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# Adoption is (not) a Dirty Word: Towards an Adoption-centric Theory of Anishinaabeg Citizenship

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*This paper is dedicated to my grandmother, Geraldine MacLaurin-ba, who carried with her the adoption teachings taught to her by her father, Jacob Bannon-ba.*

## Abstract

*This paper argues that the resurgence of Indigenous peoples' citizenship orders can be informed in part by tenets of Indigenous customary adoption. The paper considers registration as an Indian under Canada's Indian Act as having conflated being "Indian" with a Eurocentric property-holder identity, which First Nations now internalize through band membership practices. As such, I argue that adoptees and customary adoption are seen as suspect because they challenge the blood- and property-based conceptions of what it means to be "Indian." Anishinaabeg customary adoption is taken up here in an analytical approach to re-thinking how citizenship could be discerned in anti-colonial ways; specifically, I consider "caring for others" and the concept of "controlling our associations" in developing an adoption-centric theory of Anishinaabeg citizenship.*

For many Indigenous peoples in Canada, adoption has become a dirty word. The history of residential schools, the 60s Scoop and the on-going issue of child and family services organizations placing Indigenous children in non-native homes has not helped its reputation; placed against the realization that Canada is a settler colonial state (Barker, 2009), and that settler colonial states are intent on replacing Indigenous peoples (Wolfe, 2006), it becomes clear that the out-adoption of Indigenous children into non-native homes is but a tool in the larger process of assimilating Indigenous peoples into the whitestream.

However, there is another site at which adoption is derogated. Through the racialization of Indigeneity, First Nation band membership regimes have often marginalized adoption as a basis for officially belonging with Indian bands. Band membership codes often reflect an over emphasis on blood lines, something stemming from Canada's *Indian Act*. Being "Indian" has become in commonsensical ways the pre-requisite for being

a citizen of Indigenous nations (see, for example, A. Simpson, 2009, p. 118). Adoption, because it inherently suggests the possibility of belonging without direct biological connection, is suspect here as it can challenge the biologization of Indigenous citizenship and identity; benefits meant for First Nations, such as treaty rights, Aboriginal rights to hunt and fish, exemption from certain taxation, and access to education funding, are regulated in such a way that privileges one's claim to registration as an Indian under Canada's *Indian Act* (see, Woodward, 1989, pp. 44–47; Palmater, 2011, p. 19). Therefore, adopted individuals that lay claim to belonging with and participating in Indigenous communities/nations, especially those people not recognized as Indians by Canada, become, to borrow from Audra Simpson (2014), “indecipherable” because they are “somewhere outside of the space of social and genealogical reckoning” (p. 16).

On a more conceptual level, the colonization or racialization of Indigenous peoples' adoption traditions helps to erase Indigenous citizenship orders. As someone who actively works with band membership codes and First Nation Chief and Councils, adoption as a means of belonging with a First Nation community is sometimes accepted only so far as racialized notions of Indigeneity allow. We might see little resistance when an “Indian” child is adopted by a First Nation band, suggesting a homogenizing approach to how bands discern their “membership.” Taking this a step further, to say that “Indians” cannot adopt “white” children, “black” children, “Asian” children, etc., is to rely on and reify reductionist approaches to ethnicity and cultural background (there *is no* white person, or black person, just as there is no “Indian” in the way Canada uses the term, as these are social constructions (Andersen, 2014, p. 15; Bannerji, 2000, pp. 36–37; Sium, 2013). To honour such interpellated categories of identity in the context of Indigenous citizenships would be aid the re-alignment of Indigenous constitutional orders in ways amenable to Canada's claims to territorial sovereignty (see, Andersen, 2014, p. 31). Such a claim to land relies on the disappearance of Indigenous peoples not only in a physical sense, but goes deeper to include the erasure of Indigenous peoples' constitutional orders (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 598; Coulthard, 2014, p. 4), of which citizenship is part. Broadly, this removal of Indigeneity, both physical and constitutional, results not only in the opening of Indigenous lands for the on-going process of “settlement,” but also in “anomie,” a state of alienation causing “serious substance abuse problems, suicide and interpersonal violence” (Alfred, 2009, p. 49. Also see Palmater, 2011, p. 177).

