

IDENTITY THEFT AND SETTLER RESPONSIBILITY

A TALK BY TAIAlAKE ALFRED*

The following is an edited transcription of a June 19, 2024 virtual talk hosted by Revivifyy.Com on Indigenous identity theft and Settler responsibility.

Though not transcribed in this text, the session began with a general introduction, and then Taiaiake describing his particular knowledge of the topic, including his personal and familial experience with all facets of colonialism and its impacts, including residential and day schools, family members in foster care and adoption and cultural reconnection, and his professional experience, which includes working in his home community, including on the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke's membership policy in the 1980s, and acting as a court certified expert witness on membership and governance in First Nations, and as an advisor to McGill University on their Indigenous initiatives, including on their recently approved Policy on Indigenous Membership/Citizenship.

So with all that said, you know my perspective now and how I come at this. We're here to have a conversation about how settlers can respond to Indigenous identity claims, and how settlers can navigate the issue of false identity claims.

There can be false claims — that is, based on misinformation or bad family stories, or something like that. And there can be actual fraud — the committing of a crime, which is misrepresentation of oneself in order to access benefits that are intended for Indigenous peoples. You can see right away that in the way I'm talking about it, there's a spectrum. There's people who commit identity fraud, if you want to phrase it that way; and there's people who are confused about their identity, who don't know, or who are maybe just too willing to take on an uncritical perspective on their own family stories and position themselves as Indigenous without having sufficient grounding or background or, to use a code word here, proof of it. And these people are increasingly in public spaces, in positions of leadership, in academia and the media, on social media and so forth.

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It's becoming an issue that has received quite a bit of attention and it's becoming a prominent crisis in Indigenous communities because what it is doing is eroding the foundations of a lot of institutions' posture towards Indigeneity. You know, we have academic institutions, we have government institutions, we have media, we have arts and so forth that have all built what they believe to be — I'm giving them the benefit of the doubt — what they believe to be a just relationship or a positive relationship with Indigenous peoples. And now what we're finding is that because of the efforts of Indigenous peoples themselves, rooted in community, who have actual authority on these questions, the people that have been advanced as representative voices and put in positions of leadership in this dynamic of relationship are being questioned. And in many cases, they have been proven to be frauds or mistaken or in some other way, not actually Indigenous. And so the relationship itself is becoming a crisis where there's no ability to trust anymore in this political landscape.

In earlier phases of this whole problem, we could say that, you know, it's an aberration. Every now and then you'll get somebody who, for personal motivation or narcissism or greed or something, misrepresents themselves. You could kind of take for granted that the norm was going to be some sort of legitimate representation of Indigenous perspective or Indigenous nationhood in the relationship that you were building. But I think we've seen in the last five years —it's actually been much longer than that, but it's really come to a head in the last five years — that you can't assume that truth anymore. You actually have to adopt a posture of scepticism. That's a sad thing to say, but that's where we're at.

That's where this conversation we're having today comes in. Because we have to give people the tools intellectually to be able to navigate through this. Withdrawing from the conversation, deferring it to a later time, or just accepting it uncritically actually reinforces the colonial reality that we're living in. And so this issue of Pretendianism, this issue of ethnic fraud, or identity fraud, has become a major factor in the current political landscape of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

How did we get here? To summarize the historical context in a very basic way, the basic dynamic that I'm thinking of is looking at colonization at the highest level. By the way, you can read my book, *It's All About the Land*, if you want my full perspective on this, it does deal with the issues head on. What was colonization? Well, it was a foreign people coming to an area of the world that was civilized, that had laws, that had a culture, that had a whole existence, and disrupting that through various means — some violent, some subtle. All kinds of means were used to disrupt that reality

and to impose a new reality and a new power and to marginalize and minimize the pre-existing reality. The hope was, I think it's fair to say, that that pre-existing reality would eventually fade from existence or be subsumed within this new colonial reality.

