The Métis Nation, Epistemic Injustice, and Self-Indigenization[1]

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Introduction

There have been several discussions in recent years about the growing phenomenon of settler Canadians falsely identifying themselves as Indigenous (Andersen, 2014; Couturier, 2020; Donovan, 2018; Gaudry & Andersen, 2016; Gaudry & Leroux, 2017; Leroux, 2019; Pedri-Spade, 2022; Sturm, 2011). This phenomenon is often labeled "settler self-indigenization" or a form of "race-shifting" akin to the Rachel Dolezal case, in which a white woman claimed to be of African American descent. While self-indigenizers may come to associate their newly acquired Indigenous identity with any of the Indigenous peoples of North America, in the Canadian context specifically, when settlers shift to an Indigenous identity, they often claim to be some kind of "new Métis" (Leroux, 2019).

The goal of this paper is to propose a characterization of the concept of settler self-indigenization and to consider some of the injustices that are generated by settlers identifying as Métis in the process of self-indigenization. Our aim here is to focus on injustices that come into view through employing an epistemic injustice lens. In the context of this paper, such a lens focuses on how deficient conceptual resources in the Canadian public's social understanding of the Métis are exploited by self-indigenizers as part of the rationalization of the process of self-indigenization. Achieving these goals, we believe, contributes to a growing understanding of self-indigenization as a contemporary dimension of settler colonialism.

To begin, we provide a general background on the Métis nation, after which we offer a brief discussion of the concept of epistemic injustice. Next, we develop a conceptual analysis of the notion of self-indigenization. In the sections that follow, we outline the origination of various misconceptions and deficiencies in the Canadian public's understanding of who the Métis are and explain how these misconceptions amount to a form of epistemic injustice that renders self-indigenization more likely to occur and how they function to undermine Métis self-government. Finally, we close by highlighting practical steps taken by the Métis nation to reclaim and assert their identity through citizenship registries.

By interrogating the epistemic environment that helps facilitate certain cases of self-indigenization, we hope to arrive at a clearer picture of some of the social mechanisms that underlie this contemporary dimension of settler colonialism and the injustices it generates. By discussing the steps that Métis governments are taking to enforce Métis nationhood and to protect against external appropriations, we illustrate an approach to addressing the problems generated by a social mechanism that underlies self-indigenization.

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[1] This article is an extension of the chapter titled "The Métis Nation, Epistemic Injustice, and Self-Indigenization," originally published in Metis Coming Together with Peter Lang. In addition to the original content, this article includes a new section addressing the role of citizenship registries as a solution to the challenges posed by self-indigenization, emphasizing their importance in preserving and asserting Métis authenticity.
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Background and Core Concepts

Who are the Métis?

We draw on our understanding of the Métis as a people, an understanding that is in line with one articulated by Chelsea Vowel (2016a, 2016b) and Chris Andersen (2014). A helpful statement that encapsulates the understanding we have in mind is that "the Métis are a post-contact Indigenous People with roots in the historic Red River community" (Vowel, 2016b). This people possess internationally acknowledged markers of nationhood, including unique languages, foods, artistic styles, a territorial homeland, distinctive kinship structures, legal and governance traditions, and most crucially, political self-awareness as a distinctive people. The Métis have played and continue to play an important role in the history of the Northwestern Plains of North America. It is this distinctive people that we refer to when using the term "Métis."

What is Epistemic Injustice?

We intend to bring into contact discussions of epistemic injustice as it is found in the political theory and social epistemology literature with discussions of settler self-indigenization. Thus, as part of setting the stage, we provide a brief overview of relevant aspects of the concept of epistemic injustice.

To begin, it is worth reflecting on how it is possible for someone to be harmed with respect to different capacities. For example, they can be harmed in their capacity to earn a living, in their health or physical wellbeing, in their capacity to pursue their vision of what is good in life, or—and of significance to our discussion here—in their capacities as a knower and interpreter of their own social experiences. Epistemic injustice pertains to this latter capacity in which someone can be harmed; it includes various kinds of unwarranted harms that occur to individuals and groups in their capacity as knowers.