That said, centering teachings that underpin customary adoption when discerning who belongs with Indigenous nations challenges said erasure(s). For example, in this paper customary adoption is defined to mean the conscious decision to care for a person, be it a child, adult or elder, who is not directly biologically related, but who has displayed a need for familial support and protection (see: Auger, 2001, pp. 177–202). Such practice does not result in the filiation or “ownership” of the adoptee in that the adoptee's freedom to choose between their adoptive and natural family is protected (Auger, 2001, pp. 200–201; Gilbert, 1996, pp. 79–80; Keewatin, 2004, pp. 15–19; Working Group on Customary Adoption in Aboriginal Communities, 2012, p. 20). Ultimately, “[t]he purpose of customary adoption is to protect and fully include children in families and in communities” (Gilbert, 1996, p. 69), though it can also manifest in younger people adopting older people and Elders (Onabigan as cited in Neil, 2005, p. 284). Considering citizenship with Indigenous nations through such a definition is a productive exercise because it reminds us that Indigenous citizenship orders are not based on blood or Indian status (RCAP, 1996b, pp. 251–263). Anishinaabeg citizenship orders are similarly fluid, and go so far as to include those who belong through

birth, marriage and adoption (Borrows, 2011, p. 158; Doerfler, 2013, p. 184). But in forgetting this fluidity and adopting solely a blood-line approach to belonging, our citizenship orders are narrowed in ways that “dis-member” our nations (Absolon & Willet, 2005, p. 100). By one estimate, millions of people have been removed from belonging with their nations because of an overemphasis on blood quantum<sup>1</sup> and patrilineal descent (Lawrence, 2004, p. 56). In that sense, citizenship orders, band membership regimes etc. that do not include adoption as grounds for fully belonging with Indigenous peoples today obscure the full range *sui generis* legal orders that can be used to “re-member” our families, communities and nations.

I see this irony all too well as someone who belongs with the Anishinaabeg nation through customary adoption but to this day is denied membership in my band due to racialized notions of Indigeneity. I was adopted into my reserve, Fort William First Nation, in 1980 when I was an infant. My father, Art MacLaurin, adopted me into his family according to the teachings his mother, Geraldine MacLaurin-ba, learned from her childhood when, in turn, her father adopted children into the family when he married a woman not from the reserve. Similarly, my adoption took place in the context of marriage; my father took me in as his own before he married my biological mother. Rather than looking at this as a circumstance of “marrying in,” I see it as my community adopting both my mother and I through the practices of family-making (Gilbert, 1996, pp. 69–73). Yet, I was never registered as an “Indian” under the *Indian Act*; and so today, though I fully belong with my community according to Anishinaabeg law, the racialization of what it means to be an “Indian” bars me from fully participating in things like band elections and “officially” living on my reserve.

In this paper, therefore, I argue that an adoption-centric theory of belonging shifts the emphasis in discerning citizenship within Indigenous nations away from a narrow focus on blood lines towards a citizenship practice that emphasizes inclusivity of *all* who rightfully belong. To demonstrate this, and because I write from the position of being Anishinaabe, I discuss specifically Anishinaabeg conceptualizations of belonging and identity as found in the literature and through some of my lived experiences—a methodology acceptable within Anishinaabeg and Indigenist research paradigms (Dumont, 1976; Martin, 2003; L. Simpson, 2000). I demonstrate that blood quantum-based approaches to discerning belonging have supplanted Anishinaabeg citizenship practices in commonsensical ways within Anishinaabe Indian bands in the Robinson-Superior Treaty territory, where my First Nation is located. I then move on to developing a limited theory of citizenship informed by adoption practices, specifically drawing on two key tenets: an obligation to care for others, and the concept that adoption and citizenship both necessitate and rely on Anishinaabeg controlling their associations with others.

## Anishinaabeg Citizenship: Behaviour, not Blood

In her 2007 dissertation, *Fictions and Factions: Reconciling Citizenship Regulations with Cultural Values Among the White Earth Anishinaabeg*, Anishinaabe scholar Jill Doerfler demonstrates how Anishinaabeg of northwestern Minnesota conceptualized identity and what it meant to belong at the White Earth Reservation. Her study focuses on the era leading up to the time when blood quantum

1 While Canada’s “Indian” policies no longer explicitly mention “blood quantum,” Palmater (2011, p. 19) has argued that they continue to do so in a “notional” sense. For brevity, I use the term “blood quantum” in this paper with Palmater’s valuable critique in mind.

based logics of discerning Indian-ness and tribal enrolment were to come into effect. Agents of the U.S. government brought with them to the reservation concepts of Indianness based on scientific measurements—Indianness, and therefore who could belong with the tribe and who could sell off tribal lands, was bound up in the measure of Indian blood found in a given person's veins and family trees. They discussed this approach with those who laid claim to belonging at White Earth.

Doerfler's (2007) work is important to this discussion because it shows that belonging, according to the people of White Earth at the time, was imagined along the lines of behaviour. Her discussion takes up a tension between how U.S. agents imagined "Indian" identities and how Anishinaabeg resisted their system of identity interpellation. In being forced to explain to the agents how Anishinaabeg understood identity, Anishinaabeg individuals co-opted blood based analogies to discuss citizenship in ways that challenge the notion that biology determines belonging:

For example, George Morrison argued that there was no designation of who was "full-blood" and who was "mixed-blood" among the Anishinaabeg until the question of land titles became tied to these identities. He asserted that all those who lived with the Anishinaabeg were considered "full-bloods," due to their way of living. ... [I]t was lifestyle and not blood that determined who was an Indian (Doerfler, 2007, p. 60).

As Doerfler (2007) goes on to show, this approach to discerning belonging is based on categories "fluid and open to interpretation," rather than being based on "fixed racial definitions proposed by the [U.S. agents]" (69). Community acceptance—what I would call the process of discerning citizenship—was (and is) based on lifestyle choices and a willingness to carry responsibilities that, in being lived out, cared for the collective (L. Simpson, 2008, p. 74).

This emphasis on behaviour is key to Anishinaabeg citizenship. John Kegedonce Borrows (2011, p. 79) has argued that Anishinaabeg citizenship is not based on race, but on the concept of *daebinaewiziwin*, or duty and rights, where the highest goal is to maintain balance. The emphasis on maintaining balance by carrying responsibilities supports the claim that citizenship in Anishinaabeg nations is based on more than just blood. While one can have 50% First Nation blood according to blood mathematics, this does not necessarily bear on the degree to which she fulfills her responsibilities to family, clan, and community. One is not 50% responsible; she either is or she is not.

I adopt in this paper a conceptualization of citizenship that Kegedonce shared with me. In an email to me, he wrote that the term *dibenindizowin* resonates with the idea that a person possesses self-determination within themselves and their relationships, and how this liberty connects self-determination to Anishinaabe citizenship law. "Freedom has *sui generis*, property-like connotations in the Ojibwe language," he wrote. "It implies that a free person owns, is responsible for, and controls how they interact with others. The same root word can be used to describe someone who is member of a group; thus the Anishinaabe term for citizen is *dibenjigaazowin*: he or she who owns, is responsible for, or controls their associations" (Borrows, personal communication, 2014).<sup>2</sup>

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2 Cited with permission from Dr. Borrows.

It is this element of behaviour, namely being responsible for controlling one's associations, that resonates with both adoption and citizenship orders within Anishinaabeg law. In both, the party with the ability to care for another chooses whether or not to make a person belong (Auger, 2001, p. 197). It is driven by fulfilling an obligation to care for others and to maintain balance, which might entail bringing new people into a family or community to fill gaps in families or skill sets. Discerning belonging in this sense emphasizes connection rather than a conception of Indian identity based on the arbitrariness of bloodlines, and thereby opens possibilities for imagining citizenships through the "totality of our connections" (Palmater, 2011, p. 189). I return to this and the concept of *dibenjigaazowin* in a moment. Next, however, I will discuss some of the main impediments to Anishinaabeg citizenship orders today, as this will help us see why an adoption-centric theory of citizenship is relevant.

## Conflations

The descriptions of belonging and discerning citizenship discussed above differ greatly from the way Canada wishes to define who can belong with "Indians." For Canada, it does not matter whether one is Anishinaabeg, Nēhiyáw, or Kanien'kehá:ka; what matters is whether one is an "Indian" according to its laws. Put bluntly, there is no room for discerning belonging based on behaviour within the framework of blood quantum.

To be an "Indian" in Canada is largely a matter of whether one has "Indian" blood. More than a century of living under the *Indian Act*, with its racialized and gendered constructions of who is an "Indian," has produced conceptions of belonging that privilege race, blood, sex and stereotypes of Indianness over the values of relationships, responsibilities and kinship (Lawrence, 2004; Palmater, 2011). Unfortunately, First Nations have been forced into discerning belonging in ways dictated by the state (see, A. Simpson, 2009, p. 118). The "terminal creeds" of race and blood-based definitions of belonging remove individuals from their families, communities by hijacking family-making practices so that belonging gets defined along ever-thinning lines of Indian blood (Vizenor, 1990, p. 189). This process of removal is referred to by Palmater (2011, pp. 46–47) as "legislative extinction" in that it reduces the number of First Nations peoples recognized in Canadian law, to the point that there are no "Indians" left. For example, Clatworthy's (2007, pp. 14–29) demographic research shows that the number individuals eligible for registration as "Indians" born to Anishinaabeg First Nation communities in the Robinson-Superior Treaty will decrease to critically low numbers within the next two to four generations. Historically, the *Indian Act* and its notional blood quantum has torn Indigenous families and communities apart by removing from First Nations those women intermarried with non-Indians (whether the men were of Indigenous ancestry or not) and the children of these partnerships (Lawrence, 2004, p. 49).

However, identity regulation bound up in Canadian settler colonialism is not just about removing Indigenous peoples in a physical sense. Rather, it also includes removing Indigenous constitutional orders from the land (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 598). This critique of the structural nature of settler colonialism allows us to account for the ways in which Indigenous constitutional orders get bound up in attacks on Indigenous peoples as a whole; while individuals are being removed from the land, so are their *sui generis* legal systems. Seen in this light, the interpellation of Anishinaabeg into "Indians" is also an attack on Anishinaabeg citizenship law because it undermines the legal system Anishinaabeg use to determine who

belongs. In effect, Anishinaabeg citizenship orders that discerned belonging along the lines of behaviour, lifestyle and responsibility to family, are structurally replaced with racialized, gendered logics of Indianness.

A closer look at this structural supplantation reveals a critique of Indianness that deepens the relevance of an adoption-centric theory of Anishinaabeg citizenship. I would argue that the key to this sleight of hand is that Indianness has been imagined as a type of property-based identity in Canadian law. As James Blaut (1993, p. 158) points out, the emergence of class in British history is co-constitutive with the establishment of blood-based rights to property. Here, blood was chosen as a way to discern who had rights to accumulated property in the form of inheritance. It provided the wealthy with a means by which to ensure their wealth stayed within the family (Blaut, 1993, pp. 157–159). The boundaries of the family were thus constructed and used in the project of property acquisition and protection. Likewise, Indigeneity was interpellated in ways that inculcated Indianness with property. Lockean property ownership was seen by the colonialists as the yard stick of being civilized. According to Locke (1821), “those who are counted among the civilized” are those who, by their “*labour* ... [remove property] out of that common state nature left it in” (p. 212. *Emphasis original*). In what would become Canada, such approaches to property and property ownership “became the foundation of the civilization program, outlining a formal policy based on establishing Indians in fixed locations where they could be educated, converted to Christianity and *transformed into farmers*” (RCAP, 1996a, p. 265. *Emphasis added*). This property-based understanding of Indigeneity continues to present interpretive challenges today in discussion about competing Indigenous vs. Canadian constitutional orders (Turpel, 1989-1990, p. 23), a competition which includes discussions on how Indigeneity is to be discerned.

Understood against this backdrop, First Nation blood is not only a biologized metaphor for interpellated Indigeneity; it takes on a deeper meaning that is productive when assessing adoption’s impact on reclaiming Indigenous citizenship orders. First Nations and First Nation lands share the same station in Canada’s grand vision for the conversation of all things Indigenous: they are both property-(holders)-in-making, with the ultimate goal always being to own and exploit land as Canadians do (see, A. Simpson, 2014, p. 152). Put differently, “Indians” and “Indian land” are both meant to eventually enter into Canadian society (see, Altamirano-Jiménez, 2004, pp. 353–361). Blood is the index by which both transit this journey: the more diluted the blood, the closer Canada gets to relinquishing its “protective” responsibilities to Indigenous nations, and the closer it gets to complete exploitation of Indigenous territories (Palmater, 2011, p. 47).

This property-based identity has carried through into band membership-based logics of belonging. Algonquin lawyer Larry Gilbert (1996) argues that the most basic function of being registered as a First Nation person under the *Indian Act* is to enjoy the land held in trust for Indigenous peoples by the Government of Canada. “The right to band membership and the right to hold, use or enjoy the lands and other immovable property belonging to or appropriated to the use of the relevant tribe, band or body of Indians,” he writes, “are the most important rights flowing from the federal definition of an ‘Indian’” (Gilbert, 1996, p. 76). I am reminded of the quote from Morrison above (as cited in Doerfler, 2007, p. 60), where he noted that First Nation blood only became an issue once tied to property. This has largely translated to the reserve-level. As of 2005, of the 11 Anishinaabeg communities within the Robinson-

Superior Treaty territory that had opted to control membership under s. 10 of the Act, nearly all were still using race-based logics to discern belonging (Clatworthy, 2010, p. 9).

The problem with such an approach to conceptualizing national belongings is that it is constituted by hierarchies of property ownership that are predicated more on exclusion and exclusive use than inclusion and maintaining connections to people and land regardless of biological connectivity. As a result, First Nations bands have come to discern “band membership” in ways based on protecting the meagre resources allotted to them by a government interested only in their assimilation.

This marginalizes both Anishinaabeg citizenship orders and adoptees. Those who rightfully belong according to Indigenous citizenship laws, but otherwise do not qualify for band membership or registration as a First Nation person under the *Indian Act*, are seen as illegitimate or otherwise dispensable community members. Likewise, adoptees, in the face of a white supremacist, settler colonial Canada have also come to be seen as illegitimate “Indians” precisely because their “blood” does not fit into the conventional view on who has a claim to benefits reserved for Indians. However, it is precisely adoption’s *incommensurability* with Canada’s racialized regulation of First Nation identity that tips off its power in asserting anti-colonial Indigenous citizenship orders. Indeed, it is this incommensurability that speaks to the existence of Indigenous constitutional orders, and their continued competition with Canadian law (see, Turpel, 1989-1900). I turn now to one of those orders now and how it guides Anishinaabeg citizenship practice from a *sui generis* source.

## Adoption in Anishinaabeg Creation Story

Basil Johnston (2008 [1976]), an Anishinaabeg knowledge holder, language expert and philosopher, describes how adoption is deeply rooted in Anishinaabeg political and citizenship orders. In *Ojibway Heritage*, he discusses part of the Anishinaabeg creation story, where animal nations adopted the first humans when they were new and helpless (Johnston, 2008 [1976], pp. 15–16). As the Earth was being made, sky-women was invited to the earth by the animals, who pitied her because she was alone (Johnston, 2008 [1976], pp. 13–14). After a time, she gave birth to two children, a boy and a girl. The children were the weakest beings on Earth, and they needed help in order to survive. Johnston recounts their adoption:

In the first year, the animal beings nourished and nurtured the infants and the spirit woman. For all their needs the spirit woman and her children depended upon the care and goodwill of the animals. ...

The first winter in the life of the Anishnabeg was an ordeal. Food was scarce; the winds were harsh. The infants grew sick and lost strength daily. It seemed that they would not survive... With bear’s sweet flesh, the infants survived. The death of the bear encompassed life for the new beings. Thereafter, the other animals sacrificed their lives for the good of [humans]. ... In gratitude and fondness they dedicated a prayer to the other animals, “I had need.” Men and women survive and live because of the death of their elder brothers. (Johnston, 2008, pp. 15–16)

The infants relied on the animals, and in turn the animals made the choice to bring the humans into their families.

Discussed in terms of adoption, meeting a “need” might take the form of sharing shelter and food with children who have lost their parents, or whose biological parents may be unable to care for them (Auger, 2001, pp. 197–201). Don Auger-ba, in his 2001 dissertation, *The Northern Ojibwe and Their Family Law*, discusses adoption within Anishinaabe law as a way to care for others; this element is an “obligation” that Anishinaabeg carry:

[I]f a member of a family was in need of something, he could depend upon the other members of his family to assist him in his time of need. This assistance might consist of the provisions of foodstuffs, shelter, looking after children or adults for periods of time, or looking after children and adults on a permanent basis. ... [O]ne of the most important aspects of life among the members of the study group was the concept of sharing. This concept imposed obligations on every person within the Ojibwe world, whether human, other-than-human, or a spirit. (Auger, 2001, p. 178)

It is this obligation to care for others that drives Anishinaabeg citizenship orders. For example, the animals in Johnston’s telling of the Creation Story found this obligation in the form of the animals making the choice to care; they had the knowledge about how to survive, which gave them the ability to take in and raise the humans. Based on that ability, they made the choice to care for the humans—they had the means to do so. And while it may seem like they had no choice (as they had an obligation), they could have chosen to neglect the humans—something they chose to do later when the humans acted irresponsibly towards the animal nations (Johnston 2008 [1976], pp. 56–57). In other words, they regulated their associations fluidly through self-determination.

Deciding our associations is where adoption and citizenship orders intersect. That choice is the basic element to Anishinaabeg self-determination. The decision to form associations with a family or community deemed important to the overall health and well-being of the nation is part of Anishinaabeg citizenship orders. Citizenship in this sense is also about meeting the needs of the nation. By contrast, band membership and First Nation status have historically left little choice for Indigenous peoples to discern who belongs. I turn now to expanding on how the lessons learned from choice and adoption can inform Anishinaabeg citizenship orders.

## An Adoption-Centric Theory of Citizenship

Scott Lyons (2010) has argued that “citizenship criteria say a great deal about the nation’s character: what it values, what it believes, and what it promotes” (p. 174). The values deployed when citizenship is informed by adoption include those of caring for others and embodying the self-determination in determining our associations. If, as Lyons (2010) argues, *[c]itizenship criteria produce the meanings of the nation*” (p. 174, emphasis original), these values establish a citizenship order with the capability to include all those who rightfully belong. As an adoptee, this is what I want to see my nation base its citizenship on, rather than the fiscal expediency of the state.



What Johnston's story about the animal nations adopting humans tells me is that belonging is based on more than just phenotype. The human beings looked different than, say, bear, moose or otter; however, they were cared for by them and, through that, belonged with them. This element can be extended to address Anishinaabeg citizenship now, in a context where racialized notions of being "Indian" have been forced upon Anishinaabeg nations as the pre-requisite for belonging. This does not mean I am advocating a colour-blind approach to Anishinaabeg citizenship; indeed white supremacy needs to be eradicated in the resurgence of Anishinaabeg citizenship orders.<sup>3</sup> Rather, as both Johnston's (2008 [1976]) story and Doerfler's (2007) work on viewing belonging as a matter of behaviour and caring for others shows, milk is thicker than blood. What matters is who we care for, to whom we give responsibilities, and who rightfully belongs.

Kegeдонce's concept of *dibenjigaazowin*—or "he or she who owns, is responsible for, or controls their associations"—twins with the concept of adoption to produce a citizenship order based on making relatives and citizens through the sharing of resources and responsibilities. Sharing in this way creates bonds and reciprocal relationships. In both, self-determination remains intact: choosing who to care for at the family level is the same type of self-determination needed in discerning citizenship at the national level, namely, a self-determination based on controlling our associations that includes all those who rightfully belong. This is what speaks to me as an adoptee. I can see myself in such a story.

In an article on constitutional reform among the White Earth Anishinaabeg, Doerfler (2013) shares a story that speaks to *dibenjigaazowin* and adoption. Her review of Anishinaabe writer Ignatia Broker's work shows us that stories about adoption unfold and centre tenets that, though based in family-making, also facilitate belonging within the broader community and nation:

After her mother had passed on, Oona asked her paternal grandparents why her mother never spoke about her family or home. They informed her that her grandfather had found Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe [Oona's mother] when he was out checking his snares. A child and another woman with her were dead. The family never questioned Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe about her past; they fully accepted and integrated her into their community. She was a fellow human being in need of help, and Oona's grandfather and the rest of the community took her in and made her a part of their family (Doerfler, 2013, p. 183).

This, to me, unfolds the values of sharing, caring for others and controlling our associations, and full inclusion. Though not fully discussed in this short paper, each of these values could be interpreted in ways that inform Anishinaabeg citizenship.