So we have colonization — this long, intentional process of disconnecting the Onkwehonwe, the Original People, from their culture, from their land, from their power, from their governance, severing their connection to each other, to the land and to their own institutions, causing massive confusion, in the hopes that that psychological state would lead to the dissolution of those Nations, so that the colonial power could completely displace, completely erase, the existence of the prior peoples and build their new reality, according to their vision. That's a one-minute summary of colonization, which people can take issue with, but I think it's fair, and I think it gets to the heart of the matter. Because what we're finding now is, that in the wake of a resistance to that, in the wake of the resurgence of people to reconnect on all of those things that were disconnected, we've had some success. We've survived. That's the first thing: we survived. The next thing is, we remember. We remember that we're Onkwehonwe, we're not Canadians. We're Haudenosaunee. We remember who we are. We remember our ancestral connections. Many of our younger people are learning our languages. It's growing. We're actually becoming who we truly are again, and not the vision or the facsimile of an Onkwehonwe that the colonizer created to use for their purposes. This is what's happening. This is what started happening in the 1960s when we had a cultural revolution, the Red Power movement, traditionalism, people standing up. It started to happen even more in the 70s, when because of court activism and successes on the issue of collective rights and the idea of decolonization — we started to have our case recognized in law. Previous to the 70s, Natives couldn't get together to press their land rights. Natives were not allowed to hire lawyers to argue for land claims, as they're called. They couldn't get together to argue for self-government or their treaties until the 1970s. Think about that. This was in my lifetime. I was a kid when we began to be able to advance this political struggle on the legal front. We started to gain recognition in a limited way. We started to make some gains, not only in the legal realm in regard to land rights and so forth, but in education, in the arts, in our presence, in media. We started to rise up again. We started to breathe life back into our Nations through our work and through our successes and strategies and sacrifices of our people.

Our rights were legalized when in 1982, Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution recognized existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights for the First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Our struggle shifted and intensified in the legal realm to try to fill in that empty box. Section 35 was an empty box because Aboriginal rights were a concept that needed

to be filled in by laws and policies. We're still in the process of doing that. So you see how we have progressed from the low point of us almost being erased as Peoples, as cultures, from the landscape of this country, to us rising up and organizing and being effective in surviving and pressing our nationhood further and further, as we are today.

This is the historical reality that we're faced with right now because the government of Canada, the Crown, embodied by both the federal government and the various provinces, they recognize the threat that this poses to the status quo. The status quo is settlers get to benefit from our land. It's all about the land, that's the name of my book. It's complicated, all these facets, but when you boil it down, settler society and all of its institutions get to enrich themselves and benefit from the theft of our land and the marginalization of our people, preventing us from accessing what is truly ours. This is what we're fighting against, and this is what the Government of Canada is resisting.

And so this is the historical context of Canada. This is what we're talking about. And we could talk about any aspect of Indigenous-Non-native relations, but we're here talking about identity. Think about in that context. Take a second and think about it not as an issue of just interpersonal relations, or whether someone's telling the truth or not. Put yourself in that historical flow. Here's the flow of history. Here you are in 2024. Here's what the government's trying to do. Here's what Natives are trying to do. And there's justice. Now. Where are you in that mix people who are identity frauds, people who fake being Native, and the settlers who enable that?

They are really slyly defending the status quo of colonialism by creating and perpetuating a false image of what it is to be Native. It's an image that continues to serve colonial purposes rather than Native purposes. The creation of an image of "Native" and then the legalization of that, the granting of political weight and legitimacy to an image of the Indian as it's represented by people who are false or who are not connected, or who are advancing liberal, capitalist, individualistic notions of what it is to be Indigenous — the purpose this serves is to further disconnect the concept of Indigeneity from the true values and principles of what it is to be Native. And so in effect, you have the next step, the next stage of this historical process of colonization, which is the colonizer thinking, "Damn it. The Natives found a way to survive! Damn it. They still remember who they are. They're rising up, and they're causing us trouble by telling us all about our treaties. That we've got to treat the land a certain way."

We're not Canadians, and the colonizer doesn't want to hear that, can't deal with that. The colonizer would rather take someone who maybe has a little bit of Nativeness or

a completely false claim to Nativeness, elevate them and hold them up as the spokesperson for Indigeneity and First Nations, because everything they say validates the colonial reality. All they want is some recognition and validation of their identity and heritage as an Indigenous person. They don't understand the struggle. They're not connected to the struggle, and they're not advancing the struggle. Most oftentimes, they are completely embedded in whiteness, and they are representing a variation of whiteness that is absolutely no threat to the colonizer. So that's the basic dynamic that we're facing here, which is a misrepresentation on the part of some people, and a willing or wilfully ignorant acceptance of that by the colonizer society. And here's where it throws a challenge out to settlers. The government has strategic thinkers to work out plans and policies to accomplish this, but the average person should know better. I was among the first people to call out Joseph Boyden. When his book *The Orenda* came out, he was celebrated. He won Canada Reads. He was all over the media. He was all over the country as a Native person, the voice of our people. His book was the voice of the spirit of Indigenous resistance. Turns out to be all bullshit.

Now, did Canadians want to hear a version of indigeneity that validated them, that fit within their cultural ideals, that saw a future of Indigenous peoples within the structure and the principles and the pillars of colonial society? Yes, they did. That's why people who position themselves in the way that he did — and there have been many others since then — are held up. And that's why people are uncritical.

And that's my challenge to people in this seminar: how can settlers address this? Well, how about looking things in the eye and acknowledging a problem when you see it? That's the first thing. If someone doesn't appear to be... if you have misgivings... have the courage to ask a question. *Have the courage to ask a question.* Because, and I hope everybody who's Onkwehonwe in this session will agree with me, that's asking a lot. Let me risk it: if you're a Native person, you're proud to talk about who you are. You're proud when you're asked a question. You know, if someone comes up to me and I'm traveling around the world, anywhere, and they're like, Oh, you're Native, well, where are you from? What tribe are you from? What Nation are you from? I'm proud. I'm proud to say where I'm from. Traveling to New Zealand, people are proud to list off their whole genealogy. In Hawaii, they're proud to list that off. Everybody who's actually Native and carrying that is really proud to demonstrate it. And so I don't think that settlers should be shy or feel like it's racist to ask someone when they have misgivings. And I wouldn't have said this 10 or 15, years ago, but this is a response to the reality, to the political reality and the way things have evolved

When you're working in an institution, whether it's a university or an arts organization, or whether you're engaging online with someone, if you have a question, ask the question. Ask people to talk about their Nation, where they're from, how are they connected? Those kinds of things. This is what we've come to in this country. I'm not saying that if you're walking down the street and you see someone who you think looks Native, to go and bug them. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about people who position themselves as leaders, people who have a voice, a platform, and claim to represent the interests in the perspectives of an Indigenous community or an Indigenous nation or Indigenous peoples writ large. Part of being a leader is being questioned and held accountable. And I think that this is something that really needs to be advanced in the conversation here, because all too often, people sense something is not quite right, and they don't ask. They just go with the flow, so to speak. And that's something I think that it really needs to be addressed when it comes down to it: the idea of self-identification, where people can just declare an identity, where people can just self-identify as an Inuit, as a First Nations person, as Métis, that is part of this whole historical flow of colonization and an assault on the collective rights of First Nations people, and in the Métis Nation and Inuit, it has to be acknowledged, self-identification is the imposition of liberal individualism on our people, and liberal individualism is an essential element of colonization. Self-identification is a starting point, but to allow someone to self-identify solely, without also including inclusion in the community, membership in the community and so forth, if it's just self-identification, that is a direct attack on the collective rights of our people to determine who we are: the fundamental right of Peoples, of Nations, especially in light of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It's a fundamental right to determine our own identity and who we are. The terms, the boundaries and the criteria for who we are are determined by us in a collective sense, not by any one individual declaring themselves to be us, and that, I think, is one of the most intractable problems in Canadian society. The doctrine of human rights leads to the whole valorization of individual rights, the freedom to self declare, the freedom to choose identities. All these types of freedoms run right up against our collective right to exist. And so that's something that needs to be brought forward and kept in mind when people are thinking about this.

The next issue that flows from this, if you take what I'm saying seriously and look at individualism as a threat, and adhere to the principle that people self-declare, but in the context of membership and acceptance within a community, within a Nation. Well, how is that expressed? And of course, there's debate, there's disagreement, there is tension around that. But for the most part, it's a principle that the governing institutions of a Nation are the institutions that determine membership in that Nation.

By the way, if you haven't done so, you can follow people who expose Pretendians and call out people. There's musicians, there's artists all over the place, all over the world, all over the United States, all over Canada. They just declare themselves to be a certain Nation. So if someone stands up and says, "Well, I'm Mohawk" online, if there's a guy, a singer say, and he declares himself to be Mohawk. Well, how do you question that? How do you find out whether that's true or not?

Right now, I think we're still at the point of people, even people who are supportive of what I'm saying, who are not understanding the depth of the rootedness of identity in the collective governance of our Nationhood. They're like, well, let's talk to his family. Let's do some research on his connection, lineage-wise, and so forth. Okay, that's a start. You can see whether he's just making stuff up. But the easiest way and the best way and the most decolonial way is to contact the Nation that the person claims to be a part of and ask them if they're a member.

I honestly don't understand what's so hard to understand for people to get about this. If you claim to be a Mohawk, well, the Mohawks have a government. Now we're addressing issues of governance in our community. There's a band council that's rooted in the *Indian Act*, there's a traditional longhouse government — either one, if you contacted people there and said, "Listen, I'm thinking of hiring this person, or I'm thinking of booking this person for a major event and making them a headliner at this Indigenous festival. The person says they're Mohawk, but I have some misgivings, and I'm calling in to check. Is this person actually a Native, according to their claim?" That's what governments are for. That's what government agencies are for. That's what that's what the job is, to do that. Yet people don't want to do that, and I think that that's probably related to people's sensitivity around issues of being perceived to be racist. But as I said, 10 or 15, years ago, I might not be saying this, but today, because of the wide scale fraud and the pervasiveness of Indigenous identity, Pretendianism and so forth, it's become a necessity for anyone who's operating in these environments — political environment, media environment, academic environment — this is where we're at on this.

I have a few points that I thought might be good to just put out there, to help settlers navigate all of this. These are things that Native people hear when talking about this with non-Native people. I'm fortunate to be working with a brilliant anthropologist who's Ojibwe, her name's Celeste Pedri-Spade, she's Associate Provost (Indigenous Initiatives) at McGill, and she and I had a little bit of fun trying to think of things that people have said that fit within this whole rubric of enabling white supremacy by not holding Indigenous people accountable for their claims to being Indigenous, claims

that are too easily accepted. So I'm just going to list some of these points, not just to try to tell jokes or be funny —I'm just going to put them out there as issues that have come up, these are all things that we've actually heard. In situations where there is a contest, where there's a debate.

One is, “I just I just know he's Indigenous and I don't want to challenge him.”

Another one is, putting the blame on colonial policies. So you could say he's a victim of blood quantum and colonial identity politics. Blood quantum, meaning the measurement, but today, it's gone beyond pseudo-scientific attempts to measure blood quantum to establish lineage, lineage-based membership policies and criteria. In Kahnawà:ke we have a policy that the majority support, that is somewhat of a consensus, that says you have to have four great grandparents. That's not measuring their blood quantum, but it's in effect saying you have to be half-Native without getting into the specifics beyond those great grandparents as to the blood quantum. So it's kind of a, move away from scientific blood quantum to being lineage-based. But basically saying, you know, he is a victim of that. He carries his Nateness and so forth, even though his own Nation says he's not a member. So that is a denial of the right of that community to determine their own membership.

Then there's the issue of these people who may not meet the criteria of membership, or who are not, in fact, at all Indigenous but you've heard, “You know, they're doing great work. They've done great work. They've made such a contribution to the culture. They've helped so many people.” As if doing work to help decolonize this country is the thing that makes you Indigenous and gives you a free pass for lying about who you are, aka Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. That was the actual argument used by many people when she was exposed as an identity fraud.

Then there's the idea of, “it's all too complicated for me. Let the Natives sort it out. I just have to take their word.”

I've heard this one so many times like, “Well, geez, this Native says that, that Native says that, this Nation says this... It's all so complicated. I can't figure it out, so I'm not even gonna try to make it more complicated by inserting myself in this conversation.” That's a deferral of responsibility in this whole process of decolonization.

Then there's another one that is very prominent — “An elder says they're Indigenous and who am I to want to question that?” And this brings in the whole issue that has been called “elder grooming.” I don't know who came up with the term but it's very apt, and it's a very prominent reality where people latch on to a certain elder, who tend to be nicer than the angry young Natives who are defending their political and

cultural boundaries, and gradually develop a relationship to the point where those elders will vouch for them as their family. And then people take that and manipulate that cultural connection, that personal connection, and translate that into a legal status, misappropriating it. The classic example here is Buffy St Marie, that's how she did what she did.

Another prominent tactic is the loss of records to verify any claim. In a lot of Pretendian scenarios, the family papers validating their membership were lost. The band council office burned down. Somebody stole the documents. Somehow the documents were lost and therefore they don't have any empirical proof of their claims. That's very common. You got to be wary of that.

And then finally, I'll just end by reiterating what I said earlier, the "I don't want to be racist by questioning anyone." I'll just say it's not racist, because any actual Native will be proud to tell you who they are and what their connections are. Anybody who reacts and calls you a racist for asking them what their Nation is, and where they're from, that's a giant red flag for them being a Pretendian.

Question and Answer Period

QUESTION: Here in the US, tribes only exist if recognized by the national government and are unmade all the time. I get what you're saying for those who claim to be leaders and things like that, but I still wonder about how valid determining identity through tribal government really is, especially for those of us that are not raised by our parents and are not verified members. I'm an academic and do not ever talk about my background out of fear of being called a faker. It's complicated, but I would appreciate your thoughts.

Thank you for the question and the integrity you bring to the issue. It's really good to see that. To me, I think that this brings up the issue of reconnecting Natives, that is, people who have been alienated through whatever process, whatever decisions of their parents or their great grandparents or adoption or something like that. This issue of reconnection is increasingly something that is being talked about, and it's very different than what we're talking about here. It's not identity fraud, it's not Pretendianism, but it is similar in the issue of people being held up as leaders and as spokespersons without having the cultural grounding or the political structure of accountability. It gives them the right to be in that position from the Indigenous perspective. And so I think the idea of reconnecting is crucially important in terms of finding out your lineage, tracing that lineage back to a community, to a culture, and

trying to develop a cultural practice and identity and a political accountability that is not rooted in colonial institutions and structures, but one that is rooted in Indigenous traditions and structures and institutions. To me, that's what reconnecting is. And as you move from being an embodiment of colonization and being completely alienated to having more and more culture, more and more connection, to be in a position of stronger and stronger accountability to that Indigenous reality, then I think the ability for that person to speak on Indigenous issues grows as well.

On the issue of tribal recognition and so forth, I agree with you. Tribal membership, tribal status, and the federal recognition of tribes is a fundamental injustice in the way that it's set up because it's the Plenary Power of the US Congress to recognize a tribe. But as a practical matter, I think most tribes that are federally recognized have some sort of historical lineage and connection to that land and a treaty relationship with the federal government of the United States that gives them that kind of that validity, that reality. A lot of the state-recognized tribes or unrecognized tribes do, but a lot of them don't and so it's a much more confused space. I think that adherence to an idea of a federally recognized tribe is kind of the best practice today, although we recognize that it's all happening in a colonial context. We're doing our best to strengthen that as we move to decolonize the federal tribal relationship, but right now, it's kind of like the best tool that we have.

QUESTION: How should non-profits and other groups react to claims of non-indigeneity within their Indigenous advisory committee? What would be the best way to handle this?

I sense this is the actual live question someone's dealing with. My answer is basically to reconstitute the committee based on what we're talking about here. I have my own practical experience in the places where I have worked. We operated on the basis of respecting Indigenous nationhood and the sovereignty of our host Nations and the Nations that we were interacting with and started from there. This is happening at McGill now, where we're working to forming an Indigenous Advisory Council. The people we're working with, and their commitment there, is to have first accountability to the host Nations and proximate Nations of people, and so to work through the governing institutions of those Nations, to get advice for the work of that institution in the city. And I think that's the way to go.

How to confront someone who has been outed or accused of being a Pretendian on an existing council once they're already in ensconced in this position, that's very

difficult. In a very practical way, I think that the same tools are available to you as anyone else, which is to go to either the proximate Nations on whose territory you're operating, or to the membership department of the person's claim Nation, and then you can go from there. It's not racist to check someone's credentials, and unfortunately, these days, you have to do that in regard to identity and claims to identity.

QUESTION: What to do when a state-recognized tribe in Vermont is people's point of reference — that's the question. The power of the state to stand for Abenaki history and nationhood.

A good question. This is a long-standing issue, and it's a very live issue legally, there's a court case underway. This is just an outright case of the state of Vermont favouring frauds to serve their own interests. And so the issue there is legal recourse. People have to sue, people have to advocate politically. And I don't know how effective this current action is going to be, but there is a legitimate, historically grounded, recognized group of people in Odanak on the Canadian side who are denying the legitimacy of the people on the Vermont side who claim to be Abenaki with no historical proof. The Vermont scenario is super interesting. It's a whole other conversation, because of the alliance of colonial power supporting obvious fakes in order to prevent the actual Indigenous people from advancing a land claim and challenging the colonial power in that area. It's a straight-up example of what we're talking about on an institutional level.

QUESTION What about whole organizations and big First Nations, Sharbot Lake, MNO, etc., who will confirm their members, but their membership criteria is really weak? They exist to undermine real First Nations, especially in the area of land claims.

This question refers to another kind of live situation in regard to the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and the resistance to their claims by the vast majority of Indigenous people in the area that they're operating in, and the official position of the Chiefs of Ontario. And so you have a very serious conflict now between the First Nations leadership and the claims of the MNO leadership. This is another example of the Vermont scenario. They illustrate how federal, provincial and state governments are not unaware of all of these dynamics that we're talking about. In fact, they're actively constructing strategies and approaches to continue to undermine First Nations

power, land rights, and self-government and sovereignty, by doing this process that we see on a personal level — just accepting anyone's claims and holding them up as the voice of Indigenous people and giving them jobs and funding and so forth — to block out the actual Natives who would come into the spaces that white people occupy and make their lives uncomfortable, or demand more serious change. The “moderate, acceptable” Native is held up over the actual Native. That's what the federal government and the provincial government of Ontario are doing in this situation.

QUESTION: We tend to rely on the same Indigenous people all the time. How can we seek out more legitimately Indigenous people to speak to us, work with us?

There are different organizations that are rooted in community that you can engage with. I know the reality, if it's a non-Indigenous person who's asking the question, it's somewhat intimidating, it's somewhat difficult, or you might be hesitant to do it, but possibly using that respected person that you're familiar with to gain connections with others. You can ask them, “Who is it that you would want to speak?” Or, “can we get someone from your organization?” This is one example that I just know best, but if you're operating in Montreal there is the Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact. It's a group made up of mainly youth who support causes around diversity, including gender diversity, there's youth, and there's all kinds of work that they do in the community. They have representatives and they have people that can speak and bring a perspective there. And in fact, that's what Eberechi and Amanda, do, that's the way they operate. They've asked for recommendations and names and things like that. And so you have that kind of accountability connection that's maintained throughout, you're not just going fishing for somebody. And if you're lucky, they're legit. If you're unlucky, they're not.

QUESTION: In Daniels v Canada the Supreme Court ruled that an unknown entity identifying as Métis are now considered Indians for the purpose of s. 91(24) of the 1867 Constitution and so are owed a fiduciary youth duty towards them. In your opinion, how has this ruling contributed to the increased number of settlers claiming an Indigenous ancestry in Canada?

A good question because it gets us to the issue of self-identification, and in practical terms, this issue is far more a problem when it comes to Métis than First Nations or Inuit. In his question Craig is referring to court decisions and policies of the various

Métis organizations that have allowed for self-identification or for membership in their organizations without the strict or rigorous application of criteria and investigation and verification of their members' claims. The Mohawk Nation, we have a very strict policy — people may disagree with it, but it's very strict, and it's very well known in terms of what the criteria are for being considered a member in that community. Whether you go by the longhouse way, the clan way, or the elected council way through the legal criteria in our membership law, you know it, it's clear. And people who want to live in the community, people who when they're born, people when they apply for membership, it's all very rigorously applied. The problem that Craig is referring to is that in Métis organizations, their instinct up until this point has been to increase their membership to generate status, political power vis-à-vis the First Nations and vis-à-vis the Canadian government. And now it's coming back as a really big problem, because you have the Manitoba Métis Federation, which is the heartland of the Métis. And if a Métis nation is going to be considered in a political discussion, that is the root of it. Generally, the ones on the prairies are considered legitimate, and then you have all these other Métis organizations that have come up in recent years outside of the prairie context. Whatever your feelings are about the roots of the Métis, the ethnogenesis and so forth, they're there. They're a nation of people within Canada that has a historical presence and a bounded culture and political reality on the prairies. West of the Rockies and east of the Great Lakes or east of Winnipeg, there's no Métis collectivities. There's no historical Métis people. Yet you have all these organizations coming up and up until very recently, you had the organizations' acceptance of people just based on their own self-identification. And now I think that primarily Métis organizations are facing this problem and trying to deal with it in various ways. But on the whole, it has transcended that particular community, because now we find that we have a constitutionally recognized group that the rest of Canada has to relate to that has no verifiable membership criteria. So you have ongoing disputes within the Métis Nation as to who is a Métis person and what are the means to enforce that and bind that to nationhood? Meanwhile, you have a federal situation where anybody can identify as Métis, and they're held up to the same level of rights and entitlements as Ka'nahsohon, for example, who was born and raised, living his whole life, speaks Mohawk, a culture carrier, a Faithkeeper in the longhouse. If he went to a university and applied for a job or wanted to be on an advisory council or in any kind of capacity, some white girl who decided yesterday that she's Métis because she heard her story from her family at some point, would have the same legal status as Ka'nahsohon, and the institution would have to treat them as equal in terms of their indigeneity. How ridiculous is that? But that's the law in Canada, and I think settlers have a responsibility to address it, because the

Canadian government refuses to, and, in fact, is retrenching on this in their defence of the MNO in Ontario. This is what they're defending: self-identification to block out true indigeneity.

QUESTION: What about Indigenous people who come from mixed identities, are displaced and/or not enrolled Indigenous peoples? Are these people still Indigenous?

For me, the answer is the same. I think it's fair to say we're all mixed at this point, everybody has some ancestry from different lines and different, as we call them, races. You know, everybody in Kahnawà:ke, everybody in Anishinaabe Nation, it would be a very rare individual that doesn't have a white person somewhere in their background in this country, just because of colonization and the way it worked. The question is, what are the criteria of the Nation of people that the person claims to be from? Would that determine whether or not that's enough? What are the criteria that that Nation uses to determine whether or not they're a member? In Kahnawà:ke in effect it's half: four great grandparents. That's the amount of lineage you need to have to have an automatic membership in our community. To say that just because you have some Native background, that you are Native, that's racist and colonial, because it obscures the collective right of the Nation to determine their own membership.

The Cherokee Nation has no blood quantum requirement. You know, you could be 1/100 or, I don't know, 1/64 or something like that. As long as you have a single ancestor, it can be traced. That's different than our requirements that I just explained. But it's not for us to determine whether or not that person is Indigenous, period, instead of question mark just based on lineage, because we don't know what Nation that person's from. Yeah, they have Indigenous heritage. And that's maybe the distinction that needs to be made. If someone has Indigenous heritage, great, let them celebrate that. Let them talk about it however they want. Let them be proud of it. But whether they're a member of a Nation and Indigenous for the purpose of entitlements, benefits, legal status, leadership, being a spokesperson, that's up to that Nation to determine, not to a self-identified Indigenous person with some claim to heritage.

Transcribed and edited by Ann Rogers.