Miranda Fricker (2007) identifies two kinds of epistemic injustice that are in focus here; testimonial epistemic injustice occurs when "prejudice causes someone to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (p. 1). In these cases, prejudicial stereotypes result in the assignment of a lower level of credibility to some testifier than is warranted. An example of this kind of injustice is cases where store employees—because of false stereotypes about a customer's race, gender, ethnicity, or class—fail to give adequate and fair consideration to the customer's statements about what they are doing and simply presume that they are shoplifting. The other form of epistemic injustice that we consider here is hermeneutical injustice, which might also be called interpretive injustice. This results from widespread misunderstanding—in what is known as the conceptual or epistemic environment—among a dominant social group. These misunderstandings undercut a marginalized social group's capacity to interpret its own social reality and project this understanding onto the dominant group. More specifically, this kind of epistemic injustice occurs when there is a flawed epistemic or conceptual environment among a dominant group within a society. This environment operates to undercut the marginalized collective's capacity to enforce its own understanding of its social experiences.

What is Self-Indigenization?

Further laying the foundations of our argument, we propose a characterization of settler self-indigenization, a phenomenon that has been characterized as a sudden decision to "identify as Indigenous without official recognition" (Couturier, 2020).https://universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/researchers-examine-the-growing-phenomenon-of-self-indigenization/[3] However, such characterizations are general, and there is room for a more precise formulation; thus, we propose a definition of self-indigenization for further consideration and discussion and try to provide some of the motivation for that definition.

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[3] Catherine Couturier, *University Affairs*, April 7, 2020, .

Self-indigenization is a process by which an individual comes to assert an Indigenous identity based solely on their view of themselves as Indigenous, without belonging to any Indigenous people.

Several points can be made about different aspects of this proposed definition, but here we consider *some* of the motivations for a definition of this nature. First, we begin by reflecting on the conditions in the world that if satisfied would render a claim of belonging, or membership, to an Indigenous people true. To be clear, we are not intending to—nor do we—provide anything approaching a complete account of the truth conditions for such claims. Instead, we simply draw attention to an essential feature that such truth conditions must possess. In particular, the truth conditions for such claims to belonging are *multilateral* in character. In saying that the truth conditions of claims to belonging to an Indigenous people are multilateral, we mean that the self-understanding of the individual making that claim is not a sufficient condition for the claim to be true. The self-understanding of the individual making the claim must be reciprocated and reflected by the people to whom the individual claims to belong.[4] In general, the social facts that render claims to belonging to a collective true are not only determined by how individuals understand themselves but also about the collective's acceptance of that individual as a member. Regardless of the confused reasoning process or belief system that might lead someone to identify as a faculty member, a member of the RCMP, or a Canadian citizen, if they are not properly accepted by those collectives themselves, their claim is simply false. The proposed definition of self-indigenization reflects that a true claim to belonging to an Indigenous people is, like claims of belonging to many other collectives, multilateral in character; self-understanding alone is insufficient for the claim's truth.

Another important feature that motivates the proposed definition is that it distinguishes self-indigenization from cases where people know they are not Indigenous but say they are. Such cases, from a moral psychological perspective, involve lying on a serious matter and are akin to committing a kind of fraud. In cases of self-indigenization, someone may come to be self-deceived or to believe, in some sense, that they are Indigenous even though they are mistaken in this belief.

Having formed this distinction, it is important to clarify that because these two phenomena are distinct, that does not mean that one is morally speaking any less serious than the other. It also does not entail that the proper legal treatment of self-indigenization would not be akin to cases of fraud, for example, as Leah Ballantyne has recently suggested (Martens, 2021). An individual does have certain responsibilities to avoid error and confusion when making certain claims that might benefit them. What this does suggest is that at least from a moral psychological point of view, these are two different phenomena. Self-indigenization involves some confused and convoluted socio-cognitive process whereby individuals falsely come to imagine themselves as Indigenous, whereas saying one is Indigenous when one knows one is not is a flat-out misrepresentation.

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[4] It is important to appreciate that the relationship between many Indigenous individuals and the people they are from has been severely and profoundly disrupted by colonial state policies and by widespread attitudes in colonial society. Some examples in the Canadian context include adopting Indigenous children into non-Indigenous families away from their Indigenous community, the residential school system, the scrip policy, and systemic discrimination. The effects of these policies and attitudes emanating from many settler people have contributed to many Indigenous people being disconnected from their own people. For such cases, inclusive membership protocols would hold such disconnected individuals to be one of the people. Thus, under these circumstances, where there is clear documentation of the state's policies and of their direct impact on Indigenous people, there is good reason for—and the general practice is that—Indigenous peoples regard such forcibly disconnected individuals as members of the people that they are from. As Gaudry and Andersen note, First Nations and Métis membership codes commonly "contain provisions to incorporate those who have been disconnected from their people by colonial policy" (2016, p. 28).

The Epistemic Context of Self-Indigenization

There is a particular epistemic environment that has left the Métis at an epistemic disadvantage when forcing the meaning and value of the word "Métis" onto the Canadian consciousness. The stories told about the Métis that have settled into the dominant Canadian public's social imagination contribute to an epistemic environment that leaves the Métis vulnerable to outsiders rejecting the notion of a distinct Métis nation, and it allows outsiders to define for themselves what it means to be Métis.

We home in on three stories about the Métis found in the dominant Canadian public's social imagination. These are the stories of treaty versus scrip, racial mixedness, and the liberal conception of freedom as non-interference. Taken together, these stories shape the Canadian public's social imagination of the Métis in a manner that undermines Métis individuals and collective Métis self-determination.

Métis communities have frequently encountered disregard for their calls for recognition and nationhood by both Canadians and the Government of Canada. The broader settler society has consistently struggled to comprehend the Métis assertion of nation-level distinction. This persistent lack of comprehension is partly attributable to the narratives of racial ambiguity imposed upon the Métis, as well as the historical dispossession of their land.

How Métis are Excluded from Treaty Narratives

There are a variety of resources that a nation might have at its disposal when asserting its distinction to another group. Historically, signed treaties are one such resource. The idea that treaties are between two nations—a First Nation and the Government of Canada, for example—lives on today through the popular phrase "we are all treaty people." In fact, the phrase and the treaty-making process have steadily become part of the political vernacular in Canada (McKenzie-Jones, 2019). Treaty-making is something that plays a role in creating a sense of self for Canadians.

Treaties create a shared narrative and a sense of national origin, serving as a potent cognitive tool to distinguish between settler Canadians and First Nations. For signatories, a treaty means that "identifying as a nation may be a non-issue. The nation has a continuing and profound historical presence and prominence in the minds of its people" (Cornell, 2015, p. 7). Treaties enhance the external acknowledgment of Indigenous national identity and wed nation-to-nation relationships to the modern societal vernacular and cognitive framework.

When the Manitoba Act was passed, there is very good reason to assume that at the time, many believed the Métis to be in a similar, if not identical, level of politico-legal authority as the Crown. Yet, even if the Manitoba Act came about through a peace negotiated between two "political equals", (Gaudry, 2014), p. 294) the way the act came to be implemented in its purpose of "extinguishing Indian title" stripped the Métis of the kind of epistemic authority that treaties normally provide for asserting national distinction. In fact, the Canadian government carried out its efforts to extinguish Métis claims to land with the express intent of treating the Métis not as a nation but as individuals and wards of the Canadian state.

The extinguishing of title was carried out through a process decided by one party (the Canadian government), and the allotted 1.4 million acres of land were distributed at the behest of the Governor General to individual heads of families. In other words, the dispossession of Métis lands occurred through an individualization of land title. Compared to what treaties do for enforcing a nation-to-nation relationship in the Canadian psyche, individualizing the extinguishing of title is of itself an act that subsumes the cultural and national distinction of the Métis. Thus, the implementation of the Manitoba Act has meant that the Métis have not been widely acknowledged in the dominant society as participants in treaty agreements.

How Métis Nationhood is Undermined by Racial Narratives

Despite being a distinct nation, with unique languages, foods, art, dance, kinship networks, legal and governance traditions, the Métis ability to project this has been undermined by racialization processes. Chris Andersen points out that the Canadian public often views the Métis not as a distinct cultural group but as racially mixed individuals, offspring of First Nations and Europeans (2014, p. 6). This perspective has led to a broader narrative of cultural ambivalence, making Métis nationhood vulnerable to misrecognition as a hybrid of two races, "Indian" and "white" rather than as a distinct and whole, Indigenous people (MacDougall et al., 2012).
The term "First Nation" serves to remind Canada that its history predates the arrival of European settlers and acts as an epistemic resource that upholds the concept of Indigenous nationhood for First Nations. While the term "First Nations" clearly reinforces claims to nationhood, the term "Métis" has been laden with implications of mixedness. This racialized interpretation has significant political consequences. For example, the perception that Métis individuals are only "half Indigenous" due to their mixed ancestry not only diminishes their claim to self-government (Andersen, 2014, p. 7) but also deprives them of a vital conceptual resource necessary for asserting their distinct identity within Canada.

What and Who You Are Is Still Considered a "Personal Choice"

The notion that it is a "personal choice" or the individual right of a person to choose an identity is rooted deeply in the stories that liberal society tells us about human nature. Much of the liberal tradition, and perhaps political theory more generally, holds that people are born in a state of natural freedom. It is assumed that we are by nature free, making it necessary to justify any restrictions on that original state. There is no onus on individuals to justify their ability to be free to act in ways that represent their interests; rather, the burden is on those seeking to restrict freedom to establish justifiable grounds for doing so (Gaus, 1996, pp. 162–166). And the reason for this, it is ultimately assumed, is that our thoughts and actions are not predetermined but are transposed unto the world by an autonomous will—and self-awareness. Persons, John Locke informs us, are in "a state of perfect freedom to order their actions … as they think fit … without asking leave, or depending on the will of any other man" (2016, p. 287).
It is not uncommon for self-identified individuals and some settlers with decision-making authorities to invoke such conceptions of freedom and individual autonomy, which are often articulated in statements like "No one can tell me who I am other than myself," "I decide who I am," and "People have a right to identify however they like; who are you to tell them otherwise?"

Consequences

As a result of this epistemic environment, non-Métis are able to define what it is to be Métis in ways that suit their interests. This occurs on two levels: individual and group. As discussed below, each brings its own set of consequences for Métis people.
At the individual level, a growing number of identity fraud cases, particularly in the academy, have centered on individuals who have used their claim to a Métis identity to receive access to educational and professional opportunities. The rationalization of these claims commonly relies, at least in part, on invoking the stories found in the Canadian public's social imagination and detailed above. These stories, in part, account for why such rationalization contributes to self-indigenizers being recognized as Métis inside public institutions and in the dominant culture in Canada more broadly. The epistemic environment generated by Canada's social imagination of the Métis leaves an interpretive lacuna that individuals are permitted to fill in accordance with their own conception of what it means to be Métis. If Métis are not recognized and understood as an Indigenous nation, but a mixed-race offshoot of other peoples, then the Métis nation's collective conception of membership and belonging is pushed aside in the determination of the truth of claims to being Métis. The dominant culture's misrecognition of the Métis as mixed between any First Nation and a non-Indigenous people—along with liberal

conceptions of freedom as non-interference—facilitates a form of receptivity towards claims to being Métis issuing from self-indigenizers, irrespective of the views of the Métis nation. What this in effect does is generate a false, unilateral notion of the truth conditions for claims to being Métis in the dominant culture. Rather than regarding claims to being Métis as possessing multilateral truth conditions that require that the individual Métis person's self-conception dovetail with that of the Métis people's, this false alternative understands the truth conditions of such claims as unilateral. More specifically, this alternative conception would misleadingly regard the truth condition for such claims as being solely based on an individual's understanding of themselves as possessing some Indigenous ancestry. This form of misrecognition of the Métis people in Canada's social imagination generates a conceptual environment in which there is acceptance, for example, of a white person who may (or may not) have, say, remote Algonquin ancestry, asserting that they are Métis on that basis alone. The liberal conception of freedom as non-interference provides further buttressing of such assertions, rendering understandable defensive statements such as "no one can tell me who I am." These stories, deeply embedded in the Canadian social imagination, thus work together to generate a parallel, yet false and unilateral, conception of the truth conditions of claims to being Métis. This alternative conception bypasses or disregards the Métis nation's own membership codes and citizenship laws and thus has serious consequences for the Métis nation's capacity to project its self-understanding onto the broader public.

This conceptual environment is a clear case of hermeneutical, or interpretive, epistemic injustice. It is a conceptual environment that clearly discounts Métis social understanding at a fundamental level: that is, at the level of determining who is, and who is not, one of the people. This kind of social understanding generates several harms to Métis people, including the misrecognition of our self-understanding of Métis peoplehood. It also, however, permits people who are not Métis and potentially not even Indigenous to benefit from opportunities intended for those who are. As such, this form of misrecognition of the Métis people is not harmless. Fortunately, recent public discussions, largely catalyzed by public media drawing attention to several cases of self-indigenizers, has gone some distance to improving the Canadian public's understanding of Métis nation's codes of membership. However, the growing number of such cases being brought to the public's attention also serves to illustrate how these forms of misrecognition of the Métis nation lead to a situation in which self-indigenizers have found receptivity for their false claims to being Métis. The success of such claims themselves, despite the Métis nation's presence as an Indigenous people with citizenship requirements that do not support these claims, draws attention to defectiveness in the broader Canadian social imagination of the Métis.

At the group level, the inability of the Métis to imprint their distinctiveness onto the Canadian consciousness has allowed some non-Métis to define who the Métis are for their own purposes. For example, in his 2008 bestseller, A Fair Country, John Ralston Saul claims that contemporary Canada has been profoundly shaped by a blend of Aboriginal and European ideas and experiences over the past 250 years (Saul, 2008, p. 3). Saul uses this notion of a "métis civilization" to describe Canadian society as whole, thereby removing the distinctiveness of the Métis, in order to advance his broader narrative.

In discussing Saul's book, Andersen identifies the grand myth with which the very term "Métis" has been saddled:

> Despite Saul's scattering of references to various Métis national icons, swept up like so many autumn leaves into his larger narrative, the author's phrasing instead defines Canada's political history as hybrid and thus marks, perhaps, its—and his own—indigeneity. [Métis historian Brenda Macdougall explains that the problem] is that even presumably well-intended statements such as Saul's "instantly negate the stories of [Métis] families, the histories of our communities, and the authenticity of our aboriginality, reducing us to an in-between, incomplete, 'not-quite-people' who are stuck somewhere on the outside of the discourse." (Andersen, 2014, p. 5)

This instance reflects the ongoing mischaracterization of the Métis as a mere blend of "Indian" and "white" races, rather than recognizing them as a distinct Indigenous people. It is important to note however, that Saul's depiction of Canada as a métis civilization is made possible only because he is free to downplay or even ignore the unique development of the Métis as a separate nation.

The precariousness of Métis nationhood is underscored when outsiders are able to define for themselves what it is to be Métis. For example, Tom Flanagan adopts a highly dismissive position: "Métis self-government in any large-scale, meaningful sense is a non-starter. Self-government requires territorial concentration of the sort that allows First Nations governments to exist on Indian reserves. But the Métis live all over Canada and are not likely to leave Edmonton, Saskatoon, or Winnipeg to set up remote self-governing enclaves" (2017).[5]

The argument that Métis self-government is impossible due to some kind of "demographic reality" is made possible only by Flanagan being able to first define the Métis in a way that suits his argument:

> The biggest of all problems is demography. The Métis National Council and its provincial affiliates claim to represent the descendants of the historic Métis of the fur trade. These were mixed-race people who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company in what is now northern Ontario, the three Prairie Provinces, and the Northwest Territories. They have many descendants today, but they have also continued to intermarry with other races and ethnic groups. Marriages since fur trade days have given rise to new generations of partly indigenous ancestry. Striking a deal limited to the descendants of the fur trade Métis will prove to be impossible. The self-identified Métis are one of the fastest growing groups in Canada, according to the census. They increased from 179,000 in 1996 to 418,000 in 2011. The explosive growth is due to what demographers call "ethnic mobility," i.e., people changing the labels they give themselves. And behind the Métis are more than 200,000 self-identified non-status Indians who could plausibly claim to be Métis if they saw some financial incentive in it. There is, in other words, a pool of hundreds of thousands of people who may be drawn to seek official Métis status if these negotiations create a financial payoff to do so. "Build it, and they will come," as the saying goes. (Flanagan, 2017)

When Flanagan defines the Métis, he does so as a racial rather than a cultural group. His ability to define the Métis in a way he sees fit and advance his straw person argument (to the detriment of the Métis aspiration for political self-determination) is not dissimilar to the process Saul employs when he advances his creation story of the Canadian state: both are based on a personalized appropriation of the definition of Métis. This process is made possible because of the way that the Métis as an Indigenous nation are structurally prejudiced by a gap in the collective Canadian understanding. To address this gap, the Métis have begun building institutions that allow them to force a national distinction on outsiders.

Reclaiming the Nation Through Citizenship Registries: A Case-Study of Métis Nation-Saskatchewan

Registries provide the necessary means for Métis governments to craft good policies that can help mitigate the problems created by the lacuna in Canada's social understanding. Through the collection of data via, for example, community censuses and surveys, registries allow Métis governments to craft strategy and vision documents that lead to policies that enable a better understanding of the people and their needs. For Indigenous governments, registries are particularly important because they provide the groundwork for negotiations with non-Indigenous governments. In 2003, when rending its decision in the Powley case, the Supreme Court of Canada outlined a general test for determining Métis Aboriginal rights and identifying

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[5] There are also significant unsupported presumptions in this statement about the necessity of a conception of self-determination that adheres to the Westphalian model of statehood. For alternatives to a Westphalian conception of self-determination, see Nichols (2020).

Métis rights holders under section 35(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982. What became known as the Powley Test laid out the criteria that determine Métis rights in Canadian Aboriginal law and how to identify who is entitled to those rights (Isaac & Hoekstra, 2017, p. 36). This decision led to the Powley Initiative, a federal government program that makes funding available for the development of standardized, Métis citizenship registries.. Prior to Powley, "debates and uncertainty about the possible nature and scope of Métis rights, the legal effects of scrip on Métis Aboriginal rights and title, Métis constitutional identity, federal and provincial jurisdiction for Métis, and the appropriate modern legal entities with whom to negotiate Métis rights created barriers to consultation and negotiation" (Bell & Seaman, 2014, as cited in Saunders & Dubois, 2019). As noted by Saunders and Dubois, "in addition to assisting with the development of Métis registries, Powley was enthusiastically welcomed by Métis leaders for providing a much-needed analytical framework to prove the existence of Métis constitutional rights" (2019, p. 130). While the establishment of citizenship registries is often beneficial, they occasionally lead to disputes.[6] However, some Métis governments, like the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MN-S), have used the Powley Initiative to strengthen and standardize their citizenship registries. Since signing a self-government agreement in 2019, the MN-S has been clarifying the pathway to citizenship and consolidating the authority that the centralized registry has in determining membership. According to the MN-S, the citizenship registry "registers eligible Métis persons in the province through a secure, efficient, standardized, and objectively verifiable process" (MN-S, 2024). For the MN-S, the citizenship registry derives its definition of a Métis person from article 10 of the MN-S constitution:

> Métis means a person, who self identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and is accepted by the Métis Nation.
>
> "Historic Métis Nation" means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Half-breeds who resided in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland.
>
> "Historic Métis Nation Homeland" means the area of west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-breeds as they were known.
>
> "Métis Nation" means the Aboriginal people descended from the Historic Métis Nation which is now comprised of all Métis Nation citizens and is one of the "aboriginal peoples of Canada["] within the meaning of s.35 of the Constitution Act 1982.
>
> "Distinct from other Aboriginal peoples" means distinct for culture and nationhood purposes. (MN-S, 2008)

Beyond their more immediate and direct benefits, registries also have the authority to fortify distinction, support the flourishing of a national identity, and force the meaning and value of the word "Métis" onto the Canadian consciousness. One direct way that citizenship registries do this is when they are used to support or transplant verification processes in non-Métis, public institutions.

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[6] While these registries play a crucial role in affirming Métis identity and supporting self-governance, they are not without challenges. A notable example is the conflict between the Métis Nation of Ontario and First Nations in Ontario. The recognition and inclusion of new Métis communities have sparked significant opposition from First Nations, who argue that these communities lack historical ties to the land and threaten their own territorial rights. This dispute highlights the tension between different Indigenous groups over land and resource rights and the complexity of identity and governance within Indigenous communities (Pedri-Spade et al., 2023).

For many years, non-Indigenous institutions, including universities, allowed a process of self-declaration as the means by which to identify Indigenous students, faculty, and staff. In November 2021, at the height of a controversy surrounding a high-profile faculty member being challenged over their claims of Métis identity, the University of Saskatchewan and the MN-S signed the Agreement for Recognizing Métis Nation Citizenship (University of Saskatchewan, 2011). In an interview following the signing ceremony, university president Peter Stoicheff acknowledged that self-declaration simply wasn't working: self-identification "is insufficient today.… The university cannot play the role of accepting self-identification but instead honours the exclusive ability of the MN-S to be the government to validate citizenship.… We believe that a key part of reconciliation is recognizing that Indigenous communities define and verify their own membership" (Willick, 2021).

This landmark agreement makes the MN-S registry the sole authority in determining its own people. This is the first agreement of this nature between a Canadian university and a Métis government. With it, the university decided that it is the community outside its own walls that has the right to determine its own membership. Non-Indigenous institutions acknowledging that Indigenous communities are themselves the authority in determining their own membership is in line with the principles set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and represents a substantive step toward recognizing the right of communities to determine their own membership (UN General Assembly, 2007).
Perhaps more important for the Métis, this agreement allows the Métis government to use its internal definition of Métis—one enshrined in its own constitution—and enforce that meaning outside the nation, in a public institution. It is clear that by being able to define their own membership, centralized registries allow the Métis nation to be better positioned to force a view and meaning of Métis nationhood onto settler society and protect themselves from outside appropriations that pose a challenge to process of (re)building the nation.

Conclusion

Relative to other Indigenous peoples, the claims of distinction and nationhood that have arisen from Métis communities have been consistently ignored by Canadians and the Government of Canada. The Métis assertion of a national distinction has routinely been met with a gap in understanding from the broader settler society. This gap, fed by the flawed stories told about the Métis that have shaped the Canadian public's social imagination, functions to undermine the Métis people's epistemic authority.

Rather than reflecting Métis people's authority in determining the truth of claims to being Métis, the Canadian public's flawed social understanding of what "Métis" is and means permits people to determine the definition and value of claims to being Métis in whatever fashion suits their interest and in a manner that excludes actual Métis people. At the individual level, this produces a situation that makes self-indigenization more likely to occur, generating within the dominant culture a form of receptivity to claims to being Métis made by self-indigenizers. This receptivity is based on a broad misrecognition in Canada's social imagination of who the Métis are. At the group level, the gap allows non-Métis to define what it is to be Métis in ways that undercut the Métis nation's pursuit of self-determination. However, the establishment of citizenship registries offers a credible and accountable mechanism for not only determining Métis citizenship but also reinforcing distinctiveness and asserting the true meaning of "Métis" in the Canadian consciousness, thereby challenging misconceptions and bolstering the Métis nation's self-determination efforts.

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