Eva Marie Garroutte and Kathleen Westcott (2013, p. 75) argue that the effects of the stories themselves are more important than the component parts of sacred stories; what matters is what the stories *do*. What an adoption-centric theory of citizenship *does* is to center Anishinaabeg sovereignty in discerning who belongs while also de-centering it away from band membership regimes. First, adoption *re-centers* decision making power in the family, community and nation. As Coulthard's (2014) discussions on the politics of recognition in Canada suggest, this re-centering is an anti-colonial act because it gives primacy

3 White supremacy and whiteness can be linked to the expropriation of lands. "Whiteness" here is a worldview, to which Anishinaabeg as well as others can subscribe.

to Anishinaabeg legal orders rather than giving our sovereignty away to a state uninterested in Indigenous self-determination. It empowers us to look to sacred stories to guide our citizenship practices, rather than continuing to decipher the limited potential for self-governance under Canadian laws.

Second, adoption also *de-centers* decision making in that it reminds us that First Nation bands are *not* the arbiters of Anishinaabeg citizenship. First Nation bands (and band membership codes) are creations of the *Indian Act*. As such, they promote a centralizing type of power that runs counter to the emergent and de-centralized nature of the Anishinaabeg clan system and family-based governance. Adoption takes place at the family level; this reminds us that families renew the nation through adoption, birth and marriage. Anti-colonial approaches to citizenship are thus those that can accommodate the decentralized nature of clan-inspired governance.

## Conclusion

In 1985, Canada amended its *Indian Act* after years of political activism led by Indigenous women (see, Lawrence, 2004, pp. 56–63). One of the changes instituted was to establish adoption as grounds for entitlement to registration as an “Indian” (*Indian Act*, 1985, s.2). This reversed a decision made 134 years earlier, when adoption was removed from the earliest colonial legislation regulating Indigenous belonging (see, Isaac, 1993: pp. 40–41, p. 47). However, the damage has been done; adoption as grounds for belonging with Indigenous nations has become a dirty word in commonsensical ways for many people today.

That said, the purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate some of the decolonial power enfolded into Anishinaabeg adoption practices. I have argued above that adoption inherently challenges the blood quantum-based identity and belonging narratives laid out for Indigenous peoples by Canada. Whereas band membership regimes and “Indian status” are meant to prepare “Indians” to own property, an adoption-centric order of citizenship demands that we discern citizenship in ways conducive to maintaining balance and continuous renewal. This requires self-determination rather than external regulation.

Indigenous peoples are more than just bloodlines; they are self-determining nations whose families decide who belongs and who does not. Yet, family-making has been hijacked by the *Indian Act*. It is not that blood lines are inherently “bad” or “colonial;” what makes them so in the Canadian context is that biological descent has been weaponized against Indigenous peoples in that it has become the narrow basis upon which Indianness is recognized. An adoption-centric theory of citizenship demonstrates the brutality of the weaponization of blood lines: those who rightfully belong according to Anishinaabeg law are being wrongfully excluded from fully participating in their nations and communities.

This paper has been bound by certain limitations. I have not taken up other elements of adoption in order to focus on how caring for others and determining our associations can inform the inclusion of people who rightfully belong. Johnston’s (2008 [1976], pp. 46–58) discussion about animal nations disowning humans has resonance in terms of establishing how one can lose citizenship or be banished. Likewise, adoption is not the only family-making practice that could inform the resurgence of Anishinaabeg citizenship orders. The values and principles underpinning Anishinaabeg marriage and birthing traditions could be equally relevant to discussions on the resurgence of Indigenous citizenship order. I wrote about

adoption because I was adopted into my nation. A longer or different reflection could take up these other possibilities in productive ways.

The arguments shared in this paper represent where I currently am in my thinking about an adoption-centric theory of Anishinaabeg citizenship—the main focus of my PhD research. I am sure that my perspectives will change over time. Here, I have taken the concept of customary adoption, and considered how some of the values underpinning it can inform the resurgence of Anishinaabeg citizenship orders. Adoption can be a form of political self-determination when the self-determination of Indigenous families is respected in discerning who belongs with their respective nation (Carrière, 2005, p. 24; Gilbert, 1996, p. 69). There is a need to re-imagine what belonging and “citizenship” within Indigenous nations means today. It is my hope that this paper lends something to that broader discussion.

## Thank You

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