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**Thesis for the Degree of Ph.D., 2014**

**Louis Riel, Justice, and Métis Self-Identification:  
Literary Politics for Survival in the Evolution of  
Canadian Nationhood**

**I, Robin White, declare this thesis to be entirely my own original work.**

## **Abstract of Thesis**

This thesis explores Métis identity in the context of the ambiguous nature of the Canadian national identity, and in particular, how the Louis Riel ‘Rebellions’ of 1869-70 and 1885, continue to resonate in contemporary Métis literature. While it is the case that the Métis have self-identified within their own communities since the seventeenth century, it is also the case that the legal definition and recognition of the Métis were not realized until 1982. Indeed, the fine points of law in the Canadian Constitution are still in dispute, not least because the Métis were not included in the initial signing of treaties with the Dominion of Canada. For the purposes of this thesis, it is first necessary to engage in a thorough examination of historical accounts of the resistance of the Métis against expansionist encroachment of the Dominion of Canada in the Northwest in order to trace the source and evolution of contemporary Métis literature. I consider the ways in which the literary texts of Métis authors confront racial and cultural prejudice that are the direct result of Constitutional law, charters of rights, legislation in the judicial system, and the eleven Confederation numbered treaties, drafted before, during and after the Riel Resistances.

The introductory and first chapters include contemporary Métis historical and legal academic analyses of the ‘Rebellions’ and an exploration of how the Government of Canada’s response in 1885 to the Métis uprising continues to inform its legal positions concerning Métis land rights and self-identification, while striving to maintain an international reputation as politically, and ethically, just. In the following chapters, this thesis analyses the literary texts of Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, and Gregory Scofield, all of who write of the complexities of defining Métis self-identification and maintaining sovereignty in light of the effects on their generations of Euro-Canadian historical accounts of the Riel ‘Rebellions’.

## **Acknowledgements**

In memory of my mother, Marguerite Irene White (née Erwin), whose love, kindness, laughter, and stories sustain and keep me.

And in memory of my aunt, Lorraine ‘Lori’ Lenore Bruner (née White), whose spirit and strength continues to inspire.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Padraig Kirwan, for his unwavering and sensitive support. I am grateful for his inspirational critical approach, generosity, good humour, and friendship.

I am thankful to the supportive staff, both administrative and academic, at Goldsmiths, University of London, who helped to make my research a rewarding experience.

Many thanks to Lucy Humphries, Sharon Holm, FRAJ (Fiona Werge, Andrea Tilouche, and June Lawrence), Rebecca Lynne, Diane Andrews, Paulina Palmer, Anne Jobin, and Simon Loxton whose support, friendship and laughter saw me through some testing moments.

I am indebted to my family in Canada (and Lorraine in London), who made sure that I knew that they championed me. Thank you to my father, Percy; our many transatlantic phone calls always lifted my spirits. A special thank you to my sister Irene Davies who enthusiastically trawled Toronto and national newspapers for articles that might contribute to my thesis; above and beyond. I would also like to express appreciation to my brother-in-law, Ray Davies, who shared with me his findings about my family that he uncovered in various Canadian archives.

I am also grateful to Gene Nadeau whose photos and care of MMM meadow in Baker Brook, New Brunswick cheered me no end.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Pat Brooks, and daughters Tilly and Kate, for their nourishing support, and love.

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## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

The words *Métis* and *mixedblood* possess no social or scientific validation because blood mixture is not a measurement of consciousness, culture, or human experiences; but the word *Métis* is a source of notable and radical identification. Louis Riel, for example, one of the great leaders of the *Métis*, declared a new mixedblood nation in the last century. He was convicted of “high treason” and executed.

Gerald Vizenor (*Earthdivers*, ix)

Although the legal definition and recognition of the *Métis* was not realized until 1982, *Métis* self-identification was clear within the communities themselves since the seventeenth century. However, the fine points of law in the Canadian Constitution are still in dispute, not least because the *Métis* “did not, as a collective, take treaty” (Teillet, “Winds of Change”, 67). The debates surrounding *Métis* identity and how it is defined are best answered by the *Métis* people independently and autonomously. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 ended the dominance of the French in North America and by the early nineteenth century, the *Métis* were specific and separate from First Nations and other mixed blood people. *Métis* communities were established as early as 1600 on the east coast of Canada when French fur traders were being supplied by, mainly, the Mi’kmaq and Maliseet tribes. By 1768 a distinctive population of *Métis* developed in the far Northwest and British Columbia as the fur trade moved west. The representation and self-representation of the *Métis* Nation and people followed separate arcs; scholarly historical accounts from outside the *Métis* community were non-existent until France’s Marcel Giraud’s erudite *Le Métis canadien: son rôle dans l’histoire des provinces de l’Ouest* was published in 1945 (translated by George Woodcock and published in English as *The Métis in the Canadian West* in 1986). However, by 1909 (only twenty-four years after the second *Métis* Resistance in 1885) *Métis* who had been part of Riel’s community in the North West founded the Union

Nationale Métisse St.-Joseph de Manitoba. They did so, primarily, to gather oral testimonies of events that led up to the Resistances of 1869-70 and 1885, and to comment on their consequences. This was a considerable achievement given the demoralization of a forcibly dispersed community stripped of land and status. The *Histoire de la Nation Métisse* was published in 1936 and provoked considerable controversy as it was the first published Métis view of the Riel Resistances and was a resolute defence of Louis Riel and the Métis community. In official terms, the Canadian Department for Indian and Northern Affairs refers to the Constitution Act, 1982, s. 35 (2) in order to identify “aboriginal peoples of Canada” and recognizes three distinct groups: Indians, Inuit, and Métis peoples. (*Aboriginal Rights*) Yet it was not until 1982 – the year of the Constitution Act that amended the British North American Act of 1867 – that the *Histoire de la Nation Métisse* was translated into English by Elizabeth Maguet as *Hold High Your Head*, advancing the creation of a space for Métis voices to be heard amongst the dominant Euro-Canadian, English speaking populace of Canada.<sup>1</sup>

The complexities of self-identification for the Métis are hampered by a long history of governmental interference, which has created tensions between the Euro-Canadian, First Nations and Métis population. The etymological progression of the term ‘métis’ into what is now the controversial ‘Métis’, has been a linguistic, social and political development. The term métis, as used by Giraud in 1945, was commonly used by French speakers in reference to offspring of First Nations and Euro-Canadian parentage, but more particularly to the Cree and French-speaking descendants of the Red River Métis. The word ‘métis’ then came to signify any individual of mixed First

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<sup>1</sup> The Métis authors, Bruce Sealey and Antoine Lussier’s, published in English, *The Métis: Canada’s Forgotten People* – the first extensive explication of the Métis as a people – in 1975.

Nation and Euro-Canadian ancestry – who self-identifies as such, and did not identify as either First Nations or Euro-Canadian – across Canada and the northern border states of the United States. With the amendments to the Indian Act in 1876 the Métis of Manitoba lost Indian status and so were referred, usually detrimentally, as ‘mixed-bloods’, ‘breeds’, ‘halfbreeds,’ ‘michif’, ‘métis’, or ‘non-status Indian’.

In 1885 at Batoche on the Saskatchewan River, Louis Riel, spokesman and defender of Métis rights, led his New Nation against the Dominion of Canada’s expansionism and suppression of Métis self-government. At their defeat, the Métis were again broadly referred to in print as ‘métis’. The change in reference to Métis, for the most part, happened somewhat sporadically even after the Constitution Act of 1982, s. 35. (2), which refers to Métis people *as* ‘Métis’ (and can be read legally – although this is being challenged in several provinces – as referring to Métis from across Canada and not just the prairie province communities). The essays (if not the essayists), in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, published in 1985, uniformly, whether Métis writers or not, apply the word ‘métis’ unless it is to describe official bodies as in “The Alberta Métis Association”. The editors Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown relate their discussion on how this was decided:

...for the sake of editorial consistency, the term is lower-cased throughout, on the French model, since, in many or indeed most instances, authors are using the term for people whose inclusion in the Métis Nation would be problematic. [...] For the Métis National Council, the ‘Métis’ people form ‘a distinct indigenous nation with a history, culture and homeland in western Canada,’ consisting specifically of the descendants of those who were dispossessed by Canadian government actions from 1870 on. The Native Council of Canada, however, formed in 1971 ‘to represent the interests of the Métis and Non-Status Indian people across Canada’ uses ‘Métis’ more inclusively, arguing that those people ‘who base their claims on national rights rather than aboriginal rights [...] undermine the aboriginal rights of all Métis people.’ (The Métis Nation (Ottawa: Métis National Council, fall 1984) 1:6. On these issues, we can only warn that history is still being made. (*New Peoples*, 6)



Current debates in Canada regarding Métis identity centre on who *is* Métis in terms of both legal and cultural identity. However, there is considerable confusion over the word “Métis” in mainstream Canada, or as Emma LaRocque puts it “plain lack of knowledge.” (“Reflections” in *Restoring*, 150) LaRocque emphasises that the Métis, especially in the Red River area,

...though a unique ethnocultural group, are also Aboriginal, whose connection to Aboriginal is genetic, familial, linguistic, epistemological, and ecological. [The] prairies, perhaps especially the more central northern parts, are filled with Cree-Métis people who, of course, originate from both Europeans and Indians during the fur-trade era, but over time formed their own ethnicity (i.e., Métis marrying Métis) with a culture blended, yet distinct, from both groups. (“Reflections”, 150)

LaRocque writes that the small-m “métis” as opposed to the capitalized “Métis” has been used by some scholars to show ethnic differences between western, Red River Métis and various other Métis people across Canada. (172) The small ‘m’ métis, as LaRocque points out, does not delineate between race and geographically interconnected cultures/communities. I consider the utilization of the small ‘m’, whether as an editorial decision of some scholars to denote all or any self-identifying Métis as disrespectful to those with affiliations to the Historic Métis Nation and Homeland and to those outside of currently recognized Métis ancestry. The instance of using the lower case ‘m’ for those groups outside of Métis Nation and Homeland and upper case for those within these parameters reinforces a colonially inspired hierarchy of lesser and greater importance in identities.

Francoise Lionnet, drawing on the Martinican theorist Edouard Glissant’s interpretation of *métissage* (the result of colonial encounters), describes the term as the “braiding of cultural forms through the simultaneous revalorization of oral traditions and reevaluation of Western concepts [which] has led to the recovery of occulted histories.” (“Politics”, 325) In Canada, as Lionnet emphasizes, the word

*métissage* translates as half-breed or mixed-blood, denoting people “of French and Native American [sic] descent only.” (327) She describes these phrases as “always carry[ing] a negative connotation, precisely because they imply biological abnormality and reduce human reproduction to the level of animal breeding.” (327) Chris Anderson, in his essay “From Nation to Population: The Racialization of ‘Métis’” sees Canadian governmental racial constructions of what constituted Canadian citizenship as “deeply rooted in firm convictions about the (supposedly) unbridgeable gaps between ‘white’ and ‘red’ and ‘self’ and ‘other’. Such understandings position the term Métis as part Indian/First Nation.” (352) Andersen’s issue here is not that Métis ‘mixedness’ is erroneous, but that “biological, cultural and linguistic ‘mixedness’ constitute a social fact for *all* Aboriginal people, First Nations included, who reside in the Canadian nation-state (especially those involved in the fur trade).” (Emphasis original, 352) In other words, post-contact, all First Nations people could possibly be racially identified as ‘Métis’. Andersen calls for a definitive clarification over the political and cultural ambiguities surrounding the term ‘Métis’. He examines the history of Canadian administrative census categories and its resultant classification of the Red River Métis as a racialized “‘Indian-or-white’ dichotomy”. (353) Andersen describes section 35 of the 1982 Constitution Act, which formally specifies three constitutional categories (Indian, Inuit, and Métis) as signifying “more fiction than fact” since “historical and contemporary distinctions between Métis and Indian are not, nor have they ever been, so neat.” (352-53). Writing about her identity, Emma LaRocque says that she is Métis “and decidedly Aboriginal.” (“Reflections”, 151) Moreover, LaRocque writes that although the Métis were:

...excluded from the *Indian Act* and treaties, they were and remain primarily connected to Nehiyawewak (Cree-speaking people), who themselves speak or grew up with Nehiyawewin (Cree language). [...] [T]hese things are important to repeat because all the confusion, not to mention politics, surrounding the term

“métis” can obscure the Aboriginal rights of those Métis Nation peoples whose cultures are centrally indigenous and whose lives contribute to the cultural continuity of all Aboriginal peoples. (150)

Andersen argues that subsequent to the Métis defeat in 1885, the Canadian government “brushed aside classifications that signified Métis distinctiveness as a people” (“From Nation”, 353). He observes that what “appeared as a Census category in 1886, by 1906 the category slipped from the Census radar altogether such that over the next half century, those designated as ‘mixed-bloods’ were variously classified as Indian, white, ‘other’ and from time to time again as half-breed.” (353) Tracking Census categorisations between the late nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, Andersen comments that, “Census recognition of Métis individuals *as Métis* amounted to *non*-recognition.” (353) The ambiguity within government Census categorizations is a result of classifying, exclusively, Métis people as a race rather than as a Nation, as Andersen points out, for the purposes of assimilation into Canadian nationalism “at the cost of the meaningful cultivation of the Métis Nation’s.” (358) Andersen references the Métis National Council (MNC), which was formed after the “political turmoil following the 1982 Constitution Act” (150). He points out that the MNC drew the “boundaries of ‘Métis’ citizenship in Canadian society” but “did not purport to represent just any individual who self-identified as ‘Métis’ but, rather, only those self-identifying with the distinctive history, culture and memory of the Métis Nation and Homeland.” (350) In 2002 “the MNC finally defined the term ‘Métis’ to reflect these boundaries [...]:

...Métis means a person who self-identifies as a 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 ‘Historic Métis Nation Homeland’; [...] ‘Historic Métis Homeland’ means the area of land in west central north America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-Breeds as they were then known. (350-51).

Specifically, MNC considers the Métis Homeland as the “three Prairie Provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta), as well as parts of Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and the Northern United States”.

<http://www.metisnation.ca/index.php/who-are-the-metis>).

Canadian Census forms have four questions in relation to self-identification as First Nations people, whether or not they are registered as Status/ Non-Status or Treaty/Non-Treaty ‘Indians’. (Statistics Canada) The first query on the questionnaire asks the respondent (all Canadians are asked to participate in the Census) to answer “ID\_Q01”: “Are you an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit)?” If the respondent answers yes to self-identifying as First Nations/Indian, they are asked if they are a member of a “First Nation or Indian Band” (Stats Can). There are no further specificities asked of the respondent who self-identifies as Métis. Andersen sees in the past and current design of the Canadian census forms a deliberate “*empirical* manifestation” of “imagining community” (emphasis original, 354) that “encourages an analysis of ‘Métis’ population data as though a singular meaning actually exists”. Further, he is perturbed that the “inability of the census to differentiate between racial and national constructions of Métis raises so few eyebrows (government *or* Aboriginal) [which] must be seen as the result of a campaign of symbolic violence traceable back to the origins of the Canadian nation-state and its contemporaneous destruction of the Métis Nation.” (“From Nation”, emphasis original, 358) Andersen questions why the MNC has not put pressure on the Canadian government to clarify the boundaries between race and Nation: “After all, in a colonial place like Canada, if the Métis Nation’s own political representatives won’t police these boundaries, who will?” (360)

Andersen advocates the “drawing of boundaries around Métis identity to reflect a commitment to recognizing our nationhood” and criticizes those whose position supports inclusiveness of Métis whose origins lay outside the Métis Homeland. (“I’m Métis”, 164) He takes exception to self-identifying Métis “who forward claims using a Métis identity based not on a connection to Métis national roots but because it seems like the only possible option” (164-65). His support and allegiance is to “a nation with membership codes that deserve to be respected. We are not a soup kitchen for those disenfranchised by past and present Canadian Indian policy and, as such, although we should sympathize with those who bear the brunt of this particular form of dispossession, we cannot do so at expense of eviscerating our identity.” (165) In 2011, two years before writing the exclusivist views expressed above, Andersen proposed a “partial solution” or “middle ground” in relation to questions asked of self-identifying Métis on Canadian Census forms. As with the questions aimed at First Nations respondents who are given the option of subcategories to state particular band affiliations, Andersen suggested, “census makers could add sub-categorisations for Métis in future census questionnaires to reflect the different meanings it has come to encompass.” As an example, Andersen proposed a possible question that he considers comparable to the Métis Nation’s “definitional boundaries: Are you a member of the ‘Métis Nation’, i.e. the Aboriginal people whose ancestors historically self-identified as Métis and who resided in the Historic Métis Homeland of western Canada?”

(“From Nation”, 359) He maintained:

...this question possesses the virtue of recognising the Métis Nation as a distinctive indigenous nation without necessarily disallowing other groups from using the term Métis as a self-descriptor. Second, it parallels yet ‘tweaks’ a Métis National Council definition which emphasises external elements (‘the Aboriginal people *then known as* Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in Historic Métis Nation Homeland’) by focusing more specifically on what should be an obvious strategic starting point for a Métis national historical narrative, collective self-consciousness. (‘From Nation’, emphasis original, 359)

The inclusion of the adverb ‘necessarily’ before the transitive verb ‘disallowing’ renders Andersen’s suggestion not quite the ‘middle ground’ that he claims. While securing a more solid category (administratively) for the Métis of western Canada, it simultaneously preserves the exclusion of geographical and cultural specifics of self-identifying Métis outside these regions. Recognition of the Métis Nation in Historic Homelands is imperative and just, but so too are the separate and distinctive histories, culture and memories of self-identifying Métis across Canada. The groundbreaking Métis historian and scholar, Olive Patricia Dickason, in her essay “From One Nation” observes that the Métis in the Northeast and on the West Coast of Canada “appear to have developed along different lines” than that of the Red River Métis because of early government interference. (*New Peoples*, 21) In the seventeenth century the Northeast regions, then known as New France, were subject to government policies created in order to assimilate all mixed-blood people into French culture. Dickason notes that the West Coast “presents a separate picture, because contact there occurred much later [late eighteenth century] and because the French element, which was so important in the other regions, was severely reduced and had no political power.” (21) Assimilation policies in New France, Dickason points out, largely failed, “but what it did do was to set in motion a train of developments which eventually culminated in the emergence of the “New Nation” in the Far Northwest.” (31) The convergence of pressures from the expansion of the Dominion of Canada and a conscious politicized separate identity of the Métis “allowed for the development of a ‘New Nation’” (32).

At this thesis’ centre is an analysis of the effects of the Dominion of Canada’s encroachment west on the Métis Nations people of the Historical Homeland and its resonance in contemporary Métis literature. However, my arguments are not from an exclusionist position. Although Métis self-identification, included or restricted by

MNC boundaries, is complex and problematic, all Métis people's rights deserve recovery and reclamation of occulted histories, memories, and culture. As Daniel Heath Justice asks: "Why not an acknowledgement of diverse, separate, and distinct Métis Nations?" (Personal interview)

The Canadian Government's past and current endeavours to classify Native identities have further complications for Métis people. For both groups, community and communally accepted rules of identification were replaced by government policies that ignored kinship ties and enabled a system to fracture families whose various members could be bureaucratically identified as 'Métis', 'status Indian', 'non-status Indian', or 'Euro-Canadian'. In what Homi K. Bhabha describes as "racist stereotypical discourse", governmental policies can thrive under the power of recognizing "the difference of race, culture and history as elaborated by stereotypical knowledges, racial theories, administrative colonial experience, and on that basis institutionalize a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, [and] discriminatory" (*Location*, 83). However, today's urban Métis face a difficult struggle in negotiating between the dominant cultures' external prescripts of identity on one hand, and First Nation and Native American commentators who regard First Nation and Native American tribal lands and reserves as the only 'authentic' location of indigenous culture, on the other. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn of the Crow Creek Sioux tribe considers urban mixed-bloods to be non-tribal as she views them as disassociated from traditions such as spiritual connection to the land. Cook-Lynn writes that the "métis" were a source of:

...much hatred and violence within tribal groups. This was especially true in the plains cultures, where it was clear from the beginning that the male person of the native society was being stripped of his power, his role in society, and his lands and possessions by the white man who married the tribal woman and eventually made what they considered chaotic principle of a new, non-traditional government possible. Few historians have really dealt with this matter. (*Why I*

*Can't*, 35-36)

Cook-Lynn's assertion that the matter of plains tribes and Métis' relationships has been largely unexamined is ill-informed, especially in the context of the Riel Resistances on which there is a wealth of scholarly work, including investigations into the relationship between the Cree in the western plains of Canada who had sympathetic unification with the Métis against encroachment from the Dominion of Canada. Moreover, Cook-Lynn's literary nationalism, where 'authenticity' of indigenous voices are defined by being "specifically tribal (nationalistic) and rooted in a specific geography (place), that mythology (soul) and geography (land) are inseparable, that even language is rooted in a specific place." (88) Cook-Lynn's stipulations are problematic for contemporary Métis writers as they could be seen to support a disenfranchisement that began with the ideologies of the Dominion of Canada and perhaps broaden these ideologies to a suppression of Métis literary expression. It is necessary to consider, then, the extent to which these concerns about authenticity impact on Métis individuals, and how – if a change of focus from the issues of authenticity were to shift to one of inclusiveness of diverse identities – they might mutually benefit First Nations and Métis communities. Bonita Lawrence writes:

A diversity of forms of affiliation – and of nation-rebuilding – could be taken up, which fit the diverse circumstances that Aboriginal peoples face across the continent. The important point is that these forms of affiliation are concrete ways of addressing the divisions that have been created by the Indian Act, divisions that are not going to go away simply by our labelling them as 'colonial divisions' or attempting to disregard them. They are ways of bringing together the very different strengths that urban and reserve-based Native people have developed out of their different circumstances, in the interests of our mutual empowerment. (*Real*, 246)

The unresolved debate on de-colonization that prompts Cook-Lynn toward a form of separatism, inspires in Lawrence a call for inclusiveness of all indigenous people,



including urban Métis, which allows for a united strength rather than what, perhaps, could be seen as a colonialist-inspired divisiveness.

Uncovering and claiming a Métis heritage after the Riel Resistances was a complex and problematic endeavour. There was little motivation to do so as to acknowledge a familial relationship with either Indian or Métis was a source of shame. Initially, First Nations and Métis people in Canada had little chance of being heard by the dominant Euro-Canadian culture, which in any case, was not receptive to hearing about Canadian history from a 'defeated' Native perspective. There was also a difficulty in finding documentation that had hitherto been overlooked as, given the focus in telling the formation of Canada from the settlers' point of view, not much attention had been paid to 'unofficial' accounts. In 1970, when Olive Patricia Dickason proposed for her master's thesis a study of first contact between the French and Indians in what was then 'New France', she was asked where she would find documentation for the "Indian side of the story [...] Oral evidence was not considered acceptable in the 1970s, being classed as no more reliable than gossip." ("Out of the Bush", 17) Around 1973 when Dickason was embarking on her work on her doctoral thesis, she found it easier to gain approval for her proposal of working on Aboriginal history: "By then there was less opposition to the idea, as more records had come to light, and as the rich unofficial documentation such as fur trader accounts and travellers' tales was gaining academic acceptance, I was allowed to go ahead with my study, eventually published as a book under the title *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas.*" (18)

Howard Adams, the Métis scholar and activist, raises the question of who owns the telling of Canadian history. He was influenced in the early Sixties by the Black Nationalist movement in the United States. Having heard Malcolm X speak while

attending the University of California, Adams became actively involved in raising red nationalist consciousness through the Red Power movement in the 1960-70s after returning to Canada. On the publication of *Prison of Grass; Canada from a Native Point of View* (1975), Adams was criticized – and often dismissed – by academic historians mainly for what they saw as his dialectical approach, and for including his autobiographical experiences of repression growing up as a Métis. However, Adams' text has had a lasting influence and has greatly facilitated the opening up of a canon that had been dominated by Euro-Canadian historians and academic institutions that neglected the perspective of Native experiences in the formation of a Canadian nationhood. An increased awareness by Métis communities of their part in the founding of a Canadian nationhood, the centennial of the Canadian Confederation in 1967, and the anniversary of Riel's execution in 1985, all contributed to a surge of Métis publications that continues to proliferate.

The historical and legal land claims for Métis and First Nation tribes in the Nineteenth century, and the current disputes surrounding these claims, are deeply rooted in the machinations of the Crown and Canadian governments administering from the seventeenth century to the present. While advancements have been made regarding land claims of Canada's Inuit and First Nations people, the disputes are far from resolved. However, it remains the case that Métis – increasingly recognised as Canada's forgotten people – rights and land claims have not been given equal governmental importance. In light of this reality I shall trace the history that led up to the Riel Resistances – resistances that still influence the legal position of the Government of Canada toward Métis rights and self-identification, in all its complex legal, cultural, and social implications.

During and since the Métis and government confrontations of the ‘Riel Rebellions’ in 1869-70 and 1885, the personality and reputation of Louis Riel has been continuously reinvented to suit the agenda of historians, political scientists, politicians, pressure groups, legal policy makers, and the mass of Canadian citizens. The role of Riel and Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s government in the ‘Rebellions,’ and even their outcomes, is still very much in dispute. The term ‘Rebellion’ itself is contentious and divisive; was this rebellion, or resistance to unfair and perhaps illegal government policies of encroachment?<sup>2</sup> The most written about figure in Canadian history, Riel is viewed by contemporary Canadians as either a traitor to Canada, or the ‘Father of Confederation.’ On this level, Riel embodies the ambiguous nature of a Canadian national identity, which is fitting since the man himself, as Albert Braz points out was “remarkably sceptical about the whole Canadian project, even claiming that Canada is the worst enemy of the Métis people, whom it yearns to ‘détruire’” (*False Traitor*, 4). Moreover, in the context of a Canadian national identity, the self-identification of Riel himself as Métis rarely enters Euro-Canadian discourse unless it is with a marked lack of historical knowledge of the Métis Nation and people. In my first chapter, I track the disparate views of Riel’s Resistances, how and why they were formed, and most importantly, the persistent impact that these contrasting views still have in the Canadian discourse, on the Métis Nation, people, and contemporary texts. I approach this in three ways; the first, an analysis of nineteenth and early twentieth century published accounts of conditions that led to the Resistances and Riel’s execution. I lead with a publication by Wilbur F. Bryant, whose colonialist version of events illustrate an American ideology of ‘Manifest Destiny’ in regard to the formation of a Canadian nationhood

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<sup>2</sup> I argue that the Métis insurrections were, indeed, resistances to the Dominion of Canada’s illegal encroachment on Native lands, and not rebellions against legally established government authority.

and the liminality of Métis communities. An examination of Métis texts of the Riel Resistances follows Bryant's, most significantly de Trémaudan's *History of the Métis Nation in Western Canada*. Finally, I present a discursive analysis between contemporary historical accounts by non-Métis academics who believe that the Canadian Government acted in good faith in implementing the terms of the Manitoba Act of 1870, and of contemporary academics, and activists, Métis and non-Métis that feel trepidation about injustices perpetrated and perpetuated on the Métis Nation and people.

A defence against colonialism in Native communities must be fought, writes Sean Teuton, "not with war but with ideas" ("Callout", 113). Representations of events at Battleford, a North-West Mounted Police fort in North Saskatchewan, continue to be challenged. An article in the Toronto based national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, October 21, 2010 states in its headline: "Cree Win War of Words, 125 years on." The article by Bob Weber reports that:

Parks Canada has agreed to stop using the word 'siege' in its posters and programming to describe the sometimes violent, sometimes tragic events at the frontier community during the Northwest Rebellion. An aboriginal historian had pointed out that while settlers gathered in the fort in fear, no attack ever came and there was no siege...whites had been killed at Duck Lake and Frog Lake and rumours were spreading like prairie fire that the Cree from Chief Poundmaker's band were massing to join the revolt. [...]

But the fort was never attacked or surrounded and its surrender never demanded. In fact, Poundmaker was there to reassure the Mounties that he had no plans to join Riel. [...]

Tyrone Tootoosis, a member of the Poundmaker band, finally tired of ads saying, 'Follow townsfolk and settlers as they seek shelter in the Mounted Police fort to wait out the Siege of Battleford.'

Mark Calette (Parks Canada's supervisor of historic sites in southern Saskatchewan) has asked Tootoosis to coordinate the involvement of area aboriginals in bringing their side of the story into future programming. ("Cree Win")

The “war of words” persists because self-representation of First Nations and Métis is a battle that must be fought over and again against a majority consensus of detrimental and damaging beliefs of historical events and contemporary reputations. Reclaiming self-representation is entirely necessary, and Adams calls for: “Métis, Indian and Inuit [to] take possession of our literature, historical records, art and all Aboriginal documents that are presently housed in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, the Batoche Museum in Saskatchewan, the Archdiocese Archives in Winnipeg, and others.” (*Tortured*, 34) In chapters two, three, and four of this thesis, I examine how contemporary Métis authors reclaim historical records, amalgamating them into literary texts.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **South of the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel: Bryant's Rendering of U. S. / Canadian Nationalisms and Louis Riel's 'Rebellions'**

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

William Faulkner, *Requiem For a Nun* (1951/1975, 80)

The chronological ordering of this chapter that progresses from an American author's perception almost immediately after the defeat of the Métis Resistance of 1885, to the examinations of Métis political and cultural history by contemporary scholars and historians is vital to the understanding of how and why historical accounts of the Riel Resistances continue to expand and develop. Taking into consideration that Louis Riel was regarded as a British subject by the Canadian government and became a naturalized U.S. citizen two years before he was hung for treason, it is important to examine Wilbur F. Bryant's contemporaneous analysis representative of a Republican American partisan perspective of the Riel led Métis Resistance of 1885. Riel made brief but desperate overtures to the U. S. Government to annex the North-West when Prime Minister Macdonald's government aggressively suppressed land claims and Métis sovereignty. It is probable, in light of historical political relations between the U.S. and the British Empire, including the American Revolution and the Republican led abolition of slavery, that Riel might have assumed more just and fairer recognition and treatment of the Métis "New Nation" south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. The intensification and incorporation of Métis voices, such as Howard Adams, to the Canadian discourse is crucial to the telling of the Canadian nation-state

in its relationship with the Métis Nation as a counter narrative to the colonialist ideologies of the historian George Stanley and social scientist Tom Flanagan.

*The Blood of Abel*, published in 1887, two years after Riel's execution, is a bombastic account of Riel and the 1885 resistance by Wilbur F. Bryant, a Republican American judge. Bryant writes that the "French half-breeds are, like their paternal ancestry, polite and hospitable." (*Blood*, 25) French blood could civilize the Indian, but English blood was not quite honourable enough to do the job. Bryant's antagonism toward the British Empire stems partly from its interference in the United States' recent Civil War, when it supplied the Rebels with arms; however, his bias is enhanced by a keen interest the United States had in annexing the North-West. Bryant's outrage against the Canadian Government for injustices done to Riel and his 'half-breeds' is not a defence for Métis culture, which he did not acknowledge – seeing the 'French Indians' as half way to being successfully assimilated into the dominant culture. His indignation is out of frustration, not that the Canadian Government didn't seem to share the United States vision and belief in 'Manifest Destiny', but that it impeded what Bryant saw as an ideology the French half-breeds could have been coaxed more rigorously to participate in. Bryant is most consistent and persistent in his view that Native tribes' demise is inevitable, and he compares it to the decimation of the buffalo that he saw "as much a thing of the past as the mastodon." (75) Bryant perceived no such inevitability for the 'half-breeds' however, given their civilizing French blood. His sympathies were with them, especially when he considered them in opposition to the British: "Put yourself in the half-breeds place. Imagine yourself ousted off your farm by the brainless spawn of an *effete* and emasculated aristocracy." (Emphasis original. 76) He describes the North-West plains as a cornucopia of riches needing only the will to exploit and can envision the

application of the ideology of Manifest Destiny in the North-West, through colonialist interests. But, as Dale Turner writes: “History has shown that when Europeans share the resources of Aboriginal communities, appeals to trust-like principles [as in treaties] become less important and the relationship becomes brutally driven by non-Aboriginal needs and interests.” (*Peace Pipe*, 77)

Great Britain’s colonial foothold in Canada was achieved through The Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) formed by the English and granted a charter by Charles II in 1670, bestowing on it:

...the sole Trade and Commerce of all those Seas, Streights, Bayes, Rivers, Lakes, Creekes and Soundes in whatsoever Latitude they shall bee, that lie within the entrance of the Streights, commonly called Hudson’s Streights together with all the Landes and Territoryes upon the Countryes, Coastes and Confynes of the Seas, Bayes, Lakes, Rivers, Creakes and Soundes aforesaid that are not already actually possessed by the Subjectes of any other Christian Prince or State. (The Royal Charter for incorporating the Hudson’s Bay Company A.D. 167; *Charter, Statutes, orders in Council relating the Hudson’s Bay Company*, pp. 3-21) (quoted in Stanley, *Birth*, 3)

There was no consultation with Aboriginal communities, who were the inhabitants of this vast region, and the disruption of Indigenous social systems between tribes that had already been disrupted by French Jesuit missionaries and European international trade were exacerbated. While France and Great Britain fought for trade dominance and sovereignty, Native food sources and local economies were destabilised, and by the time of the HBC Charter, the Indigenous population who had been able to avoid trade with Europeans thus far, were now eager to do so. The establishment of the HBC forts and the expanding fur trade attracted Native people who sought to avoid famines that were generated by the fur trade. Further, although the HBC preferred to keep company employees and First Nations communities separate, this proved to be impossible, predominately because the knowledge as guides and hunters of the



Indigenous population was invaluable for the company and thereafter, personal relationships between Europeans and First Nations developed.

The North-West Company, mainly a French Canadian institution, was a fur trade partnership established first in 1779 and again in 1783, who challenged HBC's monopoly. The rival companies pushed each other further and further outside the confines of the original Royal Charter of 1670 and by 1800, the Northwest contained between 1,200 and 2,000 white men. (Stanley, *Birth*, 3) White settlement soon followed with Lord Selkirk, having amassed a large amount of HBC stock, being granted 116,000 square miles of the Red River valley to establish a settlement of Scottish and Irish settlers. The Nor'Westers saw this as an attempt by HBC to interfere with their trade. The colliding elements of trading and land rights with the separate interests of First Nations, white settlers and an increasing Métis population, Bryant lays at the door of the HBC and their unfair monopoly the result of being: "The child of favouritism...The very charter to which it traced its existence, was the gift of an ignorant and profligate King, to a cousin who must be provided for." (*Blood*, 39) For Bryant, it was never a question of whether or not a trading company should have been established on First Nations' land, but that the rules of a capitalist free market trading were not adhered to. For this reason, Bryant sympathizes with the Métis uprising in 1849 led by Riel's father, Louis Riel père. In 1844, HBC, according to Bryant an, "unkind, domineering step-father" (39), had been squeezing the First Nations, Métis, and white traders with tyrannical, unfair taxation and trading agreements, and when the traders attempted to make more advantageous deals by trading directly with companies and individuals in the United States, HBC, Bryant writes, retaliated by threatening to "refuse transportation on its boats, of the goods of any person trading on his own account." (39) According to Bryant, Louis père was the

instigator in organizing a petition against the heavy-handedness of HBC in 1846. In 1849 when the Métis William Sayer was arrested for trading independently of HBC, Riel père was known to have been the leader of the group of armed Métis who had been allowed to ‘assist’ the defence at Sayer’s trial by Major Caldwell (acting manager of HBC, a distinct clash of interests):

In response to this invitation Riel entered the courtroom with twenty of his followers, armed to the teeth, and prepared to render the most substantial assistance [...] The prosecution closed their case, when Riel sprang to his feet; and declared Sayer acquitted. A loud yell from the half-breeds [...] greeted this announcement. In vain the magistrates protested and asserted their authority [...] Riel compelled the company to restore to Sayer the goods taken from him, to compensate him for his loss, and trouble; and to proclaim free-trade throughout the colony, and Louis Riel, senior, and his swarthy band. (41)

Bryant’s swashbuckling account of this event is disingenuous; as a man of the law he would most certainly have been aware that when the prosecution closed their case the jury found Sayer guilty but recommended mercy, which was granted, but the case for HBC was upheld. Riel and his “swarthy band” won the day when no punishment was exacted; however, the written retelling of events by Bryant is designed to mythologize the father of Louis Riel in order to influence the reader on the mythological qualities of his son. Moreover, Bryant’s written text, that employs journalistic caricatures to claim an authority of influence, obfuscates Métis oral testimony at the trial and is used as a tool for what Jean-François Lyotard calls “speculative apparatus” that impedes “true knowledge” as it “is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy.” (*Postmodern*, 35)

The British North-America Act of 1867 was passed by British Parliament declaring First Nations communities a federal responsibility. The agreements of the transfer of Rupert’s Land to the Dominion of Canada in 1869 had within it a clear declaration of care for First Nations land rights, and one of the conditions of transfer

was in clause 14: “Any claims of Indians to compensation for lands required for purposes of settlement shall be disposed of by the Canadian Government in communication with the Imperial Government; and the Company shall be relieved of all responsibility in respect of them.” (Magnet, *Métis Land Rights*, 8) Although the Métis and many First Nations bands signed treaty for the British North-America Act, they were excluded from the negotiations of the HBC land transfer, causing distrust over all future treaties. In the case of the Métis, this was a major impetus for the first Riel Resistance. Acknowledging the deceptions and injustices enacted on indigenous people before and after signing treaty, Scott Richard Lyons believes that the act of writing their signature – often with just an X – to endorse a document, is the site “where indigenous ethnic groups began transforming themselves into actual nations, and treaty signings were the original and most ubiquitous occasion for that remarkable historical shift.” (*X-Marks*, 123) The power of governmental forces through the written word is destabilized when indigenous groups enter into the discourse of written language, and by the same token when they are subsequently barred from doing the same. This is certainly true of the Northwest Métis community who tried to negotiate with the Canadian government on an equal footing. Contemporary Métis writers face similar literary negotiations writing against the groundswell of Canadian Constitutional law and legislation that affects their communities.

According to Bryant, “fate” had a hand in forcing “a transfer of Rupert’s Land, by the Hudson’s Bay Company, through the Imperial government to the Dominion of Canada.” (*Blood*, 44) Bryant argues that it is questionable whether the transfer of 2, 300,000 square miles of land for \$1,500,000, of which 14,000 square miles were designated for the annexation of the District of Assiniboia to Canada and creating the province of Manitoba, was legal. But Bryant’s challenge as to the legality of this

transfer is on behalf of the interests of the ‘civilized halfbreeds’ – and that of the United States in annexing the Northwest – and not that of any member of any tribe of First Nations or Native Americans. Dismissing the possibility of Aboriginal sophistication of thought and philosophy, Bryant underscores self-interest on the part of American expansionism that allows for a brutal contempt and disregard for the rights of those who stand in the way of a perceived right for the ideology of a ‘manifest destiny’. Ania Loomba writes of a form of colonialism that informs the Euro-American view of indigenous people:

Colonialism expanded the contact between Europeans and non-Europeans, generating a flood of images and ideas on an unprecedented scale. Europeans who travelled outwards took with them certain previous images of the people they expected to encounter. The actual encounters necessitated both the continuity and a reshaping of these images – continuity because previously held notions about the inferiority of non-Europeans provided a justification for European settlements, trading practices, religious missions and military activities – and reshaping in order to adjust images to specific colonial practices. (*Colonialism*, 58)

However, it is the process of decolonization that Dale Turner finds hard to envisage: “Colonialism has influenced virtually every aspect of indigenous people’s lives: language, religion, sexuality, art, philosophy, and politics. [...] Abolishing colonialism is the goal of many indigenous and non-indigenous peoples; finding a way to do it is a great dilemma.” (*Peace Pipe*, 108-9) Bryant’s absolute categorizations of Indians, ‘half-breeds’, and Métis are a product of colonial invention that is divisive to First Nation and Métis communities who, generally, have a more fluid understanding of what constitutes kinship. The decision to self-identify as Métis, Cree, or other tribal nations, was encoded in the first Indian Act of 1857. Self-identification changed drastically for First Nations and Métis communities when the Constitution Act of 1867 read that the classification of ‘Indianness’ was set at one-quarter blood quantum. To accelerate assimilation, the Gradual Enfranchisement Act

of 1869 offered full British citizenship in exchange for loss of Indian status. The amendments to the Indian Act in 1876 placed an emphasis on male lineage and explicitly denied Indian status to the Métis of Manitoba. (The impact of gender/race classification through the male line is examined by many contemporary Métis and First Nations writers.) Bryant did not understand the nuances of relations between a colonialist government and the Métis in what Bonita Lawrence describes as the “unique circumstances that caused specific groups of mixed-bloods in the Red River settlement to declare themselves a Métis nation in the face of the encroachment of Canada and to attempt, both in 1870 and in 1885, to create a place for themselves within Canada *as* Métis people.” (Emphasis original, “*Real*”, 83) Further, Joseph Eliot Magnet, Professor of Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa, has noted that Canada’s obligation under clause 14 of the Rupert’s Land and North-Western Territory Order “imposes a positive constitutional obligation on the Canadian government to a) deal with Indian claims to compensation for lands in the territory; b) consider and settle claims in conformity with past practices of the British Crown in its dealings with aboriginal peoples; and c) settle the claims equitably.” (*Métis Land*, 8) Contrary to the portraits drawn of the Métis in this period by George F. Stanley and Thomas Flanagan, who reduce their communal and political organizations as naïve at best, the Métis were a unified and politically structured populace who were wary and apprehensive of government plans of annexation of the Red River Settlement. They organized an armed resistance and Riel set up a provisional government which later negotiated with the British and Canadian government. Bryant reasons that the Métis: “upon racial grounds their right in the soil was something derived from their swarthy mothers.” (*Blood*, 46) However, expediency and greed in the building and expansion

of the Dominion of Canada overruled any justice in the cursory negotiations and treaties implemented between governments and First Nations and Métis communities.

In 1869, a year after Britain passed An Act for the Temporary Government of Rupert's Land, William McDougall, former Commissioner of Crown Lands, was selected as first lieutenant-governor of Rupert's Land and the Northwest Territories. He was commissioned to report on how the HBC transfer was impacting on First Nations communities. However, Ottawa did not request information as to the mood of the Métis (English or French), English-language, or French-language settlers, who all protested the lack of interest in equitable representation of their rights to territory. In October, Riel, elected secretary of the Comité National des Métis in 1869 – formed to defend Métis rights in negotiations with the government – blocked McDougall and his official entourage from the trail to Assiniboia in protest of the parties' entry before the official transfer date of December 1, 1869. This incident forced the Dominion Government to recognize the power of the new nation of the Métis and its demands for fair acknowledgment of its claims of sovereignty. Relishing McDougall's blunders, Bryant does not miss the wider legal ramifications of his actions. After the blockade, Riel and the Comité took over HBC's headquarters at Fort Garry. On the official transfer date, McDougall read the royal proclamation from Canada, thus ending HBC authority and leaving no replacement governance. In this political void, the Comité set up a provisional government on December 27 with Riel as its elected President representing Métis rights. A second provisional government was formed on February 8, 1870 which was more inclusive in its representation of English-language and French-language settlers.

Thomas Scott, a zealous Ontario Orangeman with a reputation for violent behaviour and a dismissive attitude towards First Nations and Métis rights, was sent

by the Canadian government as a surveyor to the Red River settlement. Scott is an important, contentious, and pivotal figure in the historical context of this rebellion and its aftermath. Riel's objection that Canada had no right to survey Red River settlement's land and Scott's flagrant disrespect for the new Métis nation and reports of his violent assaults resulted in his arrest, trial, and execution on March 4, 1870. There are varying perspectives on these events and whether or not Scott's execution was a profound error on the part of the provisional government (Father André, quoted in Stanley, *Collected*, Vol. 3, 583) – or was “a measure of public safety” (Anonymous, *One Who Knows*, 55) – however, from Bryant's point of view, Scott deserved his punishment as he had been “conducting himself more like a mad-dog than a rational and accountable being.” (*Blood*, 51) Bryant also argues that Riel was acting justifiably and defensively, as “a representative of the people [so] was not a rebel, not even a revolutionist.” (53) What is generally understood, however, is that Scott's execution changed what had been a peaceful resistance into a battle of ideologies that galvanized racial tensions between English Protestants and French Catholics. Quebec, as part of Canada, and until this point indifferent to First Nations and Métis apprehensions of annexation to Canada, now sided with them. Ultimately, the execution of Scott was to have calamitous consequences for the Métis New Nation and for Riel politically and personally.

As anticipated by Riel's provisional government, troops were sent from Canada under the leadership of the British Colonel Garnet Wolseley. Riel and Ambroise Dydime Lépine, who presided over the trial of Scott, escaped Fort Garry before the troops arrived. Although complex negotiations were being conducted for an amnesty to be granted to Riel for the murder of Scott – in part to quell the tensions between the anti-French Orangemen who were baying for Riel's blood, and Riel's sympathizers

who insisted on a full amnesty – Riel rightfully mistrusted the duplicitous machinations of the Canadian government and fled with Lépine to the United States. There was a definite basis for his mistrust; in 1871 the legislature of Ontario offered a \$5,000 bounty for his capture which prompted a period of clandestine crossings of the border to and from the United States. Archbishop Taché had mediated on Riel and Lépine’s behalf to obtain from Prime Minister John A. Macdonald a support fund for both their families if they would ‘leave the country for at least a year’ in voluntary exile. Because it was later perceived as Riel having accepted a bribe, Bryant is ambiguous about his own feelings about the incident: “The money received by Riel, at this time, has been called corruption money. If so, it reflects as little credit on the donor as the receiver. But Riel’s account of the affair, as well as his subsequent conduct, shows that he did not so regard it.” (62)

Lépine was found guilty by the Court of Queen’s Bench in Manitoba for the murder of Scott. His sentence was commuted from hanging to imprisonment for two years and withdrawal of political rights. At the last refusal of his seat in 1875, Riel was also pardoned from murder charges but punished with a loss of political rights and expulsion from British territory for five years. Riel spent most of this time in the United States; however not all of his time can comprehensively be accounted for. What has been documented is that while residing in Washington, Riel suffered a mental collapse and, according to Bryant, was diagnosed with “megalomania” since he was “possessed of the delusion that he must die for the salvation of his race.” (64) Later, Riel would write, in the third person, “God anointed him [...] prophet of the new world.” (Stanley, *Collected*, Vol. 3, 261) Riel was smuggled across the border by Major Edmund Mullet into Quebec where he was admitted into the Beauport asylum for nineteen months and released on January 21, 1878. Bryant refutes suggestions that



Riel was incarcerated in the asylum for the purpose of concealment. Bryant's casting of Riel as a righteous hero excludes any hypothesis that might insinuate pusillanimous behaviour, when it is quite rational for Riel's incarceration to serve two purposes, first, for his own safety due to his mental breakdown and second, for protection from his enemies. Further, Bryant's support for Riel and the legitimacy of his representation of grievances to the Canadian government on behalf of the 'half-breeds' curiously leaves out John A. Macdonald's desire for a national railway to be completed under the direction of George Stephen. The acquisition of British Columbia into the Confederation of Canada in 1871 made it imperative (and fiscally advantageous) to the formation of a Canadian geographical cohesion, to join the fledgling Confederation by a coast-to-coast railway. Implementation of the western expansion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) further complicated the land claims of the Métis, particularly after 1878 when the 'half-breeds' of Saskatchewan – who had migrated from Manitoba because of CPR expansion and the fear of loss of land from non-application of the Manitoba Act – petitioned for land, seed grain, and farming implements to “ease their transition to farming as the extinction of the buffalo became more and more evident in the late 1870's.” (Sprague, *Canada*, 160)

There was a deceitful dance being performed by the government out of expediency; it argued with duplicity that, first, 'half-breeds' had an aversion to farming and second, because they were non-Indians, they had no grounds for government aid. The government had changed its position from 1867 when it was keenly desired for First Nations people and 'half-breeds' of the Northwest to begin farming as it was seen as a quick means of assimilation. In the matter of identity, 'half-breeds', whether they are recognized as Aboriginal or not, and therefore under the hypothetical protection of the law and signed treaties, has still not been

determined by the courts. David Mills, Minister of the Interior and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in 1878, claimed that if they were Aboriginal, their rights were covered by existing treaties with First Nations communities and if they weren't, they had no better claim to the land than white settlers did. However, as D. N. Sprague emphasises:

...the North West Territorial Council (the appointed committee advising the Lieutenant Governor) saw the matter rather differently. In its view, all the native people previously dependent on the buffalo were entitled to aid. [...] They proposed that a 'non-transferable location ticket' entitling the recipient to 160 acres should be issued to every 'half breed' left without land in the North West. Once located on plots of their own choosing, each family could then make free use of government supplied seed-grain and farm implements for up to three years. [...] Then the Métis settlements would be carefully monitored in their agricultural development. [...] It was not recommended that they should receive their land automatically. The half breeds would have to perform settlement duties in their first three years, then continue in residence for seven more years before they would be eligible to claim patents for their farms. (*Canada*, 160)

Macdonald dithered over acting on the recommendations of the North West Territorial Councils proposals, finally opting to solicit the opinion of three bishops who were most familiar with the Métis, including Bishop Machray who supported the Territorial Council's recommendations, with the caution, "the less of such gifts the better. They are apt to do mischief." (quoted in Sprague, *Canada*, 160)

There were over 250 Métis from Manitoba settled in St Laurent, South Saskatchewan who claimed patents for land in 1884, and less than 10 were deemed legally eligible. As opposed to the land set aside for First Nations communities who signed treaty, Métis were treated as individuals, the same as white settlers. A scrip process – an option of land or money as payment, was not a realistic option for the Métis – was ostensibly set up to settle land claims, but often the lands allocated for scrip were not agriculturally viable and many Métis, often starving, opted to take cash over land. It was supposed by the government that acceptance of scrip by the Métis achieved nullification of claims to Aboriginal title. The Métis were wedged between

the choices of taking treaty, which would identify them legally as ‘Indians’, or taking scrip which located them as non-Indian. Moreover, in Manitoba the land set aside for ‘half-breed’ children had been bought by opportunists for a tiny percentage of its true value – by 1919 only ten percent of the land was in Métis hands – and there were fears of this being replicated in Saskatchewan. A new uprising by the Métis, who were failing in their appeals to the Government and were destitute, became a serious threat. Several groups had formed communities to establish individual settlements, one of which was led by Gabriel Dumont (1838-1906). Dumont was a buffalo hunt captain and allegedly spoke six Native dialects as well as French and English. As Olive Patricia Dickason, the prominent Métis historian, attests, in 1872 Dumont’s group colonized an area of “about 45 to 50 kilometres long and some 10 kilometres wide, including a stretch of the South Saskatchewan River and Duck Lake; its southern boundary was Fish Creek.” (*Canada’s First*, 272) The population of Métis in Saskatchewan grew to 1,500 all of whom were considered squatters. With no legal status recognized by the government in Ottawa, Dumont was elected president of St Laurent and governed it with eight selected councillors. Dumont and his councillors perhaps had an eye on governing the rest of the Northwest until Canada was prepared to take over. However, with Ottawa alternating between neglect and suppression of self-government, the Métis were pressed to act on their own behalf. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1884 Dumont and a party rode to Montana to bring back Louis Riel.

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1883 in the Territory of Montana, Riel was granted American citizenship by Judge D. S. Wade and as an American citizen, (quoted in Stanley, *Collected*, Vol. 5, 87) Bryant writes that it could be argued that Riel, in the legal sense, had “renounced his allegiance to the Queen; his country was at peace with England; and, consequently, he had no right to interfere with England’s colonial

politics.” However, Bryant maintains that: “Riel had entered the country with the purest motives.” (*Blood*, 78-79) It is ambiguous what Bryant means precisely by “purest motives”, however, Riel himself had made it clear in his correspondence and verbal statements that he intended a peaceful approach in his struggle for self-governance of the North-West Territories and just treatment for Indigenous communities. Further, while he had been in Montana, where there was a large Métis population, Riel had been involved with local politics in the representation of the Métis. He appealed to President Grant to intercede with Queen Victoria to implement the Manitoba Act in 1870, but in 1885 changed tactics and petitioned President Grover Cleveland to annex Manitoba to the United States. Whatever his broader citizenship papers declared, Riel’s allegiance remained with Métis rights and their relationship with their land in the North-West Territories.

Dumont and his companions accompanied Riel to the village of Batoche, near St Laurent where Riel drafted a declaration of infringements on Métis land claims. Before redrafting after consultations with Bishops Taché and Grandin, Riel’s statement included demands for: “territorial self-government; land rights similar to the assurances in section 32 of the Manitoba Act; a 2-million-acre trust (the income from which would provide long-term development capital for the Métis); 64,000 acres of ‘swamp lands’ to be reserved for the children of Métis heads of families (to be distributed every eighteen years over seven generations); reconsideration of the land rights of the Manitoba Métis; and preferential consideration of ‘half breeds’ for ‘works and contracts’ in the Territories.” (Sprague, *Canada*, 169) This was modified particularly in the demand for land titles, home rule, and compensation for non-application of the Manitoba Act. Although most families had “compromised their original demand for river lots laid out in the old Manitoba pattern” and “provided

evidence of compliance with the boundaries of subdivisions as laid out in the government survey,” (171) in February 1885 they were notified by the government that until they paid fees, and endured another round of applications, and inspections, they were not entitled to the land. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, Riel announced the formation of a provisional government with Dumont as military leader. However, he consistently denied leadership, signing himself “Louis David Riel” *Exovede*, meaning one of many, part of the flock. While the Métis pressed for the government to address their grievances, Macdonald was being pressured by the president of CPR, George Stephen, to continue financing the completion of the railway. Stephen was for taking any action that would resolve the political stalemate; Macdonald was typically inert.

There were apprehensions that Riel would incite the Plains Cree to join the struggle against the government. However, the Cree had their own legitimate reasons for grievances against the government. Although they had signed treaties that were considered by the government to be final, it was not viewed in this way by the Cree. The language of treaties was problematic on many fronts; misinterpretations made deliberately or by accident by translators were added to European concepts of “exclusive landownership, which had no counterpart in Native languages.” (Dickason, *Canada’s First*, 155) Relations between the Métis and the Plains Cree were delicate, but the growing desperation of First Nations communities who were at the mercy of government agents responsible for implementing the policy of converting them into farmers – and who generally operated ineffectually and without compassion – impelled the Cree towards an understanding with the Métis. Big Bear (Makepetoon, or Broken Arm, c. 1825-88), half Ojibwas and half Cree, had refused to sign Treaty 6 in 1876, rejecting the terms that would surrender Cree autonomy to Canadian law, but capitulated in order to obtain the meagre government rations for his starving people.

Big Bear was an advocate for pan-Indianism in order to protect aboriginal land rights from the increasing number of non-Indian settlers, believing unity between the tribes was their only opportunity for justice. In 1873 Big Bear and Dumont had a confrontation when Dumont attempted to direct the hunt for buffalo on the High Plains; but by 1884 when Big Bear and his greatly reduced band of 247 followers had been relegated to an isolated reserve at the far north Fort Pitt, and despite his reluctance to deal with non-Aboriginals, Chief Big Bear informed Riel that he trusted him to include First Nations communities in his demands for Métis rights.

Pitikwahanapiwiyyin (Poundmaker *c.* 1842-86) was a Plains Cree chief and an adopted son of Crowfoot, a principal Blackfoot chief. Unlike Big Bear, Poundmaker was amenable to contact with non-Aboriginals. However, this did not mean he was any less vociferous in defending his people against injustices: “From what I can hear and see now, I cannot understand that I shall be able to clothe my children as long as the sun shines and water runs.” (quoted in Dickason, *Canada’s First*, 279)

Poundmaker signed Treaty 6 in 1876 but refused to settle on a reserve until 1879. In 1883 the starvation of the Plains Cree prompted three chiefs, Sehkosowayanew (Ermineskin), Keskayiwew (Bobtail), and Samson (Maskepetoon) to send a letter to John A. Macdonald: “If no attention is paid to our case now we shall conclude that the treaty made with us six years ago was a meaningless matter of form and that the white man has doomed us to annihilation little by little. But the motto of the Indian is, ‘If we must die by violence, let us do it quickly.’” (quoted in Dickason, *Canada’s First*, 282). In an effort to consolidate separate Cree bands and choose a representative to petition the government for a single large reserve for all Crees and demand a fair treaty to replace Treaty 6, Big Bear coordinated a thirst dance to take place on Poundmaker’s reserve where more than 2,000 Cree took part. In order to put a stop to First Nations

unification, Edgar Dewdney, lieutenant-general of the North-West Territories, revised the Indian Act to include a threat of arrest if any First Nations people ventured onto a reserve where they did not live unless they had authorized permission.

Riel's formation of the provisional government and the fear of his leading a united front of First Nation and Métis communities, led the government to send Lawrence Clarke (chief factor at Fort Carleton) to arrest Riel. Riel offered to return to the U.S. given the incongruity of being a U.S. citizen, but his companions refused his offer, and the community armed themselves. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1885, Riel sent a message to Fort Carleton demanding its surrender. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, Leif Crozier (Superintendent of the North-West Mounted Police) led 100 Mounties from the fort and was confronted by the Métis at Duck Lake, resulting in 12 Mounties dead and 11 wounded. Five Métis and one First Nations warriors were also killed before Riel halted further pursuit of the fleeing Mounties. Following this altercation, Chiefs Poundmaker and Minahikosis' (Little Pine, c. 1830-85) bands rode in to Battleford, north-west of Batoche, where they raided houses and stores. Big Bear's war chiefs attacked HBC stores on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, as Dickason describes:

Nine people were killed in the incident, including the agent, two priests, and settlers. Big Bear succeeded in stopping the carnage in time to save the HBC representative, as well as women and children. Most of the settlers in the area were able to take refuge in Fort Pitt, and NWMP garrison, but after taking council among themselves they decide to surrender to Big Bear. The chief allowed the fort's garrison, under Inspector Francis Jeffrey Dickens (1844-86, son of novelist Charles Dickens), to leave without any problems, then took over the fort on 15 April. (*Canada's First*, 288)

From Bryant's point of view, the events at Duke Lake were the single catalyst that "aroused the Indians", who at Battleford, he says, "acted more like a herd of swine than like human beings." (*Blood*, 84) However, the conduct of the Cree at Frog Lake, which Riel was subsequently, and specifically at his trial for treason, accused of being responsible for, Bryant writes, "was in no manner traced to Riel's door." (85)

Following the altercations at Battleford a fearful response across Canada was immediate and on April 6<sup>th</sup>, Frederick Dobson Middleton (1825-98), commander of the Canadian militia, and his troops were heading to Batoche from Que'Appelle. In all, 3,000 troops were dispatched to the Territories. Included in Middleton's armoury were two Gatling guns, the first machine guns developed and used by the US army during the Civil War. The paddle wheel steamer *Northcote* travelled up the Saskatchewan River with armed men to give support to the ground troops, but was impeded by a ferry cable that the Métis had positioned across the river, losing its stacks and masts. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, Middleton narrowly escaped an ambush by Dumont at Fish Creek, the southern boundary of the territory.

In Bryant's version of the clashes at Duck Lake, Frog Lake, and Fish Creek, he remarks that: "There are many published accounts of [these] battles. They are all by Englishmen, or Americans in the last stages of Anglo-mania. The poor half-breeds, like the ancient Cilicians, had no historians." (83) This is true, and it is only in the last forty years that this has been redressed with an increasing quantity of Métis publications. However, Bryant's bias against, and dismissal of 'savages', blinds him to the necessity for Indigenous accounts of the frequently pitiless enterprise that was the building of a Canadian Confederation.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Colonel William Dillon Otter (1843-1925), led an attack on Poundmaker's "sleeping camp at Cutknife Hill and was saved from rout by Poundmaker's refusing to allow his warriors to go off in pursuit." (Dickason, *Canada's First*, 288) During the week of May 9-12 Middleton, with 850 men, attacked 350 Métis, Cree, and Saulteaux members, at Batoche. The attack on Batoche was at first answered by a single shot from the Métis that, according to Bryant, was aimed too high. The Gatling gun was then fired by a Captain Peters of the Canadian



militia, the result of which Bryant describes as a “murderous volley [that] was followed by a harvest of death, shocking to anyone but the biped who sowed the seed.” (*Blood*, 97) The Métis were ensconced in rifle pits and by May 12<sup>th</sup> had all but run out of ammunition.

Riel sent a messenger with a letter to Middleton stating: “If you massacre our families, we are going to massacre the Indian agent and other prisoners. Louis ‘David’ Riel, *Exovede*.” Middleton replied: “Mr. Riel – I am anxious to avoid killing women and children and have done my best to avoid doing so. Put your women and children in one place and let us know where it is, and no shot shall be fired on them. I trust to your honour not to put men with them.” (Stanley, *Collected*, Vol. 3, 86) Riel complied with the terms but added; “I do not like war, and if you do not, retreat and refuse an interview, the question remaining the same, the prisoners.” (Sic, 88) Bryant reports that Middleton replied, “his troops would cease firing when the enemy did, and not before. After this Riel’s little band of patriots fought with the courage born of despair. But it was all in vain, the bayonet and the Gatling did the work.” (*Blood*, 99) Riel and Dumont escaped, the latter making his way to the United States. Dickason describes this battle, as “the only clear defeat of the Métis during the uprising, but it was decisive.” (*Canada’s First*, 289) There was a strong protest from the clergy to the government, including an objection from Father André, when after the battle the Canadian militia plundered and set ablaze the houses of the Métis.

Louis Riel surrendered on May 15<sup>th</sup>, Poundmaker on May 26<sup>th</sup>, and Big Bear on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. Of the cost of the rebellion, Dickason notes, “53 non-Natives killed, 118 wounded; about 35 Indians and Métis killed [...]. The financial cost to Canada: about \$5,000,000.” Dickason details the cost to those involved in the resistance:

The government charged or considered charging more than 200 individuals, most for treason-felony against an empire that had conscripted Amerindians and Métis

into its orbit without consulting them and, in the case of Amerindians, without granting them citizenship. In the end 84 trials were held, 71 of which were for treason-felony, 12 for murder, and (Riel's) for high treason; of the 129 individuals who were jailed, there were:

- 46 Métis, of whom 19 were convicted, 1 hanged, and 7 conditionally discharged; the remainder were either unconditionally discharged or not brought to trial
- 81 Amerindians, of whom 44 were convicted and hanged for murder; there was no plea bargaining for them;
- Two Euro-Canadians, both charged with treason-felony, of whom both were acquitted, one on the grounds of insanity. (290)

The Cree Chiefs Big Bear, Poundmaker, and One Arrow were sentenced to three years imprisonment, were released before their sentences were completed and all were dead within a year of their release.

### **Concealed History and Forgotten Generations**

Riel's trial began on July 28<sup>th</sup> presided over by a stipendiary magistrate for the North-West Territories, Hugh Richardson. For Bryant it was evident from the outset "that the Government was determined to have the prisoner's blood." (*Blood*, 102) If a government conspiracy against Riel cannot be made definitively there is at least scope for doubts as to the soundness of some of the witnesses called by the Crown prosecution – particularly Charles Nolin, about whom I shall write more extensively later in this chapter. Since Riel was singled out for the charge of high treason, punishable by death, while the 27 Métis who were brought to trial for the lesser charge of treason-felony, Bryant reasoned that: "Behind the scenes stood the Nemesis of Thomas Scott." (103) There was certainly a need on the part of the government to appease the Orangemen of Ontario who were howling for Riel's blood, but the overriding motivation was to quell resistance to the Dominion of Canada's sovereignty of the North-West Territories.

The most contentious issue regarding Riel's trial was, for Bryant, the question of nationality. Riel's council had asked for a continuance in order to procure evidence on his behalf, including an application for a certificate of his U. S. citizenship. From Bryant's point of view the omission by both the prosecution and the defence to argue the question of nationality was one of many miscarriages of justice in the trial. Bryant maintains that if Riel was a naturalized U. S. citizen, "there can be no doubt that he ceased to be a British subject. The effect of naturalization, long a mooted question between the English and American government, was definitely settled by the treaty of 1870." (114) The treaty in question was of the Naturalization Convention with the United Kingdom as part of the Bancroft treaties which recognized the right of each countries populace to become naturalized citizens of the other. However, while U. S. citizens lost their right to citizenship of their old country when obtaining citizenship in their new, British law of naturalization did not reciprocate. British policy dictated that a British subject could not lose their status through later citizenship in another country, in other words, possessed dual citizenship. This could explain why it did not come up in the proceedings on behalf of the defence, who in any case had decided to pursue an argument of innocence by reason of insanity – to which Riel objected. In Riel's address to the court before sentencing he says: "I am an American citizen and I have two countries, and I am taken here as a British subject." (*Queen vs. Louis Riel*, 159) Disastrously for both the Métis and First Nations communities the complexities of British and U. S. law over border lines supersede the sovereignty of aboriginal territory.

Riel was seeking extrication from the legal implications for Métis and First Nations communities of the boundaries of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, (the Medicine Line). When he approaches President Cleveland to consider annexation of the North-West to

the U. S. Riel asks him to “blot out” the “international line between the United States and the Northwest [...] from Lake Superior to the Pacific Ocean.” (Stanley, *Collected*, Vol. 3, 187) At his trial, Riel endeavours to clarify his position: “I don’t wish to call the people from the States on this side of the line. No, I wish it only if there is no other possibility [...] The last remedy although it may be extreme is always worth something to try it, but if there is justice as I still hope [...] Oh! Here it seems to me I have become insane to hope still.” (*Queen vs. Louis Riel*, 158) There is a desperate wit in Riel’s reference to his sanity. It would have been distressing to his self-respect and sense of justice to highlight his mental state when references to it were a continuous thread throughout his trial. His defence council solicited testimony from psychiatrists Dr. Francois-Elzéar Roy, part owner of the asylum in Quebec City where Riel was confined after his breakdown, and Dr. Daniel Clark from Toronto who had never treated Riel and had interviewed him for only a few hours for the purpose of the trial. Both deemed him insane. Conversely, Dr. Juke, senior surgeon and witness for the prosecution believed him to be sane, arguing that Riel’s alleged religious mania could be compared to “Mahomet’s belief [...] that he was divinely inspired.” (*Queen vs. Louis Riel*, 139) In his address to the court before sentencing, Riel argues that his actions on the behalf of Métis and First Nations communities were the only ones possible in response to an “insane and irresponsible government.” He reasons:

- 1<sup>st</sup>. That the House of Commons, Senate, and ministers of the Dominion who make laws for this land and govern it are no representation whatever of the people of the North-West.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>ly. That the North-West Council generated by the federal Government has the great defect of it parent.
- 3<sup>rd</sup>ly. The number of members elected for the Council by the people make it only a sham representative legislature and no representative Government at all. British civilisation, which rules to day the world, and the British constitution has defined such Government as this which rules the North West Territory as irresponsible Government, which plainly means that there is no responsibility, and by the science which has been shown here yesterday you are compelled to admit it, there is no responsibility, and it is insane.

If you take the plea of the defence, that I am not responsible for my acts, acquit me completely, since I have been quarrelling with an insane and irresponsible Government. (153)

In a further appeal and an expansion of his meaning of “having two countries”, which, he points out, can also apply to Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans in a just and moral sense if not a legal one, Riel enquires of the court:

Do you own the lands? In England, in France, the French and English have land, the first who were in England, they were the owners of the soil and they transmitted to generations. Now by the soil they have had their start as a nation. Who starts the nation? The very same one who creates them, God... Now here is a nation, strong as it may be, it has had his inheritance from God, when they have crowded their country because they have no room to stay at home, it does not give them the right to come and take the share of the small tribe beside them, when they come they ought to say: Well my little sister, the Cree tribe, you have a great territory but that territory has been given to you as our own land has been given to our fathers in England, or in France, and of course you cannot exist without having that spot of land... God cannot create a tribe without locating it, we are not birds. (159)

Second to Bryant’s strongest objection on the issues of Riel’s trial which was that of nationality, and an overall conclusion that there was a government conspiracy, was the specific argument used by the prosecution that Riel was guilty of breaking the terms of his banishment from Canada:

The Macdonald government tried to sneak behind the miserable subterfuge that Riel’s amnesty was conditional upon his remaining in banishment five years; that this had been violated, because, during his confinement at the Beauport asylum, he was not in banishment. The idea of a lunatic breaking a compact is too absurd to deserve a serious answer. (*Blood*, 113)

However, Bryant missed the crux of the Crown case; this was that Riel was sane and responsible for his actions, therefore his ‘residing’ at the asylum was a voluntary act of his own stratagem to re-enter Canada. Bryant also takes exception to the instructions to the jury from Judge Hugh Richardson which included: “The questions really for you to determine are, first, are you satisfied that there was a rebellion.”

(*Queen vs. Louis Riel*, 154) I have found no evidence that Bryant was aware, but he surely would have been satisfied to learn that Prime Minister Macdonald, as D. N.

Sprague informs, “dismissed most of the military side of the North West Rebellion as a mere riot.” (*Canada*, 176)

On August 1<sup>st</sup> Riel was found guilty of high treason and despite a plea for clemency from the jury, he was ordered hanged. The majority of the population of Quebec called for commutation of the death sentence, to which McDonald answered: “He shall die, though every dog in Quebec bark in his favour.” (Anonymous, *One Who Knows*, 130) After an unsuccessful appeal, this was carried out in Regina on November 16<sup>th</sup>. Along with unsettled issues of the role of the government concerning confrontations with the Métis, the repercussions of the Resistances are also very much alive in relations between French and English Canada. In the endeavour to create a Canadian Nationhood – with an emphasis on a British-Canadian contingent – John A. McDonald’s decision to appease the Orangemen of Ontario caused a fracture yet to be healed.

In summing up Riel’s trial, Bryant maintains that: “There was a material variance between the information and the proofs [...] the insurgents only sought to defend their homes against invasion.” (*Blood*, 127) Further, Bryant rightly takes issue with a jury made up of only six rather than twelve men. Many of Bryant’s declarations in *The Blood of Abel* are flawed and skewed by his rancorous resentment toward the British Empire for its part played in the American Civil War, and by his bigotry toward ‘Indians’ and his faith in Manifest Destiny. However, *because* of these flaws, *The Blood of Abel* is an important account of the Riel Rebellions in order to illustrate by comparison the complexities and controversies that still rage around Louis Riel.

The *History of the Métis Nation in Western Canada*, written by A.-H. de Trémaudan was commissioned in 1927 by the Historical Committee of l’Union

Nationale Métisse Saint-Joseph de Manitoba, now and since 1932 known as La Société Historique l' Métisse Inc. In the foreword to the French edition of 1928, the editor gives a brief history of the text's inception:

In 1909 a group of eminent persons of the French-Canadian Métis Nation gathered in Joseph Riel's home, the former home of his brother Louis Riel in St. Vital. Three of them had been Riel's lieutenants in 1870: Ambroise Lépine, André Nault and Elzéar Lagimodière. They decided to set down a clear record of the historical events of 1869-70-71 and 1885. (de Trémaudan, *Hold High*, xii)

It was imperative that a Métis analysis of historical events be published in order to attempt a shift in the dominant cultures' paradigm and give legitimacy to their interpretation. Oral stories are important in Métis communities, however, as Dale Turner observes, in contrast, "philosophical discourse in the European tradition has evolved around the legitimacy of the 'text.'" (*Peace Pipe*, 47) The decision to undertake this enterprise was difficult at this time because, as the editor and member of the committee writes: "The Métis, withdrawn amongst themselves since 1885, their heads bowed low under an avalanche of calumny, finding but little sympathy around them, had remained silent, saddened by the memory of their sufferings and their misunderstood sacrifices." (de Trémaudan, *Hold High*, xii) Dickason concurs; the battle of Batoche "ended for half a century the Métis struggle for corporate recognition." (*Canada's First*, 292) This group, as members of the French-Canadian Métis Nation, hoped to change public opinion, "wide-spread prejudice that Métis were greatly inferior to other groups had to be fought." (de Trémaudan, *Hold High*, xii) The contrast of the two Métis voices, the Committee's and Dickason's (which are separated by almost a hundred years) is striking and illustrates – in the case of the Committee – a lack of conviction that the Métis will be heard and, a more assured belief – in the case of Dickason – that they have a rightful place at the dialogic table.

The Committee gathered documents owned by the Riel family, consulted participants and witnesses of the Resistances, and recorded their oral testimonies. According to the editor, there was immense hostility toward a Métis version of events, “as soon as the news spread that the Métis had decided to write their history and defend themselves, people in certain quarters hastened to cast suspicion on this movement and even to use intimidation. Why? What did they fear? Did they wish to deny most salient facts of its history and justify itself?” He adds enigmatically: “There did exist certain motives that we prefer not to discuss.” (*Hold High*, xii) This was possibly a reference to the Liberal Canadian government led by Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, 1896-1911, who fought for control of natural resources to be retained by the federal government rather than the provincial governments, and who oversaw the creation of Alberta and Saskatchewan as Canadian provinces in 1905. The prospect that the questions over the Resistances that continued to be problematic and remained raw over the issues of territory, language, and, sovereignty being resurrected were viewed as dangerous to the Dominion and suppression of these issues would have been a principal concern.

De Trémaudan was a French-Canadian historian who had deep sympathies for the consequences to the Métis people of the outcome of the Riel Resistances. With de Trémaudan’s help the Committee hoped to encourage a rejuvenation of strength, dignity, and a self respect in the Métis for their customs and a belief that its people had a right to exist as a nation: “The Métis owed to themselves, and to those who have gone before, a chronicle that will inspire in the new generation of French-Canadian Métis a pride in their ancestry and their past. The knowledge of these facts will enable them to hold their heads high and say, ‘This is our land.’” (*Hold High*, xvi) The English edition that I reference is translated by Elizabeth Donaldson Maguet, a



French-Canadian who acted as Managing Editor for Manitoba Métis Federation Press/Editions Bois-Brulés. Published in 1982, three years before the one hundredth anniversary of Riel's execution and the flood of publications marking that event – and the year of the legal definition and recognition of the Métis - Maguet added the title for this edition with a “message to the Métis people: Hold High Your Heads.” (*Hold High*, title page) The main purpose of the original publication was to stress the legitimacy and rights of the Métis and the French-Canadians to retain French as their official language. However, the first chapter is allocated to: “The Maternal Ancestor: The Indian Women.” (1) Although there is a hegemonic schematic tendency in the terminology throughout the text when referring to them, this first chapter defends the Indigenous population against a Euro-Canadian hostile dismissal of the First People's Nation on the continent of North America:

The Indian lacked neither intelligence nor sagacity. Our imperfect knowledge of his language and temperament dims our appreciation of his qualities. In our self-conceit we forget that he like anyone else, was justified in resisting the invasion of his domains by a race who came to destroy even his simplest means of existence. It is only fair to admit that we, the Whites, did much to earn the mistrust of the red man. We have only to ask what our own feelings would have been had we endured the same treatment even in the name of a civilization which we conveniently call ‘advanced’. (2)

De Trémaudan identifies specificities of the Métis people as both separate from and amalgamated with that of First Nations and Europeans, thereby establishing a new tribe whose ties to the land are an integral part of their identity. However, it may be seen to be told with what Vizenor would call “the romance of an aesthetic absence” (*Fugitive*, 228). Perhaps this is an internalized colonial ideology of a romantic ‘dead’ First Nations life on the prairies, or (which I think more likely) a strategic appeal to a Euro-Canadian readership for a sympathetic hearing because of these romantic images. Before the decimation of wild life that forced the Métis to cultivate the land, and as with First Nations tribes, the buffalo herds were crucial to survival for the

Métis, who relied on them for food, clothing and shelter. De Trémaudan describes a rigid organization that was necessary in order successfully to hunt enormous herds of bison. Métis hunting techniques differed from those of First Nations tribes who drove the bison off cliffs or drove them into enclosures; the Métis galloped on horseback through the middle of a herd and shot the selected animals with rifles. While there were still tens of millions of bison thriving on the prairies, each spring and autumn, from the late eighteenth century, the Métis would make up hunting parties of up to 1,600 hundred people, including men, women and children. The organizational structure for the hunts, which later formed the basis of Louis Riel's leadership of his Provisional Governments, is described by de Trémaudan:

They chose a leader called general or president and twelve councillors to whom was added a public crier responsible for bringing rules, orders and recommendations to the attention of the people in the camp. [...] Above all it was his duty to declare the moment to charge the buffalo. Also, they chose guides from among those most suited to carry out these critical functions, who, during the entire expedition, had to lead the hunters to the land richest in game and free of enemies. The remainder of the men became soldiers. They were grouped in tens and each ten chose a captain... The Council was both a government and a tribunal. It not only laid down the laws designed for a sound conduct of the hunt in all its details but saw that they were respected. These rules were the *law of the prairie*. [...] While the Council had a certain latitude in ordinary matters, in affairs of general importance, its authority was limited. In these it needed the assent of the entire camp, [...] Functioning only in cases of necessity, this patriarchal ceased to operate at the conclusion of the hunt when the difficulties were overcome, the dangers averted, or hostile attacks repelled. Hence the name *Provisional Government*. (Emphasis original, *Hold High*, 14)

As the buffalo herds diminished, tensions between the Métis and Indigenous tribes – particularly the North Dakota Sioux – increased. The Métis held dominant control over the plains from around 1840-1859 during which time there were frequent skirmishes resulting in the Sioux setting prairie fires to drive the Métis out of their territory. De Trémaudan writes that the Provisional Government served to protect the hunters “from enemies from without and within. The first of these enemies were the fierce Indian tribes who resented the Métis hunting the same game in the same

territory or who simply wanted to wage war and joined to do so in a dangerous way.” (*Hold High*, 13) In 1860 the Dakota Sioux sent a delegation requesting a conference with the Métis, who responded, travelling to Dakota to make peace. David Grant McCrady writes: “For the Métis, the purpose of these negotiations was to gain access to the hunt on Sioux lands and to engage in trade.” (*Living With Strangers*, 19) However, the relationship between the Sioux and Métis was negotiated through, as well as in spite of American and British sovereignty of indigenous territory: “In some ways aboriginal peoples tended to ignore the boundary. They moved repeatedly back and forth across the border, continuing to hunt and trap and gather foods, just as they had always done.” (6) But by 1851 the United States government hardened their attitude toward the Métis and sought to prevent them from crossing the international border.

De Trémaudan associates the enmity between the Hudson’s Bay Company, (HBC) and the North-West Company as the flashpoint of disenfranchisement for First Nations and Métis communities, and the further straining of relationships between the two groups:

The Hudson’s Bay Company, in particular, had greater freedom in its undertakings after 1760. But despite the claims and privileges contained in its Charter, it soon felt the rivalry of another powerful company, the North-West Company, that had been established in Montreal with the firm purpose of competition...It can be said that until about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Métis lived in comparative peace alongside their Indian cousins, sharing these immense lands in a free rivalry of hunting, trading and fishing. (*Hold High*, 19-20)

The competition for the fur trade between the two companies led both parties to encroach on each other’s assumed territories. The arrival of the Scottish Lord Selkirk, whose intent was to set up an agricultural settlement on the Red River, was the catalyst for a merger of the two companies. Selkirk bought thirty-one percent of HBC stock and gained controlling interest in 1811 through his marriage to Jean

Wedderburn-Colville, whose family owned a substantial amount of stock in the company. De Trémaudan sees Selkirk's plans as "inspired by philanthropic ideas that might better the living conditions of Irish and Scottish peasants." (23) However, Selkirk's acquisition of 116,000 acres of land from HBC was a business proposition that charged the settlers brought from Ireland and Scotland, per head, £10 for their passage, one hundred acres at 5 shillings, and one years provision. For a family of five, this would have been today's equivalent of around £5000, hardly affordable to "peasants". Moreover, any surplus from the settlers' crops would be sold through HBC. As well as being a business venture Selkirk's Red River settlement also served as a reinforcement of the British Empire through colonization of the North-West.

The majority of those involved in the fur trade, from both companies, were not in support of the settlement colony whose agricultural pursuits would affect their business. De Trémaudan maintains that the majority of Métis were amenable to the transition from fur trading to agriculture, but that the heavy-handed tactics of the HBC, through the Assiniboia governor Miles Macdonell, forced their resistance. "If the idea of a 'New Nation' can be traced to a single event, it would be the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816, although it had received considerable impetus with the curtailing of the export of products of the hunt from the colony two years earlier." (Dickason, *Canada's First*, 242) Macdonell issued the Pemmican Proclamation on January 8, 1814 stating that no provisions were to be exported without a special licence. This would have an immense impact on the Métis who economically relied heavily on the exportation of pemmican; dried and powdered bison mixed with bison tallow and sometimes dried berries. The Métis conducted a string of raids against the colony and, after a winter of starvation, in the spring of 1816 a group of 60 buffalo hunters led by Métis captain Cuthbert Grant captured the HBC post at Brandon House. The group

sequestered pemmican and took it to Red River where they were confronted by Robert Semple (governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land) and 21 settlers; this altercation is known as the battle of La Grenouillère, or the Seven Oaks. Semple and his men were killed along with one Métis hunter. De Trémaudan, on behalf of the 'New Nation' and in opposition to Euro-Canadian historical accounts of these events, and laying the blame at governor Macdonell's and Semple's doors, writes:

These are the facts the so-called impartial historians have distorted with the aim of casting the responsibility for this unhappy affair on the underhanded, barbarous and brutal conduct of the Métis...In our opinion, this bloody scuffle was caused by the imprudence of one man, ignorant of the nature of the country to which he had just come, who blundered, never dreaming of the consequences of his over-zealous actions. (*Hold High*, 35)

As a consequence of the confrontation, the Governor-General of British North America, Sir Gordon Drummond ordered an investigation out of which came a recommendation to merge the two companies which was realized in 1821.

With the diminishment of the buffalo herds and over hunting of other game, the Métis became menial labourers for HBC. The government's initiative to encourage white settlers pushed them towards militancy over concerns for clarification of their rights. The monopoly of HBC was strengthened with its repurchase in 1835 of the land acquired by Selkirk, which substantiated its legal governance of the colony. The HBC sanctioned punishing trade restrictions for the Métis who were forbidden to conduct transactions with anyone but themselves. The Métis were also disturbed by the appointment in 1839 of the Francophobe, Judge Adam Thom who, not bilingual, was viewed as a threat to the survival of the French language. However, the arrival of Catholic missionaries was seen by the majority of the Métis as a powerful support, not just spiritually, but as educators who could prepare First Nations and Métis children for the profound changes to their lives that were rushing in. Moreover, they acted on occasion as intermediaries between the Métis, the HBC, and government agencies. De

Trémaudan sees the arrival of Joseph-Norbert Provencher (1787-1853) elected bishop of St. Boniface in 1818, and his schools as a liberation, one that “awakened that desire for emancipation latent in all men of good family.” (45)

As Bryant had, de Trémaudan writes of the 1849 trial of the Métis William Sayer, who was arrested for trading independently of the HBC. In de Trémaudan’s account of the trial, he quotes an eyewitness to the speech Jean-Louis Riel, Louis Riel’s father, made in the courtroom:

We want more than the acquittal of Sayer, for having trafficked in a few furs with the Company’s permission, whatever the defence lawyer says. We demand that from now on trading be free all across the country and that all hunters and merchants have the right to buy, sell or exchange furs without first having to get permission from the Company. In the future it must no longer, in any way, meddle with our business transactions. We intend to be free. I proclaim here and now that from this time forward trade is free. (47)

Important as this declaration was in obtaining a collective voice to be heard within the HBC for the purpose of ending punitive trade practices, de Trémaudan cites the meeting of the Assiniboia Council after the trial as of equal importance. At this meeting it was agreed that in the future all magistracy dealings with the Métis or Canadian interests would be conducted in French: “The attitude of the Métis had the added effect of making the Hudson’s Bay Company and its servants in the Council of Assiniboia realize that they must now reckon with the French-speaking people of the colony.” (48)

After HBC’s agreement with the government to cede their land to Canada in 1867, but before the agreement had been formally signed, the government declared that the provinces of the North-West were no longer separate, but part of the dominion of Canada. Unlike Bryant, who generally questions the legality of the transfer of Rupert’s Land, de Trémaudan is specific in how the government acted unlawfully toward the Métis and the HBC: “The company did not have to sign and

seal the act of cession before November 19, 1869. Her Britannic Majesty was not required to affix the 'Sign Manual and Signet' before June 22, 1870. The transfer itself would be finalized only on July 16, 1870." (56) In spite of this, William McDougall sent a team to construct a road that would unify the Red River colony with Upper Canada. De Trémaudan writes that the most threatening action for the Métis was the Canadian government's dispatch of surveyors to mark the boundaries of Métis land: "This was absolute invasion [...]. Moreover, that the engineer-surveyors felt themselves authorized to carve out, for their personal use, parcels of the lands they surveyed, was indeed the height of insolence." (58) Protests from the Métis over what they rightly saw as a foreign incurrence and surrogate governance were ignored. De Trémaudan makes clear that the Métis, incensed at the Canadian government's intrusion and fearful of how it would affect their land rights and autonomy:

...saw in this change nothing less than the violation of the innate rights of the country's inhabitants, a despoiling of their most precious possessions – their land and their privileges [...] Indeed, these privileges were so deeply rooted within the Métis that they considered themselves a distinct nation. (62)

Moreover, the land being surveyed by the Canadian government had already been parcelled to the specifications of communal needs of the Métis; community held prairie for grazing of livestock, and family lots laid out in strips along the Red River's edge, extended back through strands of woods to fertile fields.

Trémaudan identifies Dr. John Christian Schultz, an Orangeman from Ontario, as one of the main sources of discord between the Métis and the white English-Canadian settlers. A member of the nationalistic political movement, Canada First, Schultz, and his party were biased against the Catholic, French, and First Nations communities. 'Firsters' were also opponents of the tyranny of the HBC's monopoly. However, as Sprague notes, "as soon as Schultz learned that the transfer [of the HBC land to

Canada] was imminent, he sloughed off his earlier liberalism and declared that authoritarian government under Canada was entirely proper until the colony was better prepared for elective institutions.” (35) With William Buckingham and William Caldwell, Schultz took over the *Nor’Wester*, the first newspaper at Red River, whose aim, de Trémaudan claims, was to “prepare the way for the pure and simple annexation of the North-West to Canada, where they were starting to talk a lot about Confederation. It was a question of which of the two provinces, Quebec or Ontario, which of the two nationalities French or English, would establish its influence over these new territories.” (53) Moreover, de Trémaudan laments the lost opportunity to the Métis; if they had set up a press published in French rather than English: “Who knows if French influence, already implanted by the Métis [...] would not have continued in Manitoba, and if that province as seems right and logical, might not have been a second Quebec?” (54)

As mentioned previously, Lieutenant Governor William MacDougall made a public proclamation that the transfer of the HBC land had already been completed, which prompted Riel to draft a list of conditions to safeguard Métis and First Nations rights. The Firsters decided to act independently of MacDougall, but with his sanction, in recruiting an army of English ‘half-breed’ sympathizers to attack the French Métis. Riel discovered the plot and on December 7, 1869 captured Schultz, Thomas Scott, and around 57 others, and jailed them at Fort Garry. On January 9, 1870, Scott and a few others escaped, Scott being recaptured a few weeks later. The rest, including Schultz, were to be held until the Métis could obtain assurances from the government that their rights to their territory and sovereignty would be honoured. While refusing to recognize the Provisional Government, Ottawa sent Donald A. Smith, Canadian Commissioner, to appease the Métis and prevent a war between the



English and French ‘half-breeds’. Riel contrived to have the documents sent from Ottawa to be read in front of one thousand of the inhabitants of the settlement.

Contained in the letters from Ottawa, were simple pacifications that were not legally binding since the promises had not been debated between the Houses of Parliament or the Cabinet. As de Trémaudan writes:

...a simple letter from Sir John Young, Governor- General of Canada, was full of lovely promises, but contained nothing precise. [...] If Smith had had the good sense to show these famous documents to Riel, the young Métis chief could have shown him quickly that the promises he brought were of no more importance than those previously brought by the pseudo-Governor McDougall. (81)

De Trémaudan argues that Riel viewed the sending of Smith to the settlement as recognition, if not of the Provisional Government, then at least “that the people of Red River had the right to require that they be consulted.” (81) On January 23, Schultz and a few others managed to escape. The first meeting of the Convention took place on January 25, which de Trémaudan concedes neither Smith nor the new Red River settlement’s Assembly had the legal authority to pronounce on any issues. “Only one proposal remained logical, the one Riel insisted on making: the establishment of a Provisional Government.” (82) The English delegation of the Red River settlement appealed for a consultation with Governor William McTavish and a committee made up of John Sutherland, John Fraser, Xavier Pagé and Ambroise Dydime Lépine was sent to ask: “‘Are you still Governor of this country? Will you continue to be?’ McTavish, suffering from the illness that a few weeks later was to carry him to the grave, answered, ‘For the love of God, form a government. I have no longer either power or authority.’” (82) This was seen by the Settlement, English and French, that the transition from the HBC governance to the Provisional Government headed by Louis Riel was successful. Sixteen prisoners held as hostages were set free.

Riel was willing to free the remaining prisoners until he heard rumours of a rising of English and Scottish colonists from Portage La Prairie, orchestrated by Schultz, who were planning a raid to free them forcibly. William Dease and five or six other French Métis were arrested as collaborators of Schultz, and scouts were sent to Headingly and Fort St. Pierre to track the movements of the opposition to the Provisional Government. De Trémaudan's recording of eyewitness accounts describes around 700 of Schultz's men arriving at Fort Garry on the evening of February 14, equipped with ladders to mount the fort's walls. Riel told the "English party" that the prisoners were no longer incarcerated, garrisoned the walls with his soldiers, and sent for more men to bolster the manpower of 500 that were already at the fort. (84) Schultz's men demobilized leaving Henry Prince (Mis-kou-kee-new, 'Red Eagle', the Saulteaux Chief who announced they were willing to fight for the Queen) to guard Fort de Pierre. De Trémaudan records that no one had informed Riel that the plan to attack Fort Garry had been abandoned so that when forty-eight armed men returned, William B. O'Donoghue, a Fenian and a principal aid to Riel, blocked their path, and took them prisoner. As supporters of McDougall and Schultz, Major Boulton and three of his Lieutenants were tried at a military court and condemned to death. Boulton was given a reprieve at the last minute if he swore not to oppose actively the Provisional Government.

Thomas Scott was one of the forty-eight men captured with Boulton and according to de Trémaudan was a difficult prisoner, "insulting the guards, defying and ridiculing them in front of the other prisoners." (84) Scott and another prisoner escaped from their cells, attacked their guards, and tried to incite other prisoners to follow their lead. At the insistence of his Councillors, who feared for Riel's life, Scott was sentenced to death for armed revolt and insubordination by a military court,

“presided over by Ambroise-Didyme Lépine, Adjutant of the Provisional Government, assisted by André Nault, Elzéar de Lagimodière, and J.-B. (Janvier) Ritchot. Joseph Nolin filled the role of Secretary and Joseph Delorme, that of the Guard.” (88) De Trémaudan emphasises that Riel was reluctant to execute Scott, pleaded for clemency, and was absent from the execution. After recounting the arrest of those involved in the sentencing of Scott, and Riel’s banishment for five years, de Trémaudan summarises that the resistance of the Métis during 1869-70 had practical results:

Briefly, except for the amnesty many times promised but never accorded as was understood, and except for a few quite secondary details, the Canadian Government, by its Manitoba Act of 1870, had consented to all the demands including in the list of rights of the Métis of the Red River and of the North-West, represented by the three official delegates of the Provisional Government, received and recognized by the Federal Government’s Ministers in Ottawa. (111)

After Riel’s banishment many Manitoban Métis moved west to Métis settlements established on the Saskatchewan River, and further to Alberta where along this route settlements had been established since the second half of the eighteenth century. The majority from the Red River diasporic settled at Batoche where two hundred families were led by Gabriel Dumont. The resistance of 1885, de Trémaudan emphasises, was made problematic by the involvement of the priests, particularly Monsignor Taché. Staunch Catholics, the Métis looked to the priests for guidance in spiritual and secular matters. The Métis received support for their resistance in 1869-70 from the church, as de Trémaudan points out, “while not participating openly in the resistance movement, they had, in fact, encouraged it, whether directly, by advice (like Father Ritchot) or indirectly, abstaining from all intervention even in the most tragic moments [...] or trying to bring calm and gain leniency from the authorities as did Msgr. Taché.” (121) Moreover, de Trémaudan argues that many petitions sent to

Ottawa were sent by members of the clergy and the rest were approved by the local missionary, with the majority of those actually drafted by missionaries. However, when the Métis decided to commence an armed resistance, the missionaries withdrew their support and punished them, as Dumont attests: “When we took up arms the priests turned against us. They would not hear our confessions, neither man, woman nor child.” (121) According to de Trémaudan “the missionaries deluded themselves in thinking that their disciplinary measures would stem the flood of unrest, which they themselves, without apparently realizing the final consequences, had helped to unleash.” (122)

De Trémaudan quotes extensively from the papers held by La Société Historique l’ Métisse of Dumont’s memoirs, recited orally (Dumont could neither read nor write) to E. Riboulet in 1886. After the Battle of Batoche, Dumont says he wanted to see Riel once more before escaping to the United States:

I looked for Riel for four days in spite of my wife, who kept urging me to cross the line and not be captured. I couldn’t leave without knowing where my poor ‘cousin’ was [...] I wanted to beg him not to give himself up, but then he might have won me over to his opinion. When I saw that I was alone, I decided to go to the United States. That was on May 16. (141-142)

Dumont joined Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show in 1886, and in spite of the general amnesty given in the summer of that year, did not return to Batoche until 1888.

The narrative of Riel’s trial is described by de Trémaudan as a “story [...] of the most shameful in the history of civilization, in general, and of Canada, in particular.” (143) Of the trial judge, Hugh Richardson, de Trémaudan calls into question his suitability, and indeed that of the prosecution’s team, to preside or be involved with the case as their Orange affiliations were well known. Of the defence, de Trémaudan writes that Charles Fitzpatrick was skilful and eloquent, but that since the trial was slanted toward Orangemen of Ontario and against the Métis of the North-West,

concludes that Riel “did not mount the scaffold to expiate the rebellion of 1885, but to expiate the resistance of 1869-70, and its subsequent events. He had been prosecuted for treason and condemned for murder.” (156) The country was divided over the execution of Riel, which was stayed three times, split along language lines and who carried more political weight, the French or the English. On March 11, 1886, P. Landry, Conservative Deputy for Montmagny, Quebec, proposed in Parliament: “That this house consider it a duty to express its deep regret that the sentence of death, pronounced on Louis Riel, judged guilty of high treason, was permitted to be carried out.” (155) In the debate that followed, Wilfred Laurier, liberal leader of Québec Est, (and Liberal Prime Minister, 1896-1911 who wanted a united Canada of French and English citizens) de Trémaudan writes that he was witnessed as saying “that if *he* had been on the banks of the Saskatchewan when the Métis took up arms, he would have joined them without hesitation.” (Emphasis original) He added, “Where would the Métis be today if there had not been a rebellion?” (156)

In the last chapter of *Hold High Your Heads* de Trémaudan includes a summary of seventeen points made in a speech in support of Landry’s motion by one of the French-Canadian Members of Parliament, Guillaume Amyot, one of which stated that the treatment “of the Métis had been very dishonest and very unjust. The pretended settlement of claims, petitioned for in vain over many years, was delayed seven years and resulted in an underhanded plundering of two thousand farms belonging to the Métis.” (157) De Trémaudan gives the last quote of the French-Canadian Members to François Bécharde who pronounced that: “If Riel had conquered in the North-West and had set up a permanent government, the matter would have been considered today as a glorious event. He would have been a hero; none would have dared call him a rebel and a traitor.” (157) La Société Historique l’ Métisse does consider Riel a hero whom

it regards as a martyr – at least at the time of the text’s publication – and whose participation in the resistance to the Dominion of Canada assured that “the history of the Métis in the Canadian North-West is worthy of a place in the glorious annals of the history of the world.” (165) That the formation of a Canadian nationhood and its separation from Great Britain receive recognition in the annals of history, then indeed, the history of Métis actions and interests deserve due acknowledgment.

### **Métis Autobiographical, Academic Self-Representation: Howard Adams and *Prison of Grass***

Howard Adams, a scholar and activist who in 1966 was the first Métis in Canada to obtain a PhD, presents us with autobiographical details in his political analysis of the formation of Canadian nationhood and the struggles of the Riel Resistance. While studying at the University of California, Adams heard Malcolm X speak at a rally and drew a parallel between Black Power and Red Power. When Adams returned to Canada he brought the ideologies of the American Indian Movement with him and became an important advocate of Aboriginal nationalism and militancy. In his most influential texts, *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View*, and *Tortured People: The Politics of Colonisation*, Adams incorporates the autobiographical form to express the narrative of the Métis in the North-West. Adams sees the Métis history through the prism of post-colonialism and Marxist theory focusing on, particularly in *Prison of Grass*, “the native people’s struggle as dictated by their oppression and exploitation. The book also reveals the infamous record of the federal government in suppressing the native people of Canada.” (*Prison*, 6) A self-identified ‘halfbreed’ Métis with a French-Cree mother and English-Cree father, Adams’ great-grandfather was Maxime Lépine, friend and brother-in-law of Riel. Along with his brother

Ambroise-Dydime, Maxime served in the provisional government in 1869-70, and was elected to the provisional government as counsellor in 1885. Lépine fought at the battles of Fish Creek and Batoche, surrendering to Middleton after the latter battle, and was tried and sentenced to prison for seven years for high treason and released after seven months. Adams writes that he feels ashamed for “not having inquired about my great-grandfather and his distinction.” (98) However, he reflects on the *raison d'être* for his lack of curiosity, paraphrasing the Martinican psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon's, *The Wretched of the Earth* as he does:

Of the many games we halfbreed kids invented, not one was relegated to the struggle of 1885. This history was hidden from us because our grandparents and parents were defeated generations. We were a new generation, starting our lives of defeat, without hope, ashamed of ourselves as halfbreeds. Although our forefathers – Régnier, Boucher, Fiddler, McDougall, Parenteau, Ouellette, Short, Adams – had fought gloriously against the Ottawa regime we were still the wretched of the earth. (98)

After the hanging of Louis Riel, the Métis suffered from increasing social disenfranchisement and the lack of legal definition that would protect their land rights and their identity. Growing up in what he describes as a ghetto, Adams learned shame that led him to separation from his family and Métis community:

To me, everything about them and the community seemed so definitely halfbreed, and therefore ugly and shameful [...] I wanted to be a successful white man in mainstream society. [...] I was fully aware of how whites mocked and condemned halfbreeds and their way of life. I wanted to escape all that ugliness and mockery. [...] I was very sensitive about my inferiority because I knew that whites were looking at me through their racial stereotypes and I too began to see myself as a stupid, dirty breed, drunken and irresponsible. It made me feel stripped of all humanity and decency, and left me with nothing but my Indianess, which at the time I did not value. (15-16)

Adams links the persistence of racial stereotyping by Euro-Canadians with their continuing dominant authority in telling the story of First Nations and Métis history.

Ute Lischke and David T. McNab concur: “Clearly, the Métis will have to tell their hitherto untold stories of their families and their communities; their history is both as

free and independent as they are themselves.” (*Long Journey*, 3) However, Lischke and McNab seem to have more confidence in Part II: Rights of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada in the Constitution Act of 1982 which in part declares that: “The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed” (*Aboriginal Rights, Part II*), and its powers to diminish embedded prejudices in the Euro-Canadian psyche than Adams:

Although known as Canada’s forgotten people, the Métis have always been here, within their extended families and their own communities. They now have constitutionally protected rights that are recognized. Today this fact is certain. However, it was not always so, since their identities and histories have largely been written by non-Aboriginal historians. (*Journey*, 3)

While stressing the imperativeness of self-identification and the powers inherent in a Métis perspective in the discourse of historical events, Lischke and McNab perhaps overestimate the authority of the Canadian Constitution to influence the wider Canadian populace in recognizing socially the Métis’ legally protected rights.

Adams locates the development and establishment of the Métis community and society in the period of conflict between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company. Specifically, Adams sees the Sayer case and its challenge to HBC’s tyrannical monopoly as raising the Métis political consciousness: “The power of the halfbreed nation became recognized for the first time in 1849, not only by themselves but by the Hudson’s Bay Company as well.” (*Prison*, 50) The transfer of Rupert’s Land to Canada by the HBC in 1869 and the relinquishment of its trade monopoly led to the subsequent resistance by the fixed Métis and First Nations communities of having their lands used as bargaining chips for the annexation of the North-West. Like Bryant, Adams objects to the term “rebellion” in describing the uprising of 1869-70:

According to most Canadian scholars and journalists, the resulting civil war was a rebellion by the Métis of Red River. Portraying it as a rebellion distorts the objective conditions and consequences of this struggle, justifies imperialist conquest, and at the same time falsifies the heritage of native people. The



struggle of 1869 was not a rebellion because it was not an uprising against a constitutional government in existence at the time. (51)

With no recognised government, the Métis formed the Métis National Committee and after taking control of the area of Fort Garry issued a “Declaration of the People of Rupert’s Land and the Northwest”, stating:

1. When people have no government, they are free to adopt one form of government, in preference to another, to give or to refuse allegiance to what is proposed.
2. The Hudson’s Bay Company having abandoned the people, without their consent, to a “foreign power,” the people are free to establish a provisional government and hold it to be the only lawful authority now in existence in Rupert’s Land and the Northwest, which claims the obedience and respect of the people.
3. The provisional government would enter into such negotiations with the Canadian Government as may be favourable for the good government and prosperity of its people. (Stanley, *Birth*, 84)

Adams describes the Orangemen Dr. J. C. Shultz and Thomas Scott as the primary agitators with mercenary objectives who were “engaged in clandestine and undemocratic activities against the Métis.” (*Prison*, 54) Adams correlates Scott’s involvement in an attempt at a coup d’etat in order to get McDougall into the colony with the political unification of the Métis: “Because the Orangemen and their allies supported the federal government, the Northwest people began to consider carefully what kind of government existed in Ottawa and how it would operate in the Northwest.” (55)

Further, Adams remarks that the United States’ interest in annexing the Northwest for itself prompted Ottawa to the “pretence of negotiations with the provisional government.” (56) The list of rights drawn up by the Provisional Government led to the Manitoba Act that promised the Métis self-government. However, as Adams points out, while Ottawa was assuring the Métis of political autonomy, they were gathering troops for a military expedition to the Red River settlement. On July 15, 1869 when Manitoba officially became a province, troops were travelling under the

command of Colonel Wolseley “ostensibly on a peace mission.” (58) With the arrival of the troops, Ottawa reneged on:

...several of the conditions previously greed [sic] upon, and, with the campaign complete and Red River occupied by federal troops, Ottawa installed its dominion over Manitoba. The people’s democratic government was crushed and the Hudson’s Bay Company was revised from its earlier feudal operation and brought into line with capitalist development. A reign of terror against the halfbreeds followed in the wake of Colonel Wolseley and his troops. When they and the Orangemen had finished their violent destruction, the halfbreeds were landless and homeless. (58)

For Adams, Riel’s successful election to membership in Parliament from which he was subsequently banished on the grounds that he was wanted for the murder of Thomas Scott, is a contamination that still resonates: “The vote scarred Canadian democracy and has doubtless caused some native persons to question its validity. This parliamentary decision leads one to wonder whether the electoral system will ever work for the Indians and Métis.” (59) By 1885 the slaughter of the buffalo, which Adams sees as a deliberate governmental policy similar to that of the American government’s, left the Métis destitute and starving. It also changed Métis political sovereignty that was rooted in their hunting economy. Moreover, because ‘halfbreeds’ were not identified as ‘Indian’, they were not allocated reserves but “confined on farm colonies and rural ghettos.” (61) In Adams’ view, not many ‘halfbreeds’ embraced the idea of homesteading because “the intention behind such land settlement plans was to exclude most of the indigenous people who had aboriginal claims.” (62) In addition the Métis could afford neither the down payment for securing homesteads, nor the farm machinery that would enable them to cultivate the acreage in the three years required by the government. Many Métis families chose the alternative of settling on the South Saskatchewan River. However, although they became residents or squatters, the Métis were unable to obtain land titles until after April 1885.

Adams has great sympathy for, and understanding of, First Nations communities' predicament in their forced negotiations with the government of Canada. Adams writes that in an unequal bargaining position, they were powerless because they did not speak English, they had become dependent on European economics and they were tribally divided. Adams quotes from an interview with Big Bear by the editor Patrick Gammie Laurie in the *Saskatchewan Herald*: "Big Bear stated that, before he signed the treaty, he had been promised by government officials as much land as he wanted, and wherever he wished to chose it. Without these conditions Big Bear claimed that he would never have signed the treaty." (*Saskatchewan Herald*, 25 February, 1882)

(63) Understandably, Big Bear expected that the promises of the oral treaty negotiations would be included as part of the signed treaty documents. Adams also observes the government's divided policies for the treatment of First Nations bands and the Métis:

Indians were treated as 'primitives' who could not be assimilated into white Euro-American society. They were segregated and isolated from the mainstream, under a policy much like apartheid. The Métis, although treated on a racial basis as indigenous people, were considered half white, and thus potentially assimilable. (71)

However, the Métis potential for assimilation was not enough to erase the Canadian government's doubts of their Aboriginal "primitive" heritage winning out over their Euro-Canadian "civilized" natures. Adams identifies the government policies that favoured the economic interests of the east, particularly those of Ontario, as putting pressure on the western economies. Farmers were paid lower prices for their goods and HBC charged disproportionately high freight rates. Moreover, before the suspension of construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway due to the near bankruptcy of the federal treasury, 17,000,000 acres of land that had been set aside for settlers had been given to the CPR. "These injustices were perpetuated without

warning or consultation with residents of the area, leaving many embittered and hostile.” (72) When white settlers petitioned the government for better conditions, Prime Minister Macdonald ignored their requests, deepening resentment against him and his administration. Adams considers William Henry Jackson, a Euro-Canadian farmer with “liberal militant” tendencies, together with Charles Adams, president of the English Halfbreeds Association, as the first to organize a central committee, “which became the governing body of confrontation activities.” (73) However, Adams maintains that after Dumont brought Riel back to Canada from the United States, (when Jackson became Riel’s secretary) Macdonald had a “made-to-order scapegoat”. (73) Further, Adams asserts that with the arrival of Riel: “Propaganda was circulated that described Riel as an advocate of hostilities and a leader of the ‘poor ignorant’ Métis who would do what he commanded. Finally, Macdonald began to show a personal interest in the western political scene, although he still pleaded ignorance of Métis grievances.” (73)

Propaganda was deployed by Macdonald’s administration to drive a wedge between the white settlers, First Nations, and Métis communities. However, alongside the propaganda spread by journalists, there was a lively debate in many Canadian newspapers. The *Prince Albert Times*, particularly, deliberately baited the government with its numerous articles covering the discontent in the Northwest. In the article titled: “Ottawa ignores grievances of the North West”, August 19, 1883, the editor accuses the Ottawa newspaper, the *Citizen*, of being an organ of the government when they called the petitions sent from the Northwest as “imaginary grievances”. It goes on to taunt the *Citizen* Editor that if he were to:

...take a run up to these Territories he would soon find out whether they are imaginary or not. He would find a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the policy of the Government in relation to the conduct of public affairs in the North West, particularly in regard to their land policy, which is growing stronger as the

months go by, and which is rapidly developing into something more potent than mere remonstrance. (Editor, "Ottawa Ignores", 1)

The threat of insurrection is palpable in its expressions of fury at the "system which has allowed all the valuable lands in the neighbourhood of Prince Albert to be monopolized by speculators and landgrabbers" warning that, "Even the trampled worm will turn at last, and they little understand the temper of our people if they imagine that the present state of things will much longer be endured." (3) On July 1, 1884, the *Prince Albert Times* also reported on an address to a public meeting by Riel (accompanied by Jackson) in Prince Albert. Riel, who was trying to defuse the growing tensions between the Euro-Canadian settlers and the Métis, made a speech, as recounted by the editor of the *Prince Albert Times*:

He said: He intended to address the meeting as human beings, and asked if they thought there was anything in him other than human. If he was, then he ought to have the rights and privileges of a human being and wished the meeting to state their decision in the matter [...] He had noticed that he had been called an 'alien French halfbreed,' which seemed to suggest he was otherwise than human. Riel again asked for the sympathy of the meeting as he did not feel satisfied with their last expression, as he thought it was not unanimous. (Applause). (Editor, "Riel Address", 1)

Adams maintains that there was a deliberate policy by Macdonald to agree to some demands of the white settlers "while at the same time allowing the Métis and Indian situation to aggravate itself to the point of desperation and hostility. In this way, Ottawa could justify troop movement to the Northwest by saying that savages had created an uprising and were massacring innocent settlers." (*Prison*, 75) Eighty-four petitions were sent to Ottawa by the Métis between 1878 and 1884 appealing for improved conditions; all were ignored. This did ensure the intensification of grievances felt by the Métis that Adams claims would result in the violence hoped for by the government. If Macdonald could suppress the 'hostile' Métis, he would be seen as the champion of eastern interests in the Northwest.

De Trémaudan and Adams accuse the Catholic priests and Charles Nolin of working together in betraying the Métis to General Middleton and Ottawa. Riel's cousin Nolin was the commissioner in the Provisional Government (and the Crown prosecution's key witness at Riel's trial) whom Adams charges with turning against Riel after the Red River struggle of 1869. Nolin was opposed to Riel's proposal for provincial status to the Red River Settlement. However, five years after this was accomplished in 1870, Nolin was appointed minister of agriculture, becoming a part of a government that had suppressed the Métis. Nolin was ambitious and perhaps felt eclipsed by Riel's leadership of the Métis; certainly, Nolin attempted to gain leadership after Riel's exile. Relations between the two men deteriorated; Nolin's attempts at undermining Riel led him to order his arrest after Nolin was suspected of receiving a bribe from Donald Alexander Smith, an HBC officer who was appointed by Macdonald to influence the Métis to refrain from opposing the HBC's transfer of land to the Canadian government. When Riel organized a committee of forty representatives in order to vote on the declaration that the HBC agreement be null and void, Nolin was the only member to vote against it. Adams writes that Riel and Dumont distrusted Nolin after his return to Batoche: "Why did he leave his successful position in Manitoba and move to a place where he was unemployed, without both income and status? Was he being employed by Prime Minister Macdonald to spy on the halfbreeds of Saskatchewan?" (84) There was a further source of tension between Nolin and Riel; Nolin's devout Catholic sensibilities were taxed by Riel and Father André's estranged relationship over theological disagreements and Riel's proclamations as a prophet. Adams maintains that some priests became so antagonistic toward Riel for his rejection of the principles of the Catholic Church that they plotted to annihilate him, and to do so, collaborated with Charles Nolin. Further,

the divisive relations between Riel and Nolin, and Riel and the priests exacerbated the distrust that existed between the white settlers and the Métis.

In *Hold Your Head High*, La Société Historique l' Métisse writes that it is its “painful but imperative duty” to expose the role and actions of particular missionaries in 1885. To substantiate its claim and avoid the accusation of bias, La Société Historique Métisse quotes from a letter jointly signed by Fathers André, Touze, Moulin, Fourmond, Végreville, and Lecoq, addressed to the Province of Quebec just over a month after Riel’s incarceration: “Louis David Riel does not deserve the support of the Roman Catholic Church and its members, since he usurped our mission as priests and deprived our people of the advantages and consolations we could have offered them. He did all this for his own personal interest.” (*Hold High*, 195) Letters to the Métis community from various priests grew more vicious as Riel’s trial approached; Father Fourmond wrote: “We had our Antichrist in the person of Louis Riel, against whose deadly influence on our poor people we had to struggle [...] his diabolical plans caused the shedding of blood of Whites and that of our dear and zealous confreres massacred by the Indians under his orders.” (196) At a loss to find reason in these vitriolic outpourings, La Société Historique Métisse concludes that “the only possible explanation of this attitude, so contrary to the priestly character and to the personal sentiments of some among them, is that the Government of the day had to be saved.” (196)

The defeat of the Mounted Police at Duck Lake prompted a surge of volunteers to enlist in the forces and, as Adams attests, transportation of the troops was “an excellent opportunity for the C. P. R. to prove itself and restore public confidence in its operations.” (*Prison*, 87-88) Middleton and his men wandered the prairies for a month, expecting an attack by the Métis; however, as Bryant and Adams points out,

the Métis were only intent on protecting their homes. As government troops begin to head toward Batoche with their Gatling gun, Dumont gathered his men to attack Middleton's camp at Fish Creek. Middleton and his men, unused to guerrilla warfare, were driven out of their camp, leaving behind the bulk of their equipment. However, the Métis were severely outnumbered by over eight hundred Canadian men with "one soldier or policeman equipped with the latest weapons for every five persons in the Northwest, including women and children." (93) Adams describes the battle of Batoche as a deliberate and unnecessarily brutal undertaking. The conflict began on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1885 and ended on May 12<sup>th</sup>, "on the fourth day Middleton closed in for the final victory. Instead of offering terms, as he might have done knowing that the Métis were almost out of ammunition, he pounded the town with rifle, machine gun, and cannon fire." (93) Adams claims that Middleton knew that Batoche was lacking supplies "because he was being kept informed by the priests." (93)

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1885 Louis Riel surrendered while Dumont decided to fight on before he ultimately escaped to the United States. Riel and Dumont had oppositional views on how to win the struggle against Ottawa. De Trémaudan recounts the disagreement between Riel and Dumont over procedures in how to counteract Middleton's advance on Batoche before reinforcements were sent for. Dumont advised that they should "get ahead of the troops and harass them during the night. Avoid the army, but tire it, make guerrilla attacks, retreat, but never yield. That, he said, would demoralize the enemy soldiers, and prevent them from rapid advance during the day, forced as they must be to rest after the fatigue of the night." (*Hold High*, 127) Riel was squeamish about guerrilla tactics, and had been informed that there were French-Canadians in Middleton's camp. Dumont countered, "since these folks came to pillage and massacre, I can't see, now that we've decided to revolt, why



we should hesitate to wound or kill even friends, who, though ill-advised, would not hesitate under orders to fire on us and our families.” (127) De Trémaudan comments:

The idea of using Indian methods of warfare made Riel inflexible. Dumont had to give in and renounce all his defence tactics, the only effective ones under the circumstances. That was Riel’s great drawback. Even if he were a good legal counsellor, he was no military leader [...] at all costs [Riel] did not want it be said of him or his people that they acted like savages. (127)

Adams considers Riel naïve about Ottawa’s enthusiasm for military force in suppressing the Métis. In *Tortured People: The Politics of Colonisation*, Adams argues that Riel’s “superior leadership” abilities of 1869-70 in the struggle for Métis autonomy, by 1885 had given way to his focus on “radical spiritual reform”, with an emphasis on pacifism and negotiation. Furthermore, Adams writes: “Riel willingly surrendered to Middleton, leaving Métis people to scramble for their personal survival. If he had not been at Batoche, the Métis and Indians may have had a better chance of winning their liberation struggle, of maintaining control of their territory and establishing a nation.” (*Tortured*, 108) In a CBC radio interview conducted by Ted North and broadcast on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1966, in anticipation of Canada’s 100<sup>th</sup> year of Confederation in 1967, Howard Adams was asked how he felt about the Battle of Batoche being re-enacted. Speaking generally for the Métis of Batoche, Adams wryly voiced the concern that the possibility of two more re-enactments had been refused; those of Fish Lake and Duck Lake where the Métis had triumphed. Adams took the opportunity to add that while Louis Riel is identified as the leader of the Métis insurgents, this was because:

...the white man has written all the history textbooks, and he has made Louis Riel the real leader and hero of the society. But this is not quite true with us. Gabriel Dumont is the man, is our hero, is our man. And there was considerable amount of conflict between Gabriel Dumont and Louis Riel. But my own people followed more closely to Gabriel Dumont and he is the man they revere today. (*North*, CBC Radio)

It is an important part of Adams' account of the Riel Resistances to include the story of his great-grandfather, Maxime Lépine, who was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for felony treason for his participation in the 1885 uprising. Adams' identity and self-identification, after his raised political consciousness and a refutation of a Euro-Canadian definition, is fixed in the history of his family and community which is vital to self-representation, as Lischke and McNab argue: "The old worn categories and academic debate on who are the Métis people must be challenged and transformed by the Métis voices themselves – Canada's forgotten people." (*Journey*, 1) Adams writes emotively of his grandfather's incarceration: "Leg irons and chains were used to lash together 25 Indian and halfbreed prisoners, until all were brought to trial in August, three months after their capture." (*Prison*, 99) Writing of his grandfather's trial, Adams' ire is focused on one of the many travesties in law of the resistance trial: "The defendants did not speak English, and many of the legal terms employed were difficult to translate into French and impossible to translate into Cree." (99) Adams relates the lack of integrity in the proceedings and its outcome:

My great-grandfather and 10 other patriots did not have to wait long to appreciate British justice: within the hour they were sentenced to the penitentiary of Manitoba for a period of seven years. The suffering and torture during his imprisonment took its toll and, two years after his release, Lépine was dead. The Canadian government had its own peculiar way of exterminating the Indian and halfbreed people, less dramatic and violent than the American way, but equally effective. (100)

Adams states, while conceding that it is difficult to prove definitively, that Riel's trial was contaminated by conspiracies, collaborations and collusion between "politicians and capitalists with their vested interests." (109) Adams writes that through his studies he could only conclude that Charles Nolin, Philip Garnot, together with Fathers André, Végreville, Moulin, and Fourmond were "definitely members of the secret group. But there were many others; possibly government officials, cabinet

ministers, or C.P.R. officials.” (111) He further accuses Nolin, André, and Fourmond of being “professional witnesses” who testified for the prosecution: “In fact, the prosecution in Riel’s trial based nearly all of its arguments on the evidence of these three witnesses; whereas the three defense lawyers did not cross-examine these witnesses beyond a few, simple, friendly questions.” (110) Furthermore, Adams maintains that by hanging Riel, “Ottawa silenced revolutionary and separatist ideas in the Northwest for many years.” (120)

Adams writes of the changes to his perspective and a new awareness of his identity while he was studying at Berkeley, University of California, “[it] made me conscious of myself as a Canadian, yet being Canadian did not satisfy or explain fully my nationality. It was only when I acknowledged to myself my Indian ancestry that I was fully satisfied with my national identity.” (152) Further, he examines the ongoing complexities and difficulties challenging Native Canadians in their demands for a socially and politically recognized status that has created tensions for Métis and First Nations in the context of the dominant social fabric of Euro-Canada. Adams stresses that tensions were also created between First Nations and Métis communities by the government of Canada who, before the Constitution Act of 1982, did not confer the Métis legal status. With no specific records for a group who were not categorized as having a particular racial identity, the Métis were grouped with non-status or non-treaty First Nation people. Legally, Métis and non-status First Nations people were considered as part of Euro-Canadian society, whether or not they lived traditional aboriginal lives. However, as Adams emphasizes, “in practice, the Métis and non-status Indians are personally identified and discriminated against as a specific racial group. The pretence is made that we are equal co-workers in mainstream society.” (128)

In 1975 when *Prison of Grass* was first published, there were immense difficulties in uniting Métis communities and it was problematic to bring the Métis and First Nations tribes together to challenge a dominant Euro-Canadian ideology. To elude prejudice many Métis, including Adams who acknowledges his internalization of racial prejudices that prompted his attempts to be a “successful white man”, reject any association with a First Nation or Métis identity. Adams argues that “since the whites inclined to hold full Indians in greater contempt, and since Métis sense this sliding scale of discrimination they sometimes make sure they are distinct as possible from full Indians.” (145) Adams cites an example of how this practice was played out in his family: “Because of the white society’s racial images, the Métis consider themselves superior to Indians. One of my maternal aunts has refused to allow me into her house or to speak to me because I stated publicly that my mother was of Cree ancestry.” (145) Ensnared in an identity prescribed by external forces, Adams argues that First Nations people, too, try to counteract inequitable judgements in a fragmented nation, “many status Indians consider themselves superior to halfbreeds because they are true Indians and have a noble heritage. Native people all along the continuum of Indianness are sensitive to and react to the colonizer’s portrait of themselves which obstructs the building of harmonious relationships among the members of native society.” (145) These issues continue to be contentious; “white society’s racial images” influence and create a tension between perceptions by Euro-Canadians of the Métis and First Nations; on the one hand Euro-Canadians have been propagandized into disregarding both groups as untrustworthy outsiders to the status quo, on the other as emblematic romantic creatures with whom blood-identification and association is a source of pride. The Euro-Canadians who romanticize and claim distant blood kinship are much derided as ‘wannabees’ by both groups. The

complexity of identification is compounded for mixed-blood, status, and nonstatus Métis by the Métis National Council's decision in 2002, who as Bonita Lawrence writes, adopted:

...a new definition of Métisness, which restricted membership in the Métis Nation solely to individuals who could claim descent from the historic Red River community. This not only excluded former member groups such as the Métis Nation of British Columbia and the Métis Nation of Ontario, it excluded a sizeable number of nonstatus individuals in western Canada whose diverse histories are not from the Red River but who identify strongly (and receive services) as Métis. It is striking that, in doing this, the Métis National Council has made strong statements distancing themselves from their former constituency, calling them "wannabees" (in much the same way that status Indian organizations currently dismiss Métis people). (*Real*, 85)

For generations Métis authors have continuously challenged governmental doctrines of identity, while deconstructing essentialist practices in order to voice self-identification and rectify misrepresentation.

### **Academic 'High Priests'?: George Stanley and Thomas Flanagan**

Consistent with Adams' urgency that Métis voices must be heard in the telling of their histories, is his rejection of particular biases that are disseminated through many Euro-Canadian versions of the formation of a Canadian nationhood. Adams brands George Stanley as a "promoter of white supremacy in Canada" and perceives his influence as dangerous in propagating simplistic and damaging images of First Nations and the Métis:

George Stanley is hailed by other academics as the high priest of Métis history. *The Birth of Western Canada* [...] is a Bible to those who have written about the Métis for many years. The book's main narrative is the clash between primitive and civilized peoples; a kind of Hollywood version of battles between 'scalping savages' and white settlers. [...] Such efforts still pose as historical truth. (*Tortured*, 30)

Adams finds George Stanley and Thomas Flanagan's historical renderings of the Northwest particularly disrespectful and dangerous reinforcements of social and racial

stereotypes. George Stanley is the general editor of *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel/Les Ecrits Complets de Louis Riel* published in 1985, the hundredth anniversary of Riel's execution. His extensive academic credits include an historical biography of Louis Riel published in 1963, and the influential *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* initially published in 1936 as his doctoral thesis. After its public, as it were, publication in 1961 by the University of Toronto Press, it remained in print for thirty years until the last reprint in 1992, and its authority with historians and in academia at all levels of the Canadian school system persists. This influence is deemed malignant by many because the Riel Resistances and the acquisition of the Northwest are seen from a Euro-Canadian perspective that perpetuates – sometimes covertly, more often overtly – the view of Métis and First Nations tribes as a people and culture in a temporary stage of assimilation towards annihilation. When writing about Métis and First Nations, Stanley's condescension is palpable. However, it is the self-deluding façade of concern that is particularly offensive when he writes about the Northwest settlements of 1830:

The gravest problem presented to the Dominion of Canada by the acquisition and settlement of Rupert's Island and the North-West, was the impact of a superior civilization upon the native Indian tribes. Again and again, in different places and in different ways, this problem has unfolded itself at the contact of European and savage. Too often the advent of the white man has led to moral and physical decline of the native. In Africa, Australia, Melanesia and America, the clash of peoples in different stages of Development has spelled disaster to the weaker. The Europeans, conscious of his natural superiority, is only too contemptuous of the savage, intolerant of his helplessness, ignorant of his mental processes and impatient at his slow assimilation of civilization. The savage, centuries behind in mental and economic development, cannot readily adapt himself to meet the new conditions. He is incapable of bridging the gap of centuries alone and unassisted. Although white penetration into native territories may be inspired by motives of self-interest, such as trade and settlement, once there, the responsibility of 'the white mans burden' is inevitable. (*Birth*, 194)

Thomas Flanagan, Deputy Editor of *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel/Les Ecrits Complets de Louis Riel*, professor of political scientist at the University of Calgary,

neo-conservative political activist – including mentor and advisor to Prime Minister

Stephen Harper – writes in his introduction to the 1992 edition of *The Birth of*

*Western Canada*:

...it has been read by tens of thousands of researchers and students over a period of more than fifty years, and this new reprint is tribute to its continuing vitality. What is perhaps almost as remarkable is that George Stanley has not revised a single word of the book over all these years. He told me once that he would never write a second edition of any of his books. He would not, he said, take unfair advantage of his readers by inserting the benefit of later wisdom into the text. At the time, I thought this was a bizarre attitude, although I did not tell him so, but now I understand it better. By refusing to revise, George Stanley has made his books of history an actual part of history. The study of history is itself historical; and for generations of students of Western Canadian history, the starting point has been and will continue to be *The Birth of Western Canada*.  
(xi)

Yes it will, and until there is a correcting of the imbalance of influence reaching a wider Euro-Canadian readership, Métis and First Nations people will struggle to remedy the dominant culture's marginalization of them. Stanley's reasoning that his position should not be revised in subsequent editions is sound, when the argument is that it makes "his books of history an actual part of history". The study of history is itself historical, therefore an intervention by and from Métis and First Nations' accounts of a shared history in the formation of a Canadian nationhood is imperative in correcting the absence of the voices that contributed to it, which in turn becomes "an actual part of history". Inexorably, contemporary Métis writers who integrate historical events into their fictional, and/or autobiographical texts, also carve a place as part of this shared history.

Flanagan also defends Stanley's view of an 'uncivilised' culture being defeated by a 'civilised' one: "Stanley emphasised the clash between native *culture* and the advance of white *civilization*." (Emphasis mine, xiii) Taking the intellectual high ground, Flanagan argues against nit-picking historians and contemporary readers who might object to Stanley's turns of phrase:

It is now the 1990's, when many historians and anthropologists refuse even to use the word 'civilization' because they regard it as an ethnocentric expression of European superiority. In this climate, Stanley's words may strike some readers as condescending or even racist. But to read them that way would be intellectually perverse as well as unfair to the author. In the setting of the 1930's, Stanley's approach was a pioneering attempt to depict native, especially the Métis, as real people, real actors, in Canadian history. In his view, the Métis were not just a French-Canadian offshoot in Western Canada, *even if they were tragically doomed to be crushed by the march of civilization*, they were a separate people who had to be understood in their own terms. (Emphasis mine, xiii)

Setting aside, for the moment, Flanagan's own vernacular in writing about the Métis in the past tense, Stanley's prose is not just a product of its time; it is a product of an enduring mind-set that endeavours to reinforce a binary that places Euro-Canadian culture above that of the Métis and First Nation people. Stanley's sorrowful hand-wringing over the woeful state of aboriginal tribes after contact with Europeans, does not disguise his supplication for sympathy for the responsibility shouldered by the 'inevitable' and 'superior' conquerors.

Unlike Bryant, Stanley has a reverence for the British Empire and attributes to it an inherent fairness and honour. He describes the history of 'native' policy as having passed through three phases; conquest, segregation and amalgamation. He attributes the conquest phase to the French, "as far as the Indian rights to land were concerned" and segregation and amalgamation to the British:

...British native policy in regard to the Canadian Indian was designed to break up their tribal organization by making them amenable to the laws of the land and by providing means for their ultimate enfranchisement...the object of Canadian policy from the middle of the nineteenth century was the amalgamation of the native and the European races. (195)

However, Stanley's seemingly temperate terms "segregation" and "amalgamation" attempt to mask the consequences of callous Canadian policies on First Nations and Métis communities. While he concedes that the HBC was a "mixed blessing" for the Indigenous population, considering its impact on tribal self-reliance and independence, Stanley consistently states that conditions could have been worse, such



as south of the border where “Indians were fighting for life and revenge against the white men.” Moreover, he overstates the peaceful relations between First Nations communities and the HBC, “their dealings with the Indians were marked by a sense of trusteeship and strict integrity. The Indian learned to respect the ‘Kingchauch’ man as the representative of superior civilization and the embodiment of fair dealing.” (197) Fair dealing or not, First Nations community survival depended on trading with the HBC when the buffalo herds that were central to their existence were decimated.

Stanley quotes the Standing Rules of the HBC – waggishly nicknamed “Here Before Christ” and “Hungry Belly Company” by indigenous trappers and traders – that were reported by the British Select Committee in 1857: “That the Indians be treated with kindness and indulgence, and mild and conciliatory means resorted to in order to encourage industry, repress vice, and inculcate morality.” (197) This may have been policy, but the practical control and implementation of these rules couldn’t be unilaterally monitored in such a vast territory, let alone enforced. Adams writes that First Nations traders were consistently cheated in their trade of furs that were exchanged for what turned out to be faulty merchandize, and when an argument was made, the complainant was beaten by HBC employees. Further, Adams argues: “Liquor was also commonly used as a ‘treat’ during which the trader would give the Indians free drink to get them intoxicated, so that they could cheat them out of their furs [...] in one year alone the Hudson’s Bay Company imported nearly 5000 gallons of rum to be used in trade with Indian trappers.” (Prison, 26-27) HBC’s website claims that:

Originally, the Company was extremely reluctant to sell alcohol to the native population. Instructions sent by London to Fort Albany Governor Anthony Beale in 1713 was explicit: *‘Trade as little brandy as possible to the Indians, we being informed it has destroyed several of them.’* But despite the very best intentions, it proved impossible to compete with the Nor’westers without resorting to the sale of liquor. Not only had a market developed among the aboriginal peoples,

but the drinking of alcohol itself formed a key piece of the ceremonial which evolved around the exchange of goods for furs. (*HBC Archive*)

Alcohol as a “key piece of the ceremonial” is misleading at best. Trade ceremonies that took place between indigenous tribes pre-contact, and extended to European traders of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, who were expected to honour the tradition of an exchange of gifts that could last for days – alcohol excluded – became a parody of themselves at the instigation of the HBC and the North-West Company with their introduction of alcohol.

The increasing strength of the HBC monopoly multiplied infractions of HBC Standing Rules causing skirmishes at many trading forts. However, Stanley identifies the transfer of HBC territory to Canada as having the most damaging effect on First Nations and Métis communities. With the increase of white settlers and the loss of HBC governance, free trade was unchecked: “Trader outbid trader and upset the century old values fixed by the Hudson’s Bay Company [...]. In southern Alberta, American whiskey runners from Montana introduced the lawless spirit of the American frontier.” (*Birth*, 199) The pressures on an expanding Canadian nation prompted an evaluation of what was occurring south of the border; a threat was perceived, not only of the possibility of losing territory, but also a loss of the fragile construction of ‘Canadian’ as a collective identity. Because of the fears of the settlers in Red River that were whipped up from sensational stories of the United States ‘Indian Wars’, it was paramount to distinguish the American identity from that of the Canadian. Stanley writes of the lawlessness of the American ‘frontier’ that appeared to be imminent in filling the economic vacuum in the Northwest left by the diminishing influence of the HBC, and he distances Canada from the possibility that what had occurred in the United States, particularly in relation to Native American communities, could possibly happen in the North-West, or anywhere else in Canada.

Stanley states that the North-West First Nations fears of settler's occupation of their land:

...hardly arose in the North-West before the 'eighties, but the gruesome experience of their kinsmen in the United States was not lost upon the Canadian Indians in the North West Territories...Extermination was the frontiersman's policy, and to it, by force of circumstances, the American Government became an unwilling ally. Obligated to protect their citizens against Indian retaliation, the United States were involved in a series of Indian wars. To the natives this meant ultimate extinction but they fought with desperation. (201)

The "Canadian Indians" would have been perfectly aware of the threat of European occupation of their lands long before the "eighties", and it is deceptive of Stanley to imply that the American Government was unwillingly led into the destruction of Native American lives and culture when it was acting on governmental policy. In a different context, Stanley states: "[The people of Canada] knew what to expect from the United States. After all, Canada had considerable experience of its sometimes unscrupulous neighbour, and Canadians knew that Americans would always take advantage of their strength and position." (*Louis Riel*, 42) The self-definition of a Canadian identity required a clear demarcation from that of the United States. Jennifer Reid proposes Canada's issue of identity as being a binary necessity, which, "over time [...] assumed a sense of distinctiveness based on moral superiority that precluded the possibility of regarding the United States as an 'equal' when the time came for Canada to identify fully with its continental situation rather than with the British Empire." (*Louis Riel and Creation*, 42) As an evolving independent nation, Canada could not distance itself from the British Empire only to lose a distinctive identity to that of the United States and the strategy remains that of "moral superiority" on the world stage; Canada: fair and honourable: United States: powerful and "unscrupulous".

Stanley has a conflicting opinion to Bryant's of the French and English speaking 'half-breeds' in the North-West. While Bryant considers English half-breeds as "reprobates" (*Blood*, 49), a quality passed down from their fathers, and Métis as inheriting honourable characteristic from their French fathers, Stanley deems the English speakers – with predominately Scottish fathers – as "economical, industrious and prosperous." The Métis he regards as "honest, hospitable and religious, rather improvident and happy-go-lucky, without care and without restraint, true sons of the prairie, as free as the air they breathed and by nature as independent as the land which gave them both." (*Birth*, 9) In other words, he sees them as child-like, a quality handed down by their Cree mothers. Stanley finds the North-West Company culpable in "rousing the racial consciousness of the metes. The Nor'Westers carefully fostered the idea of half-breed territorial rights and informed the credulous metes that the white settlers were interlopers who had come to steal the land from them." (11) Perceiving them as unsophisticated children, it is unfathomable to Stanley that the Métis were capable of understanding, by their own cognizance, that an influx of settlers endangered their land rights. On the contrary, the Métis organised themselves politically, considering themselves part of a 'New Nation'. Further, Stanley parades a counterfeit magnanimity that he claims was not shared by many of the early European settlers because of their consciousness of a "material superiority", and therefore were "only too contemptuous of the savage, intolerant of his helplessness, ignorant of his mental processes and impatient at his slow assimilation of civilization. The savage, centuries behind in mental and economic development, cannot really adapt himself to meet the new conditions." (194) Stanley would appear to believe that the Métis had a legitimate and just case against the government for new land claims in the Northwest: "The attempt to impose an unfamiliar, and to the métis, unsatisfactory system of

survey, and thus deprive them of their river-frontages and destroy their village community life, invited armed resistance.” (225) However, Stanley maintains that overall, Canadian native policy acted with “honesty, justice, and good faith” (214).

In 1985 Flanagan published *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered* to coincide with the centennial of the second Northwest resistance. In this text, Flanagan disagrees with Stanley that the Métis had unaddressed grievances which “invited armed resistance”, asserting that the “minor grievances of the *Métis* certainly were not enough to require an armed uprising against the state, and in any case the government was already moving to respond to their complaints. The alleged grievances were only pretexts for Riel to provoke an uprising in furtherance of his private interests.”

(Emphasis original, *Reconsidered*, 10) D. N. Sprague comments on Flanagan’s version of the events of 1885:

No other historian had echoed the official history more faithfully. No one had come closer to providing a complete echo of the ‘statement of facts’ prepared for the Governor General by the Department of the Interior in April 1885. The key elements of the interpretation were government fairness, on the one hand, and Métis intransigence (misled by Riel), on the other. In the official history, Canada was a helpless victim. (*Canada*, 16)

However, Flanagan is confident that his account of Riel’s motives and their subsequent effect on Canada-Métis relations is academically and historically more accurate than the accounts of Gabriel Dumont, A. H. de Trémaudan, Howard Adams, D. N. Sprague, and George Stanley. Flanagan claims that he had previously believed that the Métis had “serious unresolved grievances”, that “Riel resorted to violence only after legal means of action failed; that he received a trial of questionable validity before being executed by a vengeful government.” (*Reconsidered*, viii) I have found no verification that Flanagan previously held these views; nevertheless he claims that when he:

...sifted the evidence, this view became less and less convincing to me, until I

concluded that the opposite was closer to the truth: that the Métis grievances were at least partly of their own making; that the government was on the verge of resolving them when the Rebellion broke out; that Riel's resort to arms could not be explained by the failure of constitutional agitation; and that he received a surprisingly fair trial. (*Reconsidered*, viii)

Flanagan writes that he agrees that the term used in reference to the events in the Northwest in 1869-70 should accurately be called the "Red River Resistance" and not as it is commonly known, "rebellion" because the Provisional Government was formed when no other government was in place. However, because Flanagan denies a link between the resistance of 1869-70 and the actions of the Métis in 1885, he concludes that: "Riel's followers not only formed a government, they took hostages, demanded to negotiate with Canada, and fought pitched battles with the police and militia. I think 'rebellion' is the proper word for what they did." (viii)

Flanagan's book, *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, is a polemical text that dismisses First Nations and Native Americans as no more than the first immigrants among many on the North American continent and therefore without any more persuasive land claims than the French, British or any other settler. Consistent with this logic, Métis, as mixed bloods, have no compelling case for land rights either.

Flanagan maintains that:

Unlike First Nations, the Metis Nation has no land base, except for the seven Metis settlements in northern Alberta established as a result of provincial initiative in the 1940's. Metis leaders have been trying for decades to acquire a land base, both through negotiations with government and by litigation. Negotiation hasn't yielded much, but litigation has had some returns. (*First Nations?*, 201)

Before the amendments that undermined the integrity of the statute – the legality of which remains under question – Section 31 of the Manitoba Act read:

And whereas, it is expedient, towards the extinguishment of the Indian Title to the lands in the Province, to appropriate a portion of such ungranted lands, to the extent of one million four hundred thousand acres thereof, for the benefit of the families of the half-breed residents, it is hereby enacted, that, under regulations to be from time to time made by the Governor General in Council, the

Lieutenant-Governor shall select such lots or tracts in such parts of the Province as he may deem expedient, to the extent aforesaid, and divide the same among the children of the half-breed heads of families residing in the Province at the time of the said transfer to Canada, and the same shall be granted to the said children respectively, in such mode and on such conditions as to settlement and otherwise, as the Governor General in Council may from time to time determine. (*Manitoba Act*)

It is necessary to quote Section 31 in full, as it signifies the original “treaty” between the government and the Métis and embodies many of the original demands of Riel’s provisional government. It is also important to note that in 1871, in light of the effects of its amendments, Sections 1 to 3 read:

1. Every half-breed resident in the Province of Manitoba at the time of the transfer thereof to Canada (the 05<sup>th</sup> day of July, A.D. 1870 and every child of every such half-breed resident, shall be entitled to participate in the 1,400,000 acres. 2. The most liberal construction shall be put on the word resident. 3. No conditions of settlement shall be imposed in grants made to half-breeds in pursuance of the provisions of the Act referred to and there shall be no other restrictions as to their power of dealing with their lands when granted than those which the laws of Manitoba may prescribe. (quoted in Magnet, *Métis Land Rights*, 24-25)

In 1873 the Governor in Council, under instruction from Macdonald, amended the Act which rescinded the government’s agreement to meet Métis demands for provincial status for Manitoba and political autonomy for the governance of the province, a right granted to the other provinces of Canada. “Ungranted” lands were sold to settlers, in part to raise funds for the railway, and to draw Euro-Canadians to the province. The natural resources of the province were vested to the government of Canada rather than the provincial government. Arguably, the most damaging of the amendments was the provision that “the children of half-breed heads of families alone are entitled to share in the reservation [of the 1.4 million acres]” (Magnet, 25). The withdrawal of land grants to all Métis, and the six-year delay of assessing and implementing the land grant program led to an inequity of legal process. In his study of the legal contraventions that resulted from an ineffectual government – whether by

deliberate government policy or not to dispossess the Métis of their land – Emil Pelletier found that 126,960 acres were sold illegally and 141,600 acres consigned to Métis children were acquired by land speculators who made profits of between 100 and 2000 percent. (*Exploration*, 23)

Flanagan, who was retained as a consultant for the Department of Justice in 1986, was engaged to investigate the validity of Métis land claims instigated by the Manitoba Métis Federation. In 2006, Flanagan testified in court for the federal Crown that the Métis received fair value for their land and scrip and the MMF lost their motion. In 1998 Flanagan's article *The History of Metis Aboriginal Rights, Politics, Principal, and Policy* was cited in the Supreme Court of Canada's *R. vs. Blais* which was lost by Ernie Blais, and his appeal denied in 2003. ("History of Métis", 90) Blais council defended him against the charge of hunting deer out of season in contravention of Manitoba's Wildlife Act, on the basis that he was protected by s. 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 which reads: "(1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed. (2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit, and Metis peoples of Canada." ("Aboriginal Rights") The Supreme Court of Canada dismissed the appeal on the grounds that paragraph 13 of the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement which assured the hunting and fishing rights of "Indians" could not be read to include the Métis.

A similar action was taken against Steve Powley and his son Roddy who had killed a bull moose near Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario in 1993, the Crown arguing that it was contrary to ss. 46 and 47 (1) of Ontario's Game and Fish Act. A note had been left with the carcass that stated Steve's Métis affiliation card number and his intention of harvesting meat for winter. In 1998 it was ruled that the Powleys had a right, as Métis,



to hunt, a right safeguarded by s. 35. The Crown appealed the decision, but the Ontario Superior Court of Justice dismissed their case. The Crown then appealed to the Ontario Court of Appeal, who upheld the lower court decisions and endorsed the verdict that the Powleys had the Aboriginal right to hunt as Métis. The Crown appealed again, this time to the Supreme Court of Canada, who in 2003 judged that the Powleys, as members of the Sault Ste. Marie community, could legally hunt under the protection of s. 35. The inconsistencies of national and provincial application of law concerning harvesting rights of the Métis require a unilateral solution. Jean Teillet, lawyer and great-grandniece of Louis Riel, argues that it:

...requires both procedural and substantive change. It also requires the participation and co-operation of the Métis. It seems obvious, therefore, that this situation requires a long-term solution if we are to avoid legal and economic uncertainty. [...] And there is some urgency here. The consultation duty is going to be triggered in a wide variety of statutory and policy contexts. While the need is for long-term solution, it cannot be long in the coming. (“Winds of Change”, 73)

In Flanagan’s view, decisions made about hunting and fishing rights are redundant as they lack a stable authority because the Métis “are a far cry from a full-fledged land base.” (*First Nations?*, 202) Moreover, Flanagan dismisses litigations against the Government of Manitoba by the Manitoba Métis Federation as a futile exercise that will end in failure; not least because he considers progress so slow that “the Métis will continue to be a landless nation for the foreseeable future.” (203) This is in keeping with Flanagan’s argument that the most expedient native policy is assimilation, “call it assimilation, call it integration, call it adaptation, call it whatever you want: it has to happen.” (9) Reflecting on the violence afflicted on Native Americans by Amer-European colonizers, Jace Weaver writes:

Of course, even the few rude, scattered tribes could not be allowed to survive in the myths of conquest. To allow their survival would be to pose an impediment to Amer-European designs on the continent. Extinction is a superior means of creating indigeneity. If all indigenes are dead, there is no one to dispute the

claim. In fact, guilt for wrongs done to the indigenous peoples in the past does not allow them to be other than *of the past*. (Emphasis original, *That the People*, 17)

Flanagan's substantial influence in Canadian politics due to his affiliation with the Department of Justice, and as mentor, biographer, and former advisor to Prime Minister Stephen Harper – and his ubiquitous presence in the media – causes considerable distress for First Nations and Métis communities. In 2001, after the publication of *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, Phil Fontaine, as National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, sent an open letter to Stephen Harper – who at the time was a candidate for the Canadian Alliance party, and on track to run for Prime Minister with Flanagan as campaign manager – challenging him to disclose if he were in accord with Flanagan's views. He never received a reply. Clément Chartier, president of the Métis National Council, quoted in an article written in 2004 by Marci McDonald, said: "If Flanagan continues to be part of the Conservative machinery and has the ear of a prime minister, it's our existence as a people that is at stake." (*The Walrus*, 2) Perhaps Flanagan's media influence will flag after his appearance on CBC's television program "Power and Politics" on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010, when he called for the assassination of Julian Assange: "I think Obama should put out a contract or maybe use a drone or something. [...] I wouldn't be unhappy if Assange disappeared." (Flanagan, "Power", *CBC*)

In *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, Flanagan proffers a series of eight statements that represent what he views as "particularly dubious" propositions by the "aboriginal orthodoxy". Number seven states: "The land surrender treaties in Ontario and the prairie provinces mean something other than their words indicate. Their wording needs to be 'modernized' – reinterpreted or renegotiated – to recognize an ongoing relationship between nations." Flanagan elucidates for the misinformed: "The treaties

mean what they say. Their reinterpretation [...] has the potential to be both expensive and mischievous for the economies of all provinces in which treaties have been signed.” (*First Nations?*, 7) This is a simplistic defence where Flanagan gives discharge to the government’s duty of care in the agreements between the Métis and First Nations bands that are set out in the numbered treaties and the Manitoba Act. Referring to the iniquities of the land scrip grants, Joseph E. Magnet, Professor of Law at the University of Ottawa, lead counsel in the *R. v. Powley*, as well as advocate for Métis land rights and many First Nation bands in dispute with the Canadian government, argues:

The obligation imposed on the government of Canada by virtue of its fiduciary relationship with the Metis is a strict one. At the very least it involves an obligation not to discriminate. It is an obligation that would have required the government of Canada in 1870 and onwards to treat the Metis in the same manner as it treated other aboriginal peoples in the same situation. This would have involved providing an opportunity to negotiate extinguishment of Metis aboriginal title in a manner similar to that afforded to Indian tribes in the North-West Territories and Manitoba. The government had an obligation to deal with the Metis in a manner consistent with past and contemporaneous Crown practices. (*Métis Land*, 42)

However, Magnet concludes that it should not be left to constitutional lawyers to seek solutions for the infringement of Métis land rights; that the Métis are better placed to design a resolution:

Before a court can grant a remedy, it would be well for the Metis people to articulate a vision of their place in Canada. [...] it may be that the remedy for the large scale violation of their land rights may proceed from a theory that the constitutional violation deprived the Metis people of their rightful place in Canadian society. It may be that a court could restore the Metis people to rightful place in Canadian society by a structural injunction. (46)

Flanagan’s conclusion that: “Riel’s trial stands up well as an example of the judicial process and was ‘fair’ in the only meaningful sense of that term: namely that the trial was impartially conducted under the prevailing rules of criminal procedure” (*Reconsidered*, 134) is at odds with the conclusions of many, including that of George

R. D. Goulet. Goulet, a lawyer, registered member of the Métis Nation in Alberta, grand-nephew of Elzéar Goulet (who served as a member at the court martial of Thomas Scott) and great grandson of Pierre Delorme (a member of Riel's Provisional Government) takes issue with Flanagan's opinion that the jury, made up entirely of 'British-stock' was not a legal concern, as having a jury comprising an ethnic microcosm of the larger population was never a principal of Canadian law. (126) Goulet argues: "Common sense as well as past trials of a number of African-Americans in the Southern United States by all white juries are attestations to how highly dubious this unqualified assertion is in many cases. Chief Big Bear would undoubtedly not have been convicted by an ethnic microcosm jury consisting of only Indians." (*Trial*, 63) Flanagan maintains that "the fact that the trial had to be held under the restricted procedures of the North-West Territories Act" the trial will always be prevented from being judged as fair. (*Reconsidered*, 134) The NWT Act is one of the reasons Riel's trial is perceived as unjust as it contravened the agreement between the Métis and the government for provincial autonomy. With the appointment of the Northwest Council, there were no locally elected officials and the French-language element was unrepresented. This was also the case at Riel's trial when it was conducted exclusively in English. In his conclusion, Goulet lists many objections as to the legality of Riel's trial, one of which is the "illegal application in Canada of the 1351 *Statute of Treasons* to the charges against Riel resulting in his illegal conviction and execution. [...] That statute had no application to a charge of levying war against the Queen in the North-West Territories or anywhere else in Canada." (*Trial*, 207) Goulet writes that he would like to see a reversal of the "conviction of Riel for high treason and to recognize him as a Father of Confederation and the Founder of the Province of Manitoba." (272). Flanagan rejects this proposal:

“A free pardon, because it would carry the false message that Riel did not break the law, is unacceptable.” Nor would Flanagan opt for a posthumous ordinary pardon, “if history is not to be falsified, the government will have to stress that this is an ordinary, not a free pardon, which does not establish Riel’s innocence. [A free pardon] would strengthen the already common misconceptions that the government acted unjustly toward the *Métis*, that Riel had no alternative but violence, and that he did not receive a fair trial. I conclude that we should leave history as it is.” (*Reconsidered*, 152)

Gerald J. Morin, lawyer and former president of both the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (1992-95), and the Métis National Council (1993-2003) agrees, that history should be left “as it is”, but from a very different rationale; whose history, and who is writing it? Morin, who helped to advance restoration of Métis’ Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, and to create a permanent Métis land base in the province of Saskatchewan, feels that an exoneration of Louis Riel, “although well intentioned, is misguided.” He argues:

As usual no attempt has been made to inquire about the views of Métis people and leaders on this subject. [...] Our people are ignored and still suffering. Symbolic gestures do nothing to change the situation in our communities. If the good will towards the Métis could be converted into real and concrete actions on the Métis agenda, Riel’s sacrifice would not be in vain. (*Phoenix Star*, 4-5)

Quoting Paul Chartrand, Métis professor of law and activist, who coined this phrase that Morin says accurately reflects the views of Métis people on this matter: “Let the stain remain.” (4)

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literary Resistance: Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*

The Mother of us all.

Daniel David Moses (quoted in Hartmut Lutz, *Contemporary Challenges*, 83)

Maria told a story, her story. She did not use the Métis as a vehicle for a worldview, a doctrine or even as a social protest. She simply told a story, and because it is authentic, it is my story too. Not in every detail of course, but detail is not the ultimate criteria of authenticity, the mood, the spirit and ethos in *Halfbreed* is what makes it our story.

Emma LaRocque ("The Métis in English Canadian Literature", 91)

Maria Campbell is a prolific playwright, author of children's books, translator from Cree-Mitchif (*Road Allowance People*, 1995), scriptwriter, producer/director, and advocate for young Native writers and visual artists. Although Maria Campbell's text, *Halfbreed*, is considered by many to be a highly mediated text,<sup>3</sup> I have chosen this publication, out of all of her works, to illustrate her influence on and inspiration for subsequent generations of Métis authors. Prior to the publication of *Halfbreed* in 1973, Native voices were all but absent in the Canadian national discourse. In particular, since 1885 and the Métis defeat, shame and despondency had been the prevailing emotional and psychological condition for most Métis people. Following its wide release, Beatrice Culleton Mosionier and Gregory Scofield, amongst innumerable Métis authors and diverse members of Métis communities, found courage and a new pride in their identity.

As made evident in Chapter One, the representation of First Nations and Métis people in Canada has a woeful history. Métis and First Nations communities are subject to unsympathetic and insensate colonialist versions of indigenous history.

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<sup>3</sup> Reference to Campbell's recollections of McClelland and Stewarts's editorial interference and excision of material that made allegations against the RCMP are explored later in this chapter.

Debates amongst Native critics over decolonization, in relation to indigenous subjectivity, have raised questions over the effects of colonization on self-identification and whether or not “post-colonial theory is fundamentally incompatible with Native American studies considering that Native people are *still* colonized.” (Sexton, *Across Cultures*, 235) Out of the colonization of North America grew governmental policies that resulted in a fragmentation of Native communities and an interference with their family and kinship ties. For Native women, colonization has meant experiencing “violence from within a myriad of manifestations, including racism, sexism, classism, sexual identity discrimination, social and economic marginalization, lack of adequate and safe housing, lack of access to education, lack of access to justice and social services (i.e., lawyers, specialized shelters, and various social service programs)...to name but a few.” (Fontaine, “Our Cherished Sisters”, 345). European misogyny is deeply embedded in the Euro-Canadian mindset, which continues to have lethal consequences for Native women, as the Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice points out:

...Native bodies are sites of both colonized conflict and passionate decolonization. Some of the earliest European iconography of the ‘New World’ imagined the Americas as an exotic/erotic brown-skinned woman, open and yielding to the penetrating thrust of European imperialism. Invasion depended on the subjugation of indigenous women and their frequent positions of authority as much as it depended on the erosion of affirming sexual pleasure and diversity of gender roles and identity. (“Kinship Criticism”, 161)

This is a defining visual reference, which is important to keep in mind when considering this thesis’ analysis of Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*. Her social and political negotiations, as a Métis woman, within the dominant culture of Euro-Canadians’ (and predominantly male) versions of historical events in the formation of a Canadian Nationhood are crucial to this study. Anthropological scrutiny of Aboriginal communities in Canada, whether implemented by social scientists or

governmental census surveyors, was historically carried out by Euro-centric males who looked for a mirroring of their patriarchal social values, and consequentially failed to see what Maria Campbell calls the true social structure of Métis communities as “sister centred”.<sup>4</sup> (*Bronfman Conference*)

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha examines Franz Fanon’s question, “‘What does the black man want?’”:

It is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provides a background of social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective psyche. Such a traditional sociological alignment of Self and Society or History and Psyche is rendered questionable in Fanon’s identification of the colonial subject who is historicized in the heterogeneous assemblage of the texts of history, literature, science, myth. (*Location*, 42-43)

Bhabha supports Fanon’s psychoanalytic approach, seeing it as a resistance to, and a repudiation of, colonialism’s harmful binary opposition of black/white racial violence under colonial governance in the “colonial social space” (43). As the histories of colonial occupation of indigenous lands have for centuries been written from the perspective of male Eurocentric colonizers, Fanon’s method of focusing on the psychological effects of colonization – while circumnavigating an historicizing context – was restorative, in that it confronted the psychic damage caused by the split between the mythologizing ‘civilising’ western laws, and the reality of the violence on an indigenous peoples perpetrated to uphold these laws. However, as Sidonie Smith points out, “erasing historical contingency in service to a universalized humanism, the Man without history contains and silences the heterogeneity of subject peoples.” (*De/Colonizing*, xviii) Armando E. Jannetta argues that Native autobiographical narratives are “a source of resistance and healing. Autobiography is

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Carr points out that pervasive European evolutionary theory “established beyond doubt the inferiority of both women and non-white groups; women and the non-white races, it was widely assumed, had both failed to evolve fully. T.H. Huxley was saying, as early as 1860, that five-sixths of women had only reached ‘the doll-stage of evolution’ (*Inventing the American Primitive*, 171).



therefore perceived as congenial to oppressed minorities through its resistance both to textual closure and to the Western reader's purity of genre convention, as well as its ability to bring aesthetics together." ("Métis Autobiography", 169) Choctaw scholar LeAnne Howe devised the term tribalogy to describe how:

Native stories, no matter what form they take (novel, poem, drama, memoir, film, history), seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present and future milieus (present and future milieus mean non-Indians). ("The Story of America", 42)

With reference to indigenous literary discourse in Canada, it is essential to the understanding of the politics of identity and literary decolonization that the specificities of indigenous lives and stories are intertwined and connected with historical events in the creation of a Canadian Nationhood. Heath Justice states: "The decolonization imperative in our literature [indigenous literature of the people of U.S. and Canada] both *reflects* indigenous continuity of the past and present and *projects* that continuity into the future. Stories, like kinship, like fire – are what we do, what we create, as much as what we are." (Emphasis original, "Go Away Water!", 150)

Native autobiography can be read as a political act as it excises an anthropological representation, and seizes self-representational agency for the storyteller by disrupting a Eurocentric discourse. As Sidonie Smith observes: "Deploying autobiographical practices that go against the grain, [the marginalized woman] may constitute an 'I' that becomes a place of creative and, by implication, political intervention." (*De/Colonizing*, xix) Further, the past, present and future are encoded in Native literary texts, including the autobiographical. LeAnne Howe argues that Native writers are "creating a future 'literary past' for American Indians, but the textual space, tribalogy, creates a literary and literal past for non-Indians as well." ("Story of America", 46) Campbell asserts that she wrote *Halfbreed*, not because of

the need to create, but “because I needed to survive. [...] Through writing *Halfbreed*, I was able to analyze my life and my community, and to analyze the community around me. It was a very difficult process, but it gave me life.” (*Give Back*, 7)

Adapting the Western form of autobiography in order to incorporate Native storytelling, Campbell succeeds in refusing to:

...carve a niche for Native people in the mainstream publishing industry. Rather, it is a community-interested song of survival. *Halfbreed* enacts that ancient storytelling function within a new framework, that of autobiographical literature. This allows the text to function as a Métis text in two senses: it is written by a writer who happens to be a Métis, and what is far more important, it fuses a non-native practice with an Aboriginal worldview. (Joanne R. DiNova, *Spiralling*, 129-30)

In *Halfbreed*, Campbell, through the child Maria, interweaves personal and Métis communal history. She does so in a way that differs from European autobiographies which Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (Anishinaabe) describes:

In this telling, history is not linear, chronological and progressive, it is a spiral in which there is no clear beginning or end. It is a web in which people, actions and events are interconnected and not easily disengaged or delineated. Cause and effect are not simply revealed through a listing of successive dates of events but are enmeshed in a tangle of events, emotions, histories, beliefs, values. (“Dispelling and Telling”, 101)

The narrative arc of *Halfbreed*, while non-linear, encompasses Maria’s trajectory from traditional Métis life, learned primarily from her great-grandmother Cheechum, to an urban life of prostitution, drugs, and alcohol addiction. Maria’s experiences of traditional Métis culture, and the external pressures on her community and kinship ties from the dominant Euro-Canadian culture, are progressively and consciously processed when she is in urban settings and increasingly politically aware of the social and cultural effects of racial bias and its damage to Native lives. Conversely, in surviving her journey through addiction and violent relationships, Maria brings back to her community scope for continuance in terms of present and future spiritual, cultural, and political survival.

In *Halfbreed*, Campbell uses the term Métis to describe her community of mixed-race peoples only once, opting elsewhere for the historically derogatory name “halfbreed”. After the amendments in 1876 to the Indian Act, non-signatories of treaties regarding tribal land bases in Eastern Canada were deemed non-status. For Western Canada, as Bonita Lawrence points out, “communities of nonstatus Native people have been created by another process – by arbitrarily externalizing from Indianness an entire category of Indigenous people, designated as ‘half-breeds’ and now called ‘Métis.’” (“*Real*” *Indians*, 82) Lawrence further argues:

Individuals who were considered to be ‘living like Indians’ were taken into treaty, while those who had worked hauling supplies for the Hudson Bay Company and as a result knew some English, were registered as half-breeds, in each case regardless of ancestry. [...] In any case, whether individuals were categorized as Indian or half-breed, these European labels were irrevocable. (89-90)

If band members were not in situ when government agents came to register membership they were identified as ‘half-breeds’ with no future possibility of obtaining Indian status. Jacqueline Peterson states, “it is no coincidence that many of the labels describing the offspring of interracial unions articulate an implicit wish to blot out or sterilize the human consequence of miscegenation.” (“Prelude to Red River”, 46) Hybridity is a label still in currency with some academics, for example, Arnold Krupat who applies the term to both Native identity and literatures. Lisa Brooks considers the term immensely problematic, “for a variety of reasons and one of them is the roots of the word, [which] has to do with a wild parent and a domesticated parent and then breeding. I don’t think you can get more problematic than using the term that is derived from animal husbandry.” (“Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in Native American Literature”, [www.southernspaces.org](http://www.southernspaces.org)) The term Métis is as much a colonial classification as ‘halfbreed’; however, by embracing the

latter term, Campbell claims and redefines self-identification in the context of her experiences of being so defined, as 'less than' Indian and 'less than' white.

Returning to her childhood home in Saskatchewan after seventeen years of living a predominately urban existence, Campbell records in her introduction to *Halfbreed* that she decided to write about her life because: "Like me, the land had changed, my people were gone, and if I were to know peace I would have to search within myself. [...] I write this for all of you to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country." (8) Some critics have suggested that Campbell's employment of the term "all of you" is an appeal to a mainstream readership to hear the experiences of Métis communities and people, which are written from a Native worldview:

I only want to say this: this is what it was like; this is what it is still like. I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too, but in those earlier days you at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow. My parents and I never shared any aspirations for a future. I never saw my father talk back to a white man unless he was drunk. I never saw him or any of our men walk with their heads held high before white people. (13-14)

However, in the above quote, Campbell echoes de Trémaudan's call for new generations of Métis to "hold their heads high and say, "This is our land." ( *Hold High Your Heads*, xvi) Further, as Janice Acoose writes, Campbell's *Halfbreed*, "encouraged many Indigenous people to begin writing, and her text initiated the process of representing Indigenous women both positively and knowledgably." ("Post Halfbreed", 29) Moreover, Campbell does not limit self-representation to Métis communities; instead she broadens representation to include kinship with her mixed blood, Cree, treaty and non-treaty relatives. Fagan, et al, point out in their survey of the critical reception of *Halfbreed* since its publication in 1973, that "many critics see the resistant narrative as focused on and existing for the colonial society, thus inadvertently reproducing that society's dominance." ("Reading the Reception", 265) However, in an interview with Hartmut Lutz in 1989, Campbell speaks of options in

the Native discourse: “For me, and I’m sure for a lot of other Native people that are doing the kind of work that I’m doing, I feel that we have choices! Do we want to educate white people? Or do we want to go on about our business of working with our community?” (Lutz, 59) Campbell set up a writer’s camp at Gabriel’s Crossing on the site of Gabriel Dumont’s homestead near Batoche – the battleground where the Métis were outnumbered and brutally overtaken by Middleton’s Canadian forces in 1885 – where the 1985 anthology of young Native writers, *Achimoona* (Cree for stories) was conceived. Campbell has also been active in Native community theatre, promotion of Native work in the visual arts, and gathering and recording oral historical evidence of aboriginal traditional knowledge, including spiritual, social, and cultural practices. Campbell advocates the teaching of Native texts in Canadian educational institutions, but her principal focus is on the development of Native voices.

### **Surviving Government Policies**

And seeing and yourself understanding how it is difficult for a small population as the Half-breed population to have their voices heard, I said what belongs to us ought to be ours.

Louis Riel (Court transcript, *Queen vs. Louis Riel*, 157)

Chapter One of *Halfbreed* is devoted to an encapsulated history of the Red River Resistances of 1869-70 and 1885, and tracing the historical disenfranchisement and shame of the Métis people and communities. Campbell begins the second chapter by describing how the Métis became a landless people, squatters, and finally, ‘Road Allowance People.’<sup>5</sup>

So began a miserable life of poverty which held no hope for the future. That generation of my people was completely beaten. Their fathers had failed during the Rebellion to make a dream come true; they failed as farmers; now there was

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<sup>5</sup> Road Allowance: land belonging to the Crown on either side of actual or proposed roads.

nothing left. Their way of life was a part of Canada's past and they saw no place in the world around them, for they believed they had nothing to offer. They felt shame, and with shame the loss of pride and the strength to live each day. (13)

The loss of game to hunt and trap, the loss of their traditional land base, and demoralization after the Riel Resistances covered in Chapter One of this thesis, put pressure on Métis communities and culture. As Olive Patricia Dickason puts it: "As the Old Way Fades, the New Looks Bleak". (Title, Chapter 20, *Canada's First Nations*, 271) Obdurate and repressive assimilationist policies that were heavily weighted on the side of Euro-Canadian settlers and farmers compounded the effects of poverty and destabilization. After the 1885 Riel Resistance, the Canadian government quickly instigated proceedings on extinguishment of Métis land claims. Deceitful and stringent regulations were initially manufactured by the government in order to dispossess the Métis of their homelands through scrip. The government offered a choice of either land or money through the scrip document that stated the amount of land that could be exchanged.<sup>6</sup> The government encouraged the taking of scrip as an inducement to leave treaty, thereby dispossessing Métis and First Nations not only of their territory, but also of 'Indian status' for themselves and future generations. By the 1920s and 1930s an inundation of demands by non-treaty Métis who sought to be reclassified into treaty status, led the government in 1942 to expel 663 Métis from its band lists. In her interview with Lutz, Campbell condemns the Euro-Canadian propensity for seeing themselves as honourable and 'nice' while denouncing other nations:

They tell us, "We never had slavery here, we never had this," but some of the horrible things that have happened are worse, or every bit as bad. Because the

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<sup>6</sup> Olive Patricia Dickason points out that the majority of Métis chose money scrip because many "lived in regions that were marginal for agriculture, if farming could be practised at all; and their locations often were remote from land offices. For such people, it appeared more beneficial to sell their scrip. This was often done for a song; there are records of scrip being sold to speculators for as little as half its face value. Fortunes were made at the expense of the Métis – 'half-breed scrip millionaires', in the parlance of the time." (*Canada's First Nations*, 295)

kinds of things that happened to Aboriginal people in Canada are things that were so “nice” that nobody’s ever bothered to record them because they were done in such a “nice” way, or if they were recorded, they were changed. [...] It’s okay to report the atrocities of other countries and what they do to their peoples, but heaven forbid that Canadians would ever do something like that! [...] We never hear about things like that because Canada doesn’t do things like that. We need to write those stories ourselves. (Lutz, 58-59)

In particular, Campbell refers to the dispersal of the Métis communities living sixty miles outside of Regina in 1948. During the Depression, most Métis communities were living in abject destitution; animals trapped for food and pelts had all but disappeared, many families were living in shacks, and there was no health care to treat the endemic diseases that are associated with impoverishment. Métis poverty was a financial burden on the province of Saskatchewan, because the Métis were, unlike treaty Natives, the responsibility of the provincial, and not federal, government. However, under the leadership of Saskatchewan’s Liberal Party Premier, William John Patterson, the provincial government devised a strategy that would solve the ‘half-breed problem’ by establishing “a Métis rehabilitation colony at Green Lake” in order, “through a process of social engineering, [to mould them] into productive members of society.” (Barron, *CCF*, 248) The initial policy was to organize farms for the Métis already living at Green Lake, but it was suggested that perhaps Métis in southern Saskatchewan could also be persuaded to resettle on these ‘model’ farms where they could be ‘rehabilitated’. This was not a policy that would establish a legal and permanent land base for the Métis, as there was no supportive legislature ever considered. As Barron reports: “By design, Green Lake was to be an administrative experiment in social engineering [...] it’s existence as a special government project was to be only an interim stage in its eventual evolution to municipal status.” (250) In 1944, the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation Party (CCF), with T.C. Douglas as its leader, came into power and sanctioned the Green Lake proposal. The Catholic

Church was recruited to work on behalf of the government, and with the help of local priests, managed to convince southern Saskatchewan Métis that they should leave their ‘road allowance’ homes, as the government was bestowing on them twenty-two townships as a land settlement, including Green Lake and Île-à-la-Crosse. As Campbell writes: “And so, a train came with box cars, actually cattle cars, and the people were loaded up with all their bags and stuff, their bedding, whatever! And as they were driving away, as the train pulled out, their village was burned behind them.” (Lutz, 44) It was a cold November, they were not allowed off the train and there were no facilities. “Some of the people got pneumonia and were really sick. Some babies died. When they got to Meadow Lake, they were loaded on to big trucks that would take them to Green Lake, and they were left there.” (Lutz, 44) There were no promised houses and after a hard winter, and many deaths, some went back to their old settlement by wagon and tried to rebuild. “But they were scattered. The communities were never the same again.” (Lutz, 45) Campbell adds that the last dispersal was in 1963 near Yorkton, Saskatchewan, but that none of these dispersals was a permanent defeat or obliteration: “It’s a story of survival. And no matter what happened, the people never lost. They should have been wasted with that last dispersal in 1963, but they weren’t. Throughout our whole history, we have been packing and moving, and everybody would say, ‘Well, here we go again!’” (Lutz, 45)

Campbell writes of “Spring River” and her great-grandmother, Cheechum, a niece of Gabriel Dumont: “her whole family fought beside Riel and Dumont during the Rebellion. She often told me stories of the Rebellion and of the Halfbreed people.”<sup>7</sup> (*Halfbreed*, 15) Cheechum married Campbell’s great-grandfather, who had immigrated to Canada from Scotland, settling just west of Prince Albert. Running a

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<sup>7</sup> Campbell glosses this first mention of Spring River with a footnote: “Names and places have been changed in some cases.” (12)



Hudson's Bay store, he was "involved with the Northwest Mounted Police" in 1885 when the second Northwest Rebellion began. Campbell describes him as a brutal man: "He was not well-liked by his neighbours or the people who traded with him. Our old people called him 'Chee-pie-hoos,' meaning 'Evil-spirit-jumping-up-and-down.' They say he was very cruel and would beat his son, his wife, and his live-stock with the same whip and with equal vengeance." (14) Distrustful of his Half-breed wife's fidelity in his absence – after all, she was a 'wanton squaw' – he took her to settlers meetings relating to the rebellion, at which she would gather information and pass it on to the rebels. When he discovered that she was also stealing ammunition and supplies for the rebels from his store, he publicly beat her. "He died not long after. Some people say her family killed him, but no one knows for sure." (15) Cheechum returned to live with her family who were non-reserve Cree, as they "weren't present when the treaty-makers came." (15) They lived in the area that is now part of Prince Albert National Park where she built a cabin and raised her son, Campbell's grandfather. When the vicinity was officially designated and opened as a Park in 1928, Cheechum was asked, by the government, to leave. When she refused, the RCMP were asked to step in. "She locked her door, loaded her rifle, and when they arrived she fired shots over their heads, threatening to hit them if they came any closer. They left her alone and she was never disturbed again." (15) In response to displacement and dispossession from ancestral lands, Cheechum, who "never accepted defeat at Batoche" frequently said to Campbell: "Because they killed Riel they think they have killed us too, but some day, my girl, it will be different." (15)

Cheechum's son married Grandma Campbell, née Vandal, whose family "had also been involved in the Rebellion." (16) When Grandpa Campbell died, his wife was left to raise nine children, the oldest of whom was Maria's father, aged eleven.

Her father and his mother worked for local farmers until they had the money to buy a homestead. Competing with Euro-Canadian settlers, homesteading was backbreaking work: “Because they had only had one team of horses and Dad used these to work for other people, Grannie on many occasions pulled the plough herself.” (16) Unable to meet governmental requirements for improvements to the land, they lost the deed title and became ‘Road Allowance’ people. Campbell reports that Grannie: “brushed and cleared the settlers’ land, picked their stones, delivered their babies, and looked after them when they were sick.” (17) In spite of keeping an open house to all in the community, as a dispossessed and displaced Métis she had negligible social value and no white settler deemed her house worthy of a visit. Government policies designed to encourage the Métis into the Canadian mainstream were in conflict with Euro-Canadian communities who not only feared the ‘other’, but were also apprehensive that they would be burdened with a fiscal responsibility for a community who they considered were incapable of taking care of themselves in a materialist way alien to Métis traditions and social ethos.

Maria’s maternal Grandmother Dubuque was a treaty Cree and raised in a convent. Grandpa Dubuque was “a huge, strong-willed Frenchman from Dubuque, Iowa. His grandfather had been *coureur de bois* and had been given a land grant in Iowa by the Spanish King.”<sup>8</sup> (18) Grandpa Dubuque immigrated to Canada and arranged the marriage with Maria’s Grandmother through the convent where she lived. Maria’s mother was their only daughter and they sent her to be educated at a convent when she was five, however she disappointed them when she ran off with Maria’s father to live on the trapline. For the generations that came after the Riel uprising of 1885, the pressures on Métis communities created a schism between

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<sup>8</sup> Coureur de bois were independent French-Canadian fur traders who learned survival and hunting skills from First Nations peoples.

traditional cultural influences and the galloping encroachment of settler cultural authority. Maria's mothers' convent education brought into the lives of her children an appreciation of "Shakespeare, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and Longfellow." (17)

Campbell describes her brothers and sisters re-enacting Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:

The house was our Roman Empire, the two pine trees were the gates of Rome. I was Julius Caesar and would be wrapped in a long sheet with a willow branch on my head. [...] Other times we would build a raft with logs and put a bright patchwork quilt canopy over it, with Mom's bright scarves flying from the four corners. An old bearskin rug laid down and Cleopatra would go aboard. She was our white skinned, red-haired cousin. [...] Oh, how I wanted to be Cleopatra, but my brother Jamie said, 'Maria, you're too black and your hair is like a nigger's.' So, I'd have to be Caesar instead. (17-18)

Maria and her siblings internalized and acted out in play, colonialist hierarchal race and gender values that deemed Indigenous peoples inferior, and demanded white skinned representation for Cleopatra. Maria welcomed the European literary stimulation to her imagination, but retrospectively became cognisant of the disruption and damage caused by Western values to traditional Métis culture, social customs, stories, kinships, and pride in their Métis legacy. Campbell's description of her family home, a two-roomed log house, underscores the erosion of Métis traditional spaces: braided rugs, mattresses filled with hay on beds made from poles and rawhide. Campbell remembers the kitchen and its walls covered with "various roots and herbs for cooking and making medicine" and the structure of the house with its open beams and the underlying poles serving as racks for drying furs:

On a cold winter night the smell of moose stew simmering on the stove blended with the wild smell of drying skins of mink, weasels and squirrels, and the spicy herbs and roots hanging from the walls. Daddy would be busy in the corner, brushing fur until it shone and glistened, while Mom bustled around the stove. Cheechum would be on the floor smoking her clay pipe and the small ones would roll and fight around her like puppies. (20)

However, Campbell sees the written word in English as a powerful tool that enables Native people to tell their own stories and that it is a part of: "culture that constantly

changes. It doesn't stay in one place. We didn't have horses, then the horses came, and became part of our tradition. So much so, that we have horse spirits and horse dances." (Lutz, 56) Campbell considers the appropriation of constructive aspects of colonial culture necessary for autonomous representation, the continuance of traditional values, and the enabling of Native voices to be expressed and heard: "We have to understand that the new tools for our young people are writing, painting, dancing, singing in English." (Lutz, 56) Craig S. Womack identifies North American Indigenous critical debates over Native 'authenticity' as an ostensible binary of sovereigntists being perceived as having a 'naïve' belief in a cultural purity on the one hand, and cosmopolitanists as having "a more theoretically advanced commitment to hybridity", on the other. ("Book-Length Native", 37) Krupat claims that in "varying degrees, all verbal performances studied as Native American literature, oral, textualized, or written, are mixed, hybrid; none are pure or strictly speaking autonomous. Native American written literature in particular is an intercultural practice." (*Turn to the Native*, 21) Elvira Pulitano, when targeting Craig S. Womack and Robert Allen Warrior as essentialists and literary separatists, asks: "How could a Native American theory aim at a 'pure' form of (Native) discourse, untouched by the strategies of Western tradition, when Native American literature itself is a product of a crosscultural encounter?" (*Toward a Native*, 9) Pulitano's enthrallment to 'purity' of identity and culture is itself an essentialist position that would claim that there are no 'authentic' Native people and there has been none since pre-contact. Moreover, Pulitano has misinterpreted and misrepresented both Warrior and Womack. Warrior argues that the location of Native intellectual sovereignty is its own centre and not merely reactive to European and Euro-American epistemologies. He stresses that, "the struggle for sovereignty is not a struggle to be free from the influence of anything

outside of ourselves, but a process of asserting the power we possess as communities and individuals to make decisions that affect our lives.” (*Tribal Secrets*, 124)

Womack, in his introduction to *Red on Red*, states that he has not written his text “in a rejectionist mode” but that he seeks:

...to examine [Creek] histories to search for those ideas, articulated by Indian people, that best serve a contemporary critical framework. [...] My argument is not that this is the *only* way to understand Creek writing but an important one given that literatures bear some kind of relationship to communities, both writing communities and the community of the primary culture, from which they originate. (Emphasis original, *Red*, 4)

This is a vast, complex, and continuing debate however, with specific reference to historical (for example, oral to written storytelling), and the coterminous adaptations that are necessary for autonomous representation and continuance of Native cultural values. Campbell argues:

The stories have to be written down, they have to be recorded, but not all the elders agree with me. For younger Aboriginal people, this is the real struggle, because when you decide to do that, you really are being a warrior. You might not have the support of your community, but you have to do what you believe is right. And, certainly, the elders don't always agree, they say, 'That's not to be recorded, that's sacred.' And I say, 'Well, a dog was sacred once, too, but you accepted the horse.' And then it's, 'Don't question what the elders say!' And I say, if we don't, our generations are going to lose!" (Lutz, 56-7)

Womack asks: “Doesn't it matter *what* the elders are saying and *how* we respond to it? In terms of Indian experience, valuing the elders' statements and living examples also relies on evaluating that experience.” (Emphasis original, *Reasoning*, 385-86)

Following Riel's Resistances to the expansion of the Dominion of Canada westward, Métis communities continue to negotiate, not just for cultural survival, but also for a cultural vibrancy within the broader mainstream Euro-Canadian culture. This stresses an assiduous and steady awareness of how the processes of these negotiations necessarily correlate the past, present and impact on future Métis generations. As part of these negotiations contemporary Indigenous people must, as Heath Justice says,

“respect the elders for their survival, but also have to take into account the damage that has been done to them by colonization.” (Justice, personal interview)

The treaty Cree, convent educated, Grannie Dubuque surprised the family by enrolling Maria in the residential school at Beauval, overriding Cheechum and her father’s censure. Contrary to receiving the advantageous education that Grannie and Maria’s mother believed was available from the nuns who taught at the school, Maria remembers only praying “endlessly” and her assigned job of cleaning the dormitory and hallways. She also remembers being punished for speaking Cree, when only French and English were permitted: “I was pushed into a small closet with no windows or light, and locked in for what seemed like hours. I was almost paralyzed with fright when they came to let me out.” (*Halfbreed*, 44) Residential schools and their methods – cruel treatment, starvation, and physical abuse – of deliberately separating Native children from their families and culture in an attempt at comprehensive assimilation, are currently being investigated by the Canadian government funded Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In its interim report, published in February 2012, the Chair, Justice Murray Sinclair, sees every exclusion of former students from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement – which forms part of the interim report to the Commission – as a “serious roadblock to meaningful and sincere reconciliation.” (TRC, 8-9) Ottawa, so far, has refused to include two Métis boarding schools in Timber Bay and Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, in the Agreement and Justice Sinclair states that the former students’ testimonies are “crucial” to telling the “true story” of residential schools in Canada, as well as to the process of truth and reconciliation. (CTV News, <http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada>)

Education policies for the Métis were a factor in the rejuvenation of a Saskatchewan Métis political confederation. Unlike treaty Natives whose children, by 1916, were forced into educational institutions, predominately residential, many Métis children were barred from attending school, ostensibly because the children would spread disease and vermin. Campbell remembers, “a nurse coming into our community when they were doing all this checking. [...] they wanted to check us [...] that there were worms and bugs in the water and that we had worms and bugs. [...] And all of these stories about these disease ridden people, and believe me, when you look at the research, it’s pretty awful.” (*Bronfman*) This was a mask for various racially intolerant school directors whom F. Laurie Barron cites from a 1941 Superintendent’s report on the Pebble Lake school board: “The report mentioned a meeting with Mr. Dennis Buckle, the Chairman of the district council. Buckle was quoted to the effect that Métis children were infected with trachoma, itch or scabies, lice and fleas, and that if the Department of Education allowed them to remain in school the other children would walk out.” (*CCF*, 246) However, as Barron argues, Métis parents were manipulated by local officials in their duplicitous application of medical policies. Denying that Métis children were excluded from the school, Mr. Burke, a teacher at Pebble Lake, stated that “should a half-breed child attempt to come to his school it would at once be necessary to apply the health laws and regulations and exclude the child from school until a medical certificate was produced and that on account of the home conditions such a certificate would be of little value anyway.” (Barron, *Saskatchewan Archives Board*, 246-47) Perfectly aware that Métis families were without access to the medical care that was necessary in order to obtain the required certificate, local officials, nevertheless, followed through with the pretence. Hiding racism and classism behind the supposition that all Métis children

lived in socially unacceptable poverty, the authorities were able to ban Métis children from school *because* they were Métis.

This subterfuge would have been successful if national newspapers were not made aware of the inexcusable treatment of Métis communities. The provincial government, under pressure from the bad publicity generated by the press who generally paid no more than lip service to developing sustainable policies, created commissions in order to gather information and “to get the Métis off welfare rolls and into a through-going rehabilitation program. But in substance [this] was little more than a public relations exercise, aimed primarily at quelling the dissatisfaction of the municipalities.” (Barron, *CCF*, 248) Métis children were not compelled by law to attend school until 1951, and this was not comprehensively enforced until the early 1960s. The lack of education, Campbell writes, was a loss for potential political leadership: “And so we had no spokespeople, other than a handful, and nobody would listen to them because they were considered political agitators.” (Lutz, 45)

Maria was reprieved at age nine from further humiliation at the residential institution by the construction of a local school in Spring River, only to be indoctrinated with shame over her Métis heritage and a desire for white settlers’ material goods.<sup>9</sup> The Euro-Canadian children ate foods that Métis children rarely saw, “boiled eggs, apples, cakes, cookies, and jars of milk. We took bannock for lunch, spread with lard and filled with wild meat, and if there was not meat we had cold potatoes and salt and pepper, or else whole roasted gophers with sage dressing.”

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<sup>9</sup> In Chapter Four of the TRC report, the commission relates the experiences of Métis children in residential schools, which was an environment that offered “poor food, harsh discipline, hard work, and limited education. [...] In 1914 a Métis woman complained that her children at the High River residential school had gone without boots for three months.” (TRC, *They Came for the Children*, 69) The report includes the above quote of Campbell’s experiences, along with testimonies from Raphael Ironstand who as a boy at Pine Creek residential school was beaten by Cree students, for being a “white man” in a school that “was for Indians only.” (69) The report found that “it was not unusual for many students to spend a decade in the schools and emerge with only a Grade 2 standing” (69).



(*Halfbreed*, 46-47) Maria, her siblings, and Métis peers were teased for what the settlers' children judged as meagre and crude dishes compared to their own lunches of refined abundance. Arriving home from school, Campbell told her parents that she hates them and "all of you no-good Halfbreeds." (47) Cheechum, who had overheard Campbell's invective of racist insults that were familiar to Métis people since Riel's execution, gave her her first instruction in Métis contemporary and historical politics: its past, its present and its future possibilities. She explained that when the Half-breeds travelled west to Saskatchewan, Riel had advised that "if they worked hard and fought for what they believed in they would win against all odds." During the resistance of 1885, Cheechum continued, "they gave all they had for this one desperate chance of being free, but because some of them said, 'I want good clothes and horses and you no-good Halfbreeds are ruining it for me,' they lost their dream." (47) Cheechum encouraged Maria to recognize a correlation between the failure of past resistances to the Dominion of Canada's encroachment, and Maria's reaction against her people, as a capitulation to a divide and conquer strategy of a government intent on dispossessing Métis communities. Without traditional reliance on the strength of the community for cultural survival, a yearning for individual enrichment, Cheechum warned Maria, would continue to be a threat and impediment to the Métis dream of autonomy. Cheechum's understanding, through long experience of the Eurocentric Canadian ideological hegemony, together with her political and personal knowledge of Riel's Resistances would, in the future, allow Campbell to imagine a possible agency for Métis communities and individuals outside of the constrictions of mainstream Euro-Canadian colonialist, social and political prescripts.

The strength and independence of Cheechum was matched by Maria's Grannie Campbell, her father's mother. She lived a hard working, self-governing life, but as

she aged, Maria's father wanted her to abandon her self-sufficiency and offered to look after her. Grannie Campbell refused, angered by his interference and unsolicited intrusion on her independence. Like Cheechum, Grannie Campbell's knowledge and experiences as a grandmother gives her an authority as the respected head of family and guardian of kinship ties which is at variance with that of her son's generation who are affected by colonialist Euro-Canadian influenced patriarchal positions. This colonial legacy has been perilous to Métis familial relationships; the loss of a land base and its spiritual and cultural connections to it, disrupted interrelations between individuals within Métis communities. Loss of traditional, seasonal hunting rhythms, together with governmental controls over hunting rights, and social welfare impositions, promoted a sense of powerlessness in the preponderance of Métis men.

Emma LaRocque writes:

...we can see that Aboriginal women's gender roles, including economic roles, became more restricted with the arrival of European missionaries, 'explorers' and fur traders. Separation between home (domestic life and work (productive) life (the public/private dichotomy identified by feminist analysis) certainly increased. [...] Within a few years of Confederation in 1867, the Canadian government legislated Indian status/non-status identity, rights and gender roles along patriarchal lines. ("Métis and Feminist", 55)

At Maria's birth, her father is disappointed his first-born is a daughter and not a son:

"However, this didn't dampen his desire to raise the best trapper and hunter in Saskatchewan. As far back as I can remember Daddy taught me to set traps, shoot a rifle, and fight like a boy." (*Halfbreed*, 19) Nonetheless, by the time she was seven and her brothers were old enough to learn about trapping, Maria was sidelined by her father and left behind at home with her mother. Maria describes herself as resentful, jealous and competitive; observing the lessons given to her brothers, she practised on her own until she had perfected the skills being taught. "Reward came whenever Daddy would say, 'Dammit you boys! Maria can do it and she's a girl! Can't you do it

at least half as good? If you can't, I'll send you in with the old ladies and get her to help me!" (33) Relegation to the domestic, and what was increasingly being perceived as an inferior domain, reinforced the colonialist patriarchal values on Maria and her brothers. Kim Anderson writes that she was:

...particularly struck by the respect inherent in the practice of *notokwew mâcîwin* (old lady hunting) as described by Cree Métis Elder Maria Campbell. Campbell remembers that it was the grandmothers who were the first teachers of hunting and trapping. Children as young as three or four would go out with their grandmothers to set snares because it was the grannies' jobs to teach children to be thankful, respectful, and gentle with the animals at this time and in this context. Old ladies were deemed to be the most appropriate first teachers of hunting because of their experience and wisdom as life givers. Notokwew mâcîwin was the name given to the careful practice of taking life, as learned by young children and taught by the senior life giver. ("Affirmations of an Indigenous Feminist", 82)

Campbell recounted to Anderson her memories of particular gender roles in relation to the teaching of hunting skills and the importance of respect for the animal's lives that sustained Métis communities. This was told between two Cree-Métis women in the context of learning and teaching stories that enable reclamation of cultural specifics after the historical traumas caused by Canadian colonialist expansion. In contrast, the anecdote Campbell relates regarding her experience with her father in *Halfbreed* performs two functions: first, to illustrate the rupture caused by the redefinition of gender roles imposed by the colonizers European laws, (Yvonne Boyer, "Contributions to Culture and Community through Canadian Law", 73), and second, perhaps, to draw the attention of a Euro-Canadian readership to gender equality issues prevalent in the dominant settler culture. At the approximate commencement of the 'second wave' of western feminism in 1973, and the year *Halfbreed* was published, numerous and significant cases relevant to women's autonomy were being tested in the Supreme Courts of Canada and the U.S. including

*Roe vs. Wade*, which ruled that the Texas criminal abortion statutes were unconstitutional.

Maria's convent educated mother wanted her to be a 'lady' in the Euro-Canadian mould, adept at cooking, sewing, and knitting. Unlike the predominant Métis women of her generation, Maria's mother was educated, but like Euro-Canadian women of the period, patriarchal edicts censured women's employment outside the domestic sphere. Disrupting the European patriarchal order however, Cheechum offered Maria stories of how their people used to live. At the annual Trappers Convention at Montreal Lake in northern Saskatchewan, Maria met treaty Indians and observed that the status of tribal members was determined by age rather than gender in the framework of working arrangements within the community:

Cheechum told me that we used to live in much the same way before white people came. She said it was the job of the old women and little girls to tend to the housework and the fires. The older women were good trappers and hunters, better in some cases than the men. They went out on the traplines and helped their men in all the work. Boys never did much until they were older. The women really impressed me for they were so free, although Mom with her convent background felt that they were quite shameless. (*Halfbreed*, 41)

Maria also found an affinity with the Indians at Montreal Lake, whose blue eyes "made me feel like I had found my kin." (41) Although she had dark skin, Maria's green eyes and her siblings' varying hues of blue and hazel made them targets of fun for their "black-eyed relatives." Cheechum explained to Maria that although the Indians at Montreal Lake were treaty Indians, "they were more Halfbreed than we were – probably spawns of the Campbells, Simpsons and McLaughlins." (44) As a child, Maria believed "that any Indian unfortunate enough to have blue eyes must have the devil Scot in him or her, and I would think, 'There goes another spawn of Satan.'" (41) Moreover, the mixture of French, Cree, English, Scottish, and Irish in Maria's family distinguished them from the other families in their community, who

were mostly “half French, half Cree” and predominantly spoke either “French with a little Cree”, or more “French than English or Cree [...] We spoke a language completely different from the others. We were a combination of everything: hunters, trappers and *ak-ee-top* (pretend) farmers.” (25) Without stating it, Campbell is referring to Michif, the language ‘different from the others’ (or is she?) and although Campbell can be seen to be writing to a mainstream Euro-Canadian readership, she preserves the authority of self-representation by choosing when she will translate Cree or Michif phrases, or even identify them as such, and when she will leave them unglossed. Kristina Fagan writes that unglossed terms are employed by many Indigenous authors, in what linguistics call “code-switching”, as a system for challenging “the dominance of any one language. By keeping the reader off ‘balance,’ the writers bring their language choices to the reader’s conscious attention, refuting the transparency of language and reminding us of the powers of language: to disrupt, confuse, exclude as well as to include, inform, and amuse.” (“Code Switching”, *Across Cultures*, 26) Campbell’s fluency in Cree, Michif, Saulteaux, and English provides plenty of scope for her to code-switch – glossed, or unglossed.

Campbell defines the relationship between her family and Cree relatives on the neighbouring reserve by recording, “there was never much love lost between Indians and Halfbreeds.” (*Halfbreed*, 26) Participating in Sundances, powwows, and Treaty Days, Campbell remembers that, “we never fitted in. We were always the poor relatives, the *awp-pee-tow-koosons* [Campbell’s footnote: half people]. They laughed and scorned us. They had land and security, we had nothing.” (26) Divisiveness amongst Indigenous peoples inspired by colonialist rule and its “homogenization of heterogeneous cultures” (Womack, “Theorizing”, *Reasoning*, 392), is exacerbated for Campbell’s Métis community in their in-between existence or straddling of Native

and Euro-Canadian cultural space. Summers away from trapping were spent on trips to pick roots and berries to sell 'in town'. It was a communal event; the gathering of Métis families working, story-telling, feasting, fiddle playing, dancing and singing. However, when the time came to sell their roots and berries they had to face the hostility of the townspeople. Maria observed the change in the adults, who: "were happy and proud until we drove into town, then everyone became quiet and looked different. The men walked in front, looking straight ahead, their wives behind, and, I can never forget this, they had their heads down and never looked up." (*Halfbreed*, 36) When asked why they walked guiltily, her mother replied that she would "understand when you're older." Maria resolves: "that I would never walk like them; I would walk tall and straight and I told my brothers and sisters to do the same. Cheechum heard me, and laying her hand on my head, she said, 'Never forget that, my girl. You always walk with your head up and if anyone says something then put out your chin and hold it higher.'" (36) The echo of de Trémaudan's history of the Métis peoples, *Hold High Your Heads* is repeated throughout *Halfbreed*, predominantly through Cheechum, who, Campbell says: "tried to teach me all she knew about living." (19) Cheechum's life teachings ultimately equip Campbell with the strength to hold her head high and reclaim pride in a Métis Nation that the Riel Resistances fought hard to realize.

When the money was made from the sale of their harvest, it was shared; while the women and children shopped for supplies, "the men went to the beer parlour, promising to be out in half an hour." (36) Having given up waiting for the men to come out of the bars, the women set up tents outside of town, warning the children that if they were called they were to run outside and hide. Campbell describes the men's drunken arrival at the campsite in the early hours of the morning:

The men would get happy-drunk at first and as the evening progressed white men would come by. They all danced and sang together, then all too soon one of the white men would bother the women. Our men would become angry, but instead of fighting the white men they beat their wives. [...] When that was over, they fought each other [...]. Meanwhile the white men stood together in a group, laughing and drinking, sometimes dragging a woman away. How I hated them!  
(37)

When the money ran out, “usually after two or three days, we all left, usually at the request of the RCMP”. (37) Predatory attacks by white males, including numerous priests and members of law enforcement agencies, on vulnerable Native women were perpetrated precisely because the women lacked the social status necessary for the demand of justice. This remains the case and will be examined more closely in Chapters Three and Four.

### **Post Riel Resistances: Surviving Institutional Racism**

An old Metis from Saskatchewan described the fate of his people in the twentieth century this way: “It used to be that you would have a Metis driving his horse and wagon down the road and following along behind was his little dog. Now the white man is driving the wagon and the Metis is like that little dog, running along behind.”

Henry Pelletier, interview with Murray Dobbin, 1977, tape in Saskatchewan Archives, (*One-And-A-Half Men*, 34).

Shawna Ferris takes issue with “the small but useful body of literary criticism that has grown up around the book” (*Working from the Violent Centre*, 130). She sees the reflections by Armando E. Jannetta, Helen Buss, and Ken Derry, as a disproportionate and misplaced focus on an analysis of Campbell’s childhood with her Métis community in the early chapters of *Halfbreed* and suggests that insufficient attention has been paid to her adult life as a prostitute. Ferris sees the contrast between: “Maria’s tumultuous and poor but loving family life” (130) and her marriage to the brutal Darrel at fifteen as the “early indication of the relationship between the

course of Maria's life [as a prostitute] and the setting in which she lives [that contributes] to the foreboding tone at the beginning of chapter sixteen." (132)

However, while Ferris finds these critics' lack of an analysis of Campbell's adult life in an urban setting problematic, she herself overlooks Campbell's telling of degrading events in her childhood – before her marriage at fifteen – that signpost experiences echoed in her later life as a prostitute. Ferris, while alert to the: “social and political racism [that] breeds violence and hopelessness”, (131) stops short of identifying this in the community of Campbell's childhood, or of contextualizing these experiences historically – a practice vital to the scrutiny of politically motivated discrimination against Indigenous people.

The shame felt by the men of Campbell's community in the presence of the white people of the town and their fear of law enforcers described in the passage above, was partially alleviated by alcohol which itself led to ill-considered socializing with the drunken white men. The anger provoked by the townsmen's rapacious disrespect toward the Métis women is displaced and acted out on the already degraded women because confronting the white men would have brought severe retaliation by the RCMP in a power/powerless colonial social paradigm.<sup>10</sup> Sharon Venne quotes Cree Elder Fred Horse (Kus kit tao keh who, Black Eagle) who retells, through ancestral oral testimony, how the police commissioner promised to protect Cree agreed interests:

The head of the police commissioners rode a dark horse with gleaming riding gear with his sword almost touching ground level. Grandfather said, In (sic) the distant future with the promises made by the Queen and the white man attempts to break them, when the Chief and Council fail to prevent this and the white man goes ahead, this is the one the Chief is to rely on. The fellow can do anything. He was given power and authority by the Queen. He makes his living by risking death at any time. The Indians are entitled to this man's services. To be of some

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<sup>10</sup> However, Emma LaRocque treads cautiously in positing Native male violence against women solely in a colonialist context; a matter I will return to later, in Chapter 3 of this thesis.) (*Making Space*, 61)



help to them if necessary. Today, they will not protect us, but they are protecting the white men. They were supposed to protect us, that is what my dad used to tell me, today the police do not protect us. (Venne, *Treaty Rights*, 196-7)

When ‘treaty Indians’ could not presume RCMP protection from lawless settlers in violation of the terms of Treaty 6, which the Plains and Woods Cree were forced through starvation into signing in 1876, what chance did landless, and treaty-less Métis people have? The RCMP, evolved from the North-West Mounted Police, operate as a ‘technical’ arm of the government in order to protect the Dominion of Canada’s interests, principally from perceived threats to the federation’s stability by external and internal sources. Michel Foucault writes: “Government is possible only when the strength of the state is known: it is by this knowledge that it can be sustained. The state’s capacity and the means to enlarge it must be known.” (*Power*, 408) The power of the state must be visible in order to reinforce belief in its systems of power. Foucault emphasizes that the state, and its enforcers, are only concerned with the individual when their contributions can be materially measured; indeed, the individual only exists “insofar as what he does is able to introduce even a minimal change in the strength of the state, either in a positive or in a negative direction.” (409) Campbell’s Métis community, in the context of Foucault’s theory, was not a positive contributor to the state that assesses and values citizens and consumers according to their usefulness as taxpayers and consumers. Further, the Métis, First Nations bands, treaty and non-treaty, were an impediment and feared capable of a “negative” disruption to the Dominion of Canada’s expansion and the creation of a national identity comprised of Euro-Canadian settlers. By implication, the Native population could be seen, at the least, as a social and cultural aggravation who must be culturally and socially assimilated, and at worst, if not assimilated, a problematic threat to a Canadian ideology of an enduring national identity comprised of a

predominantly white Euro-Canadian populace. Identifying resistances to this ideology permits legal retribution with the intention of marking the 'other' as resisters and traitorous to the nation state which, in turn, demands a degree of dehumanization of the identified sources of resistance, particularly in the cases of dispossessed Native people. As Campbell puts it: "one of the things we have to remember is the minute that you dehumanize people and you called them diseased, dirty, lazy, and shiftless then you can do whatever you want with them. No one will care. And if they do, they'll still be silent." (*Bronfman*) The law of the dominant society crosses cultural and legal boundaries and in the Dominion of Canada's historical drive to a quantitative representation, institutional racism within provincial and federal law enforcement agencies is a predictable consequence.

Campbell recalls when she first learned to distrust "wardens and Mounties." (*Halfbreed*, 55) When not on the trapline, Maria's father would hunt in what was now Prince Albert National Park in order to supplement the family's income by selling fresh meat to neighbouring farmers. Still being contested in Canadian law, as cited in the Powley case, it was illegal for 'Halfbreeds' to hunt for game out of season. Campbell's family would frequently have to scramble in order to hide meat after warnings from someone in their community that a game warden was arriving to conduct searches. The author describes one occasion when Joe Vandal arrives to help hide "three elk hides and one moose, plus three to four hundred pounds of meat." (54) The goods were placed in a cellar that her father had dug and where he also had a store of whiskey and a still. Instructed to place their sled over the door to make it look like a play area, Campbell and her siblings complied and this is where they were found playing "when the wardens and Mounties arrived in two Bombardiers." (54) Campbell writes:

Instead of going to the house as usual, two of them came over to us. One warden started talking to us, but didn't get any information as we were too shy and afraid. While he was speaking, the Mountie took some candy bars out of his pocket and held one out. When I reached for it he said, 'Where does your Daddy keep his meat, Honey?' I sold out for an 'Oh Henry!' chocolate bar. I led him right over to the trap-door, showed him how to open it, and while eating the candy, even told him about the church basement and how Daddy had to give that mean old priest meat. I then took the men to the house. (55)

Campbell's father was incarcerated for six months and the injustice of Canadian law as applied to disenfranchised and dispossessed Métis that punishes poverty, led the child Maria "to believe there was no worse sin in this country than to be poor." (57)

The RCMP also features in the story of the run-up to the initial publication of *Halfbreed* by McClelland and Stewart. Campbell submitted the manuscript of her first draft to Jim Douglas at Douglas and McIntyre. Advising Jack McClelland, to whom he offered the manuscript, Douglas deemed *Halfbreed* "highly libellous" as she "names names", allegedly of highly influential businessmen from the time she worked in prostitution. ("Biography with a Purpose", 2) Brendan Frederick R. Edwards reports:

Like Douglas, McClelland was leery that the manuscript 'named names' and he also took issue with the reference to an alleged rape involving members of the RCMP – McClelland was certain the law enforcement agency would seek an injunction stopping distribution if the alleged incident were to be included in the book; less than a year before the book's publication, he sought legal advice, which led him to the conclusion that M&S 'could not safely include this incident. Her lawyer tells her that we could. I would like to include it if we can, but I am still of the opinion that it could lead to an injunction.' On 13 January, 1973, less than two months after McClelland sought this advice, and only months before *Halfbreed* was published, the *Globe and Mail* broke a story of alleged RCMP harassment and sexual misconduct against Métis women in Saskatchewan. Nonetheless, the RCMP incident was not included in the published edition of Campbell's book. (2)

In her interview with Hartmut Lutz and Konrad Gross in 1989, Campbell responds when she is asked by Lutz about the original manuscript:

...a whole section was taken out of the book that was really important, and I had insisted it stay there. And that was something incriminating the RCMP [...] It was in the galley proofs. And when the book came, it was gone. It was the 100<sup>th</sup>

anniversary of the RCMP that year. The only proof I had to support that part, if the publisher or myself were sued, was my great-grandmother and she had passed away. [...] That whole section makes all the other stuff make sense. And you can almost tell at what point it was pulled out. Because there is a gap. (Lutz, 42)

Cheechum would not have been witness to her city life as a prostitute, which might suggest that an assault by the RCMP happened when Campbell was a child.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the case may be, protecting commercial interests, and above all, protecting the laws that enforce the status quo – particularly in relation to the vulnerability of Native women in a society that affords them inadequate respect, security, and justice – work to try to ensure that the disempowered remain disempowered, and to obstruct the entry of Native voices into the national Canadian discourse. Moreover, while Campbell's *Halfbreed* became a best seller, her story was, typically of the period, impeded by what Warren Cariou calls “a publishing industry that didn't understand them and didn't know how to value the uniqueness of what their stories offered.” (*Speaking True*, 2) The full story of a Métis experience was dislocated in an excision performed in order to veil an uncomfortable and inconvenient reality.

After unsatisfactory dealings with a local member of the provincial legislature and the CCF (Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation party), Campbell's father began attending meetings organized by Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris. Brady was a Métis from Alberta whose grandfather was Laurent Garneau who had been a soldier in Louis Riel's provisional governmental army. In 1932, Brady and Norris, whose mother was Métis, were instrumental in the formation of the organization briefly named L' Association des Métis d' Alberta et des Territoires du Nord Ouest, but, as Dobbin writes: “While the organization quickly became known by its English derivative (the Metis Association of Alberta) due to the general dominance of the

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<sup>11</sup> In the collaborative play “Jessica”, written with Linda Griffiths, the protagonist Jessica, a theatrical representation of Maria, states: “I got raped by a mountie when I was twelve” (*Book of Jessica*, 131).

English language, the convention testified to the fact that, in Alberta, Métis nationalism was French and Catholic.” (*One-And-A-Half*, 66) Along with Joe Dion, a nephew of the Cree chief Big Bear who supported Riel in 1885, Brady and Norris were representative of the new generation who eschewed the derogatory term ‘Half-breed’ and its correlation with the hopelessness felt by the Métis after the battle at Batoche, self-identifying as Métis. The Métis Association of Alberta lobbied the provincial government, and through negotiations with the Ewing Commission, set up in 1934 to compile a report on the welfare of destitute Métis communities, successfully negotiated a legislated land base in the creation of ten Métis colonies in 1938 as part of the Métis Betterment Act. It remains the only land belonging to Métis people in the Prairie Provinces.

After the realization of land grants in Alberta, Norris and Brady, socialists influenced by the Fabian Society and inspired by Marxist ideologies, looked to the conditions of the Métis living as ‘road allowance people’ in northern Saskatchewan.<sup>12</sup> Hired by the CCF in 1946, Brady and Norris worked in northern Saskatchewan and fought for improvements to conditions for Métis communities, and for Natives to have legal control of the Province’s natural resources in order to have economic independence from the government (not achieved for the Natives of Alberta). The economic interests of the HBC were still a major decider affecting the Métis trappers’ livelihood, and Brady was instrumental in setting up fishery and timber collectives in order to attain economic stability for Métis communities. Campbell writes of the two: “they told our people how the Halfbreeds in Alberta had organized an association and had gotten colony lands through one united voice. We could do it here too, if we

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<sup>12</sup> The Fabian Society, a socialist group, was formed in London in 1884 and advocated gradual social reformation that would ensure a just distribution of wealth, power, and human rights. Brady was deeply concerned and politically engaged with the Marxist attention to class struggles and principles of social development.

organized a strong body and elected a man to speak for us.” (*Halfbreed*, 65) However, the organization of an association in northern Saskatchewan was to prove much more difficult than in Alberta. Geographically isolated from the southern part of the province, the northern bushland was all but impenetrable. The predominant social unit was family kinship, however, as Dobbin argues:

The mixed bloods who had been trappers in the heyday of the fur trade were not an integral part of Metis national sentiment and lived no differently than their Indian cousins. [...] By the middle of the twentieth century there was no sign of the dynamic political and social organization which had characterized the plains Metis. There was no class structure, no political leadership, no democratic institutions and no coherent communities, as such. There were only the highly individualistic Indian and Metis trappers widely dispersed over hundreds of thousands of acres. (*One-And-A Half*, 167)

Out of touch with the intensifying Métis Nationalism, it would prove difficult to build and sustain a collaborative political movement in Northern Saskatchewan communities.

Maria’s newly radicalized father regularly attended meetings held by Brady and Norris, spending “hours and days talking to our people, and taking them to meetings. Everyone was excited. The government was finally going to give the Halfbreeds land.” (*Halfbreed*, 65) However, the beginnings of a transition from a long demoralized people, and a newly hopeful one with a rejuvenated political consciousness, were in conflict with the persistent fear and suspicion of all factions of the Canadian government.<sup>13</sup> This was played out in Campbell’s family; her father’s newfound political passion found a mirroring in Cheechum’s support, while Grannie Campbell “was against what Daddy was getting involved in and tried to get him to stay home and forget about the meetings. She told Daddy he would only get hurt, the

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<sup>13</sup> In 1967 Campbell visited Norris in hospital just before he died to ask advice about political infighting amongst the revitalized Metis Association of Alberta. He advised that it was unimportant; what was important was to “avoid at all costs the trap of government funding of the organization and all the other political problems will be solved through the independent and democratic struggle of native people.” (Dobbin, *One-And-A-Half*, 253)

government wouldn't give us anything, and he'd probably end up in jail for his trouble." (65) Campbell was taken by her father to a meeting where Brady spoke:

Jim said almost word for word what I have heard our leaders discuss today: the poverty, the death of trapping as our livelihood, the education of our children, the loss of land, and the attitude of both governments towards our plight. He talked about a strong united voice that would demand justice for our people – an organization that government couldn't ignore. He said many people were poor, not just us, and maybe someday we could put all our differences aside and walk together and build a better country for all our children." (65)

Campbell's father introduced her to Brady: "I told him I thought he was wonderful and that Cheechum had already told me all the things he said. [...] He reached down and gave me a hug and from that night on Jim Brady was my hero and I loved him as I loved no man but my Dad." (66) Her father neglected trapping to attend meetings, and the family suffered increased poverty, harassing visits from the RCMP, as well as rejection from some of their relatives: "Like the whites, they laughed and made jokes about Dad. [...] We were treated badly at school, even our teacher would make jokes about Dad, like, 'Saskatchewan has a new Riel. Campbells have quit poaching to take up the new rebellion.'" (66) Some stories circulating amongst their community was that Campbell's father was no longer trapping because he was being paid by the "Communists" (66). Her mother was disheartened by the accusations levelled at her husband and "begged him to quit. Then one night, he did just that. Something inside him died, and he became another defeated man." (67) Campbell witnessed her father crying over 'their failure' and Cheechum explained to her that: "some of the men had been hired by government, and this had caused much fighting among our people, and had divided them." But Cheechum also comforted and gave Maria hope for the future: "It will come, my girl, someday it will come." (67)

Brady himself became disillusioned with the Department of Natural Resources and the CCF party, commenting: "When I worked for the Alberta government, which

was purely a reactionary government, