous and/or false claims of ancestry (Leroux, 2019). Given this phenomenon, there is a growing need to help Canadians understand what it means to be Métis by drawing on a discussion of the cultural and historical kinships of community and family as well as constitutional and legal cases related to Métis identity (Kermaal & Andersen, 2021). Developing this understanding is not without challenges. It is indeed the responsibility of settler Canadians to better understand the implications of these settler moves to Indigenize, especially as these moves are made at the expense of the Métis peoples; however, the meaning of Métis identity is undoubtedly a complex issue (Adese et al., 2017, p. 2).

We are a group of four teacher educators. Patrick and Andrea are both settler academics working in teacher education at the University of Regina. Melanie and Russ are both Métis with strong ties to Métis community, Melanie in the north and Russ in the south, as well as a Métis teacher educator program in Saskatchewan called the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) where Russ currently works as a faculty member. Melanie is also the Gabriel Dumont Research Chair in Métis/Michif Education with the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. In 2019, we initiated planning of a panel discussion on Métis identity which, in light of the pandemic, ultimately led to an online panel in 2022. In this chapter, we weave our story of organizing this public panel on the topic of Métis identity into existing literature on the topic of Indigenous identity fraud with the greater goal of contributing to Canadian understandings of Métis identity. This is important because when Canadians don't understand that the Métis are a distinct Indigenous group with their own vibrant and dynamic culture and languages, Métis sovereignty is threatened.

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY FRAUD IN THE ACADEMY

Indigenous identity fraud is not limited to the university context, but because we are working within Canadian post-secondary institutions, we feel a particular responsibility to address this issue within the academy. There are two intertwined reasons as to why this issue has become more significant in recent years: (1) increased demand for Indigenous faculty and staff in Canadian universities, and (2) an overreliance on *self-identification* without any verification of Indigenous identity claims. Following the 2015 release of the final report of the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), many Canadian universities have looked for ways to ethically interact with Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledges (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Pitawanakwat & Pedri-Spade, 2022). These institutions of higher education have engaged in Indigenization or “a transformative process that depends on the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and their respective knowledges and the creation of various spaces where Indigenous peoples may enact their ways of knowing, axiologies, and ethics” (Pitawanakwat & Pedri-Spade, 2022, p. 15). This process has created a high demand for Indigenous hiring and also resulted in some unintended consequences, partly due to the underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples as faculty members and also in graduate programs. Currently, roughly 5% of the Canadian population identifies as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, and yet the number of full-time faculty members in Canadian universities is only 1.3% (Cyca, 2022). The pool of Indigenous scholars is not sufficient for the increasingly high demand in Indigenous hiring.

This high demand combined with an overreliance on self-identification has had the effect of opening the door to Indigenous identity fraud. Louie (2019) suggested that in the last decade, there has been a 40% increase in the number of self-identified professors at Canadian universities. This acceptance of self-identification results in an “academic workforce that has little to no Indigenous community support but instead fits a perceived need in the institution that is conducting the hire” (Pitawanakwat & Pedri-Spade, 2022, p. 22.) Over the past several years, there have been some well-publicized instances of what has come to be known as Indigenous identity fraud. In 2021, at Queen’s University, a report circulated publicly that questioned some faculty and staff claims of Indigenous identity. Initially, Queen’s publicly denounced the report, which resulted in a public letter signed by over one hundred Indigenous scholars calling for a retraction, among other things (Pitawanakwat & Pedri-Spade, 2022). These events ultimately led to an external review and report (First Peoples Group, 2022). Another recent instance occurred in 2021 when health researcher Carrie Bourassa resigned from the University of Saskatchewan “when it was revealed that she had provided inaccurate information claiming to be of Anishinaabe, Tlingit, and Metis ancestry to her university and federal employers” (Pitawanakwat & Pedri-Spade, 2022, p. 24). Similar to Queen’s, the University of Saskatchewan also implemented an external review process and also created a task force to “create a policy, procedures, and an implementation plan for Indigenous membership verification with documentation at the University of Saskatchewan” (University of Saskatchewan, 2022). And yet, in the rush to prevent further harm, policy continues to be written, read,

or interpreted in tidy ways that do not account for the complexity of Indigenous identity and belonging. Such was the case with Cree-Métis scholar Réal Carrière, who was denied a position due to his refusal to produce a government-issued document confirming his First Nations status, which he deemed *colonial* (Warick, 2022). In this example, institutional policy was upheld while the voices of well-regarded Indigenous academics and community members who affirmed Carrière's belonging were silenced. Finally, at the time of writing, another high-profile case has emerged regarding Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, a prominent lawyer, inaugural director of the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre at the University of British Columbia, and professor with the Peter A. Allard School of Law. This story continues to unfold.

The Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) has recognized the complicated nature of Indigenous identity because of centuries of colonization; however, they have also noted that identity is not so complicated that it “does not mean that there are no ethical considerations in claiming Indigenous identity or relationships with particular Indigenous peoples. To falsely claim such belonging is Indigenous identity fraud” (2015, para. 1). The NAISA statement urged veracity and integrity with claiming to be Indigenous. “Belonging does not arise simply from individual feelings—it is not simply who you claim to be, but also who claims you” (para. 2). NAISA clearly pointed out the damage incurred when settlers falsely identify as Indigenous, whereby “falsifying one’s identity or relationship to particular Indigenous peoples is an act of appropriation continuous with other forms of colonial violence” (para. 3). Or as other authors have noted with work in this area, such claims tend to be the ultimate act of Indigenous erasure as descendants of settlers begin to claim to be the real Indigenous people of Canada (Lewis, 2017; Leroux 2019). As Vowel (2016) observed, “once we are all Metis (and Indigenous), none of us are” (p. 47).

The implications of Indigenous identity fraud in the academy are broad and indeed extend beyond the university’s walls and into Indigenous communities. As many institutions seek to fulfill obligations associated with reconciliation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (2015) 94 Calls to Action, there is a race to hire, fund, and showcase Indigenous researchers and their work. Until recently, universities and funding agencies required little in terms of proof of belonging to an Indigenous community. Many rely solely on self-identification as opposed to verifying kinship, genealogy, community membership codes, and ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities (Andersen, 2021). This means that inevitably people who do not come from Indigenous communities are producing research and policy that is not grounded in Indigenous epistemologies or

ontologies, but instead relies heavily on the harvesting of knowledge from Elders, cultural carriers, and community-based activists and researchers. It also means that actual Indigenous researchers and students are forced to compete for jobs, resources, grants, scholarships, and community partnerships with those who have dubious claims to Indigeneity. This negates the goal of improving the traditional lack of access to the academy experienced by Indigenous peoples, while rewarding those who cannot demonstrate a shared connection to intergenerational systemic exclusion or erasure.

Belonging and identity are complex. The diversity of membership codes and practices requires that policies concerning them are crafted thoughtfully and with broad and extensive community consultation. This may or may not involve multiple kitchen table visits and/or engagement with ceremony. A membership card may affirm membership in a community but does not necessarily affirm epistemological expertise. In contrast, an Indigenous person may have been raised in a traditional way but due to a myriad of reasons may not have (or want) a membership or status card. Policy must allow room for nuance as well as time for meaningful kitchen table visits for the committee members or decision makers tasked with affirming identity. Such committees can and should have involvement from well-known Indigenous Aunties and Uncles, academics, and community leaders.

Cyca (2022) suggested that for positions which require Indigenous expertise, Indigeneity should be treated in a manner similar to other required credentials. She noted, “but credentials demand a degree of accountability, particularly when you’re talking about restricted opportunities meant for a designated group” (para. 62). In this context, it would be appropriate for hiring committees and/or those who allocate and distribute grants and funds to Indigenous scholars and students, to be as rigorous in their checks of claims to Indigeneity as they are with their checks on academic records of achievement. Although it may be an added burden, any Indigenous scholar or student with a genuine connection to their nation or community will be able to support their claim with evidence of genealogical, familial, and relational connections. Such claims are also easily verified and affirmed by Indigenous relations both inside and outside of the academy and it is important that these voices are respected and listened to even when they contradict or are misaligned with official institutional policy.

In Michif communities, it is an accepted practice to be asked “wena ki maw-maw?” or “Who is your mom?” We are situated by fellow Michifs through geography and history, but most importantly through relations, and most of us are very accustomed to explaining where we come from and to whom we belong. Our connections to the fur trade and to the Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian

faiths means that we also often have extensive genealogical records, and are accustomed to producing these records when non-Michif people ask, “So, how are you Indigenous?” This process has intensified in recent years due to the massive increase in fraudulent claims of Métis identity. Whereas the question “wena ki mawmaw?” was traditionally used in benign ways to establish connection or kinship, it is now often used to identify those who may not be Michif. It has morphed from a question used to explore a kinscape into one with a more suspicious nature. This shift in tone is a direct result of fraudulent claims to Métis/Michif identity.

ORGANIZING A PANEL

With these concerns in mind, in late 2019 we began to have preliminary meetings to discuss organizing a panel. Originally, Dr. Darryl Leroux had been invited to the University of Regina in fall 2019 to discuss his book *Distorted Descent* (2019). His book examines the phenomenon of white, French-Canadian settlers shifting into a self-defined “Indigenous” identity. His research highlights the scope of Indigenous self-identification when there are not any cultural or historical connections to Indigenous community or kinship. We were excited about the opportunity to hear from Darryl Leroux and were dismayed when his talk was cancelled. We decided to invite Darryl and others to participate in a panel discussion. The aim was to bring together scholars, educators, and activists to discuss Métis identity, in particular, because we were interested to hear a discussion of Darryl’s research in relation to Métis identity and the potential impacts to Métis sovereignty. As mentioned above, there is a growing need to help Canadians understand what it means to be Métis through the cultural and historical kinships of community and family as well as the constitutional and legal cases. This is particularly important given the growing number of people claiming to be Métis who have no historical continuity of connection to community nor kin; what Joanne Barker (2021) referred to as “kinless Indians,” where individuals and/or groups engage in Indigenous re-invention. Such activity has the potential to threaten and undermine the sovereignty and self-determination of Métis/Michif nationhood.

Besides Darryl, there were three invited panelists who took part in the discussion in March 2022. Rita Bouvier is a Michif from northern Saskatchewan and an educator, researcher, and author. Next, Russell Fayant is a Michif from southern Saskatchewan. He is also an educator and a language activist with SUNTEP at the Gabriel Dumont Institute. Dr. Brenda Macdougall is a Métis historian and genealogical researcher at the University of Ottawa. The panel was chaired by Dr. Melanie Griffith Brice, the Gabriel Dumont Research Chair in Métis/Michif

Education at the University of Regina. The journey to developing the panel was not without its twists, turns, and concerns.

As panel organizers, we received emails and questions about a range of issues including Zoom links and time zones but also about the panelists. One of the concerns raised by a self-identifying member of the Métis/Michif community, via social media, was specifically in regard to the involvement of Darryl Leroux, who identifies as settler Canadian. The respondent inquired as to why the panel was inviting a non-Indigenous academic to speak about Michif identity. We met to discuss the query and drafted a response which explained that Darryl Leroux was not being asked to speak about Michif identity, but rather to share his expertise and research on fraudulent claims to Métis identity. Among other things, his research has examined groups that exist outside the Homeland of the Historic Western Métis Nation, including but not limited to the Nation Métisse Autochtone de la Gaspésie, Bas-Saint-Laurent et Îles-de-la Madeleine (NMAG), and the Unama'ki Voyageur Métis Nation (UVMN) (Gaudry & Leroux, 2017).

MÉTIS IDENTITY AND PLACE

While there are many Métis scholars and activists who could have participated in this panel, we decided that we wanted the panelists to have a connection to Saskatchewan. With this in mind, we also considered having representation from various landscapes or individuals who were from different locations in the province. Margaret Kovach (2009), a Cree-Saulteaux scholar, explained that there is diversity in our knowledge systems because they are tied to place. This also means that “Indigenous knowledges can never be standardized, for they are in relation to place and person” (Kovach, 2009, p. 56). There are many different Métis communities across the Northwest that are shaped by the landscape and histories. While there may be similarities that allow us to identify an overall Métis culture that is shared across the Northwest, the various communities are influenced by their proximity to other Indigenous groups and settler communities. For example, the Métis lived experience of Île-à-la-Crosse is different from the Métis lived experience of those around Saskatoon, and likewise those of Lebret in the south. Knowing this, we wanted to ensure our panel was representative of several places. Therefore, we chose three Métis people from three different areas of Saskatchewan.

Because of the connections between Métis identity and place, it's important to share about the areas where the Métis panelists are from. Rita Bouvier is from Île-à-la-Crosse (Sakitawak), which is the second-oldest community in what is now the province of Saskatchewan. The village of Île-à-la-Crosse was established

in 1778. The name Sakitawak is a Cree (nēhiyawēwin) word that means “where the rivers meet.” Its location, where the Beaver River, Canoe River, and Churchill River systems meet, served as the site of many fur trading posts (Sakitawak Conservation Project, 2022). It is a historical Métis community. Not only did Rita Bouvier bring a voice from a northern Métis community, but she has also accumulated a wealth of knowledge as an educator. She has served as the director of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, a senior administrator with the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, and program head of the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) with the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatoon. She is also involved as a volunteer in many community organizations, as well as a published poet. We knew that Rita held valuable knowledge about the Métis culture, languages, and identity. Rita has used Michif, Cree, and English in her poetry, thus reflecting her distinct culture of traditions and languages. She is a fluent Cree/Michif speaker and brought a wealth of cultural knowledge to the panel.

Brenda Macdougall grew up in Saskatoon and is currently the research chair in Métis Family and Traditions at the University of Ottawa. Saskatoon was founded as a temperance colony in 1882, but Métis occupied this area prior to 1882 (City of Saskatoon, n.d.). The fertile prairie grasses were excellent grazing for the bison that roamed the area. The bison were central to the pemmican trade, which was an essential aspect of Métis culture. The South Saskatchewan River that runs through Saskatoon was a key artery in trade and transportation that tied together the many Métis communities along the river. Red River cart trails also went through the area. Brenda is an expert in the field of Métis community and genealogy. Her research chair position was created to “help increase our understanding of Métis history in general and specifically as it relates to identity, community formation and coherence” (University of Ottawa, n.d.). Her book *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Macdougall, 2010) traces the genealogy of significant Métis families in the northwest of Saskatchewan and the creation of a distinct Métis community.

Russell Fayant is Michif from the Qu’Appelle Valley. Many First Nations and Métis have made the valley home for centuries due to the abundance of fish and game, as well as the protection of the coulees from winds (Troupe, 2019). The Qu’Appelle Valley has a rich history that includes Métis road allowances and historical ties to the pemmican trade through buffalo hunts and Red River cart trails. Fort Qu’Appelle was founded in 1864 as a Hudson’s Bay Company post, and the nearby village of Lebret was founded in 1865 and is considered an historical Métis community. There has been a presence of Michifs in the

Qu'Appelle Valley since as early as the 1820s (Troupe, 2019). Russell Fayant is a Métis educator who is on faculty at the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) in Ohpushtaw li zoo (Regina). His family lived on the Katepwa road allowance in the Qu'Appelle Valley, and he is a descendent of the Michif buffalo hunting brigades of the Great Plains. Through oral tradition and family narratives, he has been taught about road allowances and the cultural history of the Métis in the valley and the Turtle Mountain Michif community. Russell brings his lived experience as a Michif to his work as a faculty member in supporting Indigenous students to learn about the distinct and rich culture of the Lii Michif, as well as to presentations at many symposiums and workshops. Russell understands the importance of Michif as a unique mixed language spoken by a distinct people and is in the process of reclaiming and learning Turtle Mountain Michif, also known as Heritage Michif (Fayant & Sterzuk, 2018; Sterzuk & Fayant, 2016).

PLANNING CONVERSATIONS AROUND MÉTIS IDENTITY

Each panel member was provided questions in advance based on their areas of expertise. Darryl Leroux's questions were:

1. What practices/strategies do people use to claim a Métis identity? Is there a difference between the types of identity claims people make in Eastern Canada and in Western Canada?
2. Why do you think there is an increase in the number of people claiming a Métis identity?

We had different reasons for the choices of questions. In drafting Darryl's questions, we wanted to hear about his research around race shifting and open it up to discussing the reasons why some people would start claiming a Métis identity. Leroux (2019) pointed out that "through their self-recognition, race-shifters claim a legitimacy to speak for and act as Indigenous people" (p. 28). He drew on the work of sociologist Eva Marie Garrouette (2003) and her critique of this practice of self-identification "for its emphasis on an individualism that undermines Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination" (Leroux, 2019, p. 28). As Darryl Leroux's research is centred in Eastern Canada and Atlantic provinces, we also wanted to discuss connections between identity claims in Eastern Canada and those in Western Canada.

The questions for the Métis panelists differed from those designed for Darryl. Brenda Macdougall's questions were:

1. How is Métis history tied to Métis identity? How is the Métis homeland, or historical Métis communities, part of Métis identity (claims)?
2. Métis people have been greatly impacted by diaspora; is there a way to determine which communities are legitimate? And to ensure people are making claims to legitimate Métis communities?

Brenda Macdougall's research focuses on historical Métis communities and the emergence of a Métis cultural consciousness. With her questions, we wanted to learn about her work in relation to the importance of kinship through ongoing and sustained relationships and also the continuity of lifestyle over time through transmission of culture and language. Identity is sustained through a sense of belonging either to a place, group, or community and is namely "encompassed in one's connection to home, which in turn, is definable by land and family" (Macdougall, 2011, p. 1).

Next, we turned to Rita Bouvier's questions, which focused on language and culture:

1. The majority of your writing, especially your poetry, shares your identity as a Métis person through language. Do you think a Métis identity can be claimed without culture or language?
2. As a person born and raised in a Métis community that is the second oldest in Saskatchewan, what does it mean to claim a Métis identity from a historical Métis community? And how do you think urbanization impacts this identity?

As was previously noted, Rita Bouvier's poetry incorporates Cree, Michif, and English words. Language is a pivotal means to the transmission of cultural knowledge. It is filled with cultural understandings that are shaped by landscape and lived experience. Her questions were designed to bring forward the importance of cultural continuity and language in identity. She pointed out that Métis identity does/did not arise from a vacuum and has come through struggle where "positive self-definition and identification are but beginning points" (Adams, 1999, p. 149). She furthered that some would argue that we are born Métis, we don't become Métis.

Finally, we consider Russell Fayant's questions. Russell's questions focused on kinship and connection to community:

1. What does it mean to be claimed by a Métis community? What does it take to be claimed by a legitimate Métis community?
2. Does the assertion of Métis identity require recent genealogical/ancestral connections and/or visible expressions of culture?

Russell is a Métis educator. He is a SUNTEP alumnus and has been SUNTEP faculty in Regina for 16 years. The students who register for his courses at SUNTEP Regina benefit from his extensive knowledge of Métis history and Métis culture. The Qu'Appelle Valley has a long history of Métis presence, and with Russell's strong kinship ties to the valley he has a strong understanding of and appreciation for the importance of an ongoing community connection and relationship as part of Métis identity and belonging. Adam Gaudry (2018) has attested to the importance of "practicing proper social conduct in everyday relationships with fellow community members" (p. 168). With this in mind, we drafted questions for Russell that would bring to the discussion the importance of reciprocal identity claims in not just self-identifying but also considering the necessity of being claimed by a community with a strong and continued cultural connection.

SIGNIFICANCE—WHAT DID THIS PANEL MEAN FOR US?

Although the panelists occupy varying contexts and positions, they fundamentally agreed on major aspects of Michif identity. Firstly, they recognize the common economic and social experiences that are the shared heritage of the Historic Western Métis Nation. Common themes to Métis/Michif identity and belonging included the fur trade, the fight for free trade, the buffalo hunt, the assertion of rights and distinctness through resistance, and our kinship and relational ties to the Cree and Saulteaux peoples. The panelists all placed an emphasis on ongoing relationships and a connection to community which is inclusive of both urban contexts and traditional Michif communities. There was a common understanding that we are not made Michif through a declaration, or through the adornment of recognizable symbols such as a sash or a flag. Self-declaration is a right of all Indigenous peoples, but who or what we claim to be is made tangible and legitimate by those who claim us. Just like a Red River cart is made useless by the lack of a horse or ox to pull it, claims to identity are just claims until they are affirmed by our connection to land, place, culture, community, and ancestors.

This Métis identity panel was important to us for a couple reasons. First, Russell and Melanie are citizens of the Métis Nation and believe that Métis sovereignty and self-determination means determining who is part of our Nation. The claims that are coming out of Eastern Canada and the Atlantic provinces challenge this sovereignty, and jeopardize and exploit the distinct Métis culture that emerged in the Northwest. The social, political, and economic structures that were developed by Métis from Red River and westward along Red River cart trails, as well as near trading posts, highlight our uniqueness as an Indigenous people

and our historic and ongoing relations with other Indigenous groups. Second, as educators and academics working in post-secondary institutions, we have seen the increase in people claiming an Indigenous identity to secure employment and research grants. We wanted to bring together Métis voices and experts and centre the discussion on Western Canada, or more specifically, Saskatchewan. Even though Brenda Macdougall and Darryl Leroux do not reside in Saskatchewan, they both brought valuable insights from their research around Métis identity and race shifting, respectively.

Engaging in conversations concerning Indigenous identity and belonging is something Indigenous scholars are increasingly being asked to do. Many of us choose to engage in this work to prevent further harm to our communities and to protect access to resources and opportunities which rightfully belong to Indigenous peoples. However, it should also be remembered that the act of engaging in such public conversations often puts Indigenous scholars (and non-Indigenous scholars researching Indigenous identity fraud) at significant risk for harm. Conversations which used to be had around kitchen tables and fires in safe and affirming environments now occur in contexts which provide non-Indigenous people and those with fraudulent claims opportunities for criticism. Such criticism is usually centred around notions of “unfair exclusion” or discrimination of other “mixed groups” who often assert legitimacy by appropriating Métis symbols, language, and history (Leroux, 2019). Jean Teillet (2019), Métis writer and lawyer, remarked that “this is a new form of colonialism whereby settlers appropriate Métis identity” (p. 481) based solely on genealogy and “cast their newly acquired identity as a journey of personal self-discovery” (p. 482). When Métis identity is seen as a personal choice, it becomes a commodity (Gaudry, 2019) and erodes the historical, cultural, social, and political structures we have struggled and fought for as a distinct Indigenous Nation for over two hundred years.

Unfortunately, the Powley case opened the door for multiple definitions of Métis (Andersen, 2014), and has seen many using self-identification as the sole component for claiming a Métis identity. Even before the Powley decision there were some who contended that there were small *m* métis and capital *M* Métis. Small *m* métis referred to those who had any Indigenous ancestry and capital *M* Métis referred to those who had cultural, political, and historical ties to specific Métis communities. The concept of Métis as mixed is problematic. It erodes our distinct culture and challenges our existence as a separate Indigenous Nation. If anyone with any mixed Indigenous ancestry is allowed to say they are Métis, where does this leave us as a Nation, as a peoplehood (Anderson, 2014)? As a distinct people, we have a rich and specific history that is tied to particular

communities. As a people and culture, we trace our history from the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816 where we solidified ourselves as a political entity. We can follow the cart trails across the Northwest to locate kinship ties; we celebrate our successes and defeats at Red River and Batoche, respectively. It is this proud history that is foundational to who the Métis are today, and to our continued fight as a Nation.

In looking back at the panel discussion, as organizers, we view it as a success. We met our objective of bringing together scholars and educators to discuss this timely topic. We also believe that this panel played a role in moving the conversation about Métis identity toward a discussion about Métis sovereignty. As scholars and educators, we need to consider how anyone who says they are committed to decolonization and Indigenization of our institutions cannot, in turn, then challenge those who attempt to reduce Métis identity to “origin stories rooted in biology or by continuing to recognize Métis claims based on ‘mixedness’” (Andersen, 2014, p. 210). We hope that this panel, and subsequent chapter, provokes others to work toward better Indigenous relations in recognizing and honouring Métis sovereignty.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Should the term *Métis* only be used by those who have a connection to the Historic Métis Nation?
2. If anyone with mixed ancestry can say they are Métis, what does this mean for the distinct Métis culture and those communities?
3. Why is there an increase in people self-identifying as Métis or groups calling themselves Métis?
4. What are the personal and professional implications for both Métis and non-Métis persons who identify those with fraudulent claims to Métis identity?
5. Beyond government-issued ID, what are other, verifiable ways Métis identity can be affirmed?

KEY TERMS

Michif: Both a language of the Métis and a vernacular term used by some Métis communities to identify members of their community. As a mixed language of Cree verbs and French nouns, with influences from Saulteaux and English, it is one of the languages that is spoken by the Métis. There are also some dialects that are either more predominantly Cree or French.

Powley decision: A Supreme Court decision (2003) that affirmed Métis people’s Aboriginal rights under section 35(1) to hunt for food. The decision was specific to the Métis of Sault Ste. Marie but has implications for all Métis people across Canada. The decision did not define Métis people, nor did it endorse a specific definition of *Métis*; however, it did tie harvesting rights to historic Métis communities, which in effect limits such rights to those communities within the historic Métis homeland.

Race shifting/self-Indigenization/Indigenous identity fraud: The practice of white settlers claiming to be Indigenous based upon family stories or a single root ancestor from two hundred to four hundred years ago. This practice sees people make claims to a Métis identity not only through lineal descent from a single root ancestor, but also through “aspirational descent” and “lateral descent.” Aspirational descent is simply based upon family stories and/or the individual’s feeling or desire that they are Indigenous. Lateral descent has the person claim to be Indigenous through a lateral ancestor rather than a direct ancestor.

Self-identification: Historically in Canada, institutions such as universities have relied on a process commonly referred to as “self-identification” where an individual simply states that they are Indigenous.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was tasked with investigating and informing all Canadians about what happened in residential schools and their impact. This investigation resulted in 94 Calls to Action (2015).

FURTHER READINGS AND RESOURCES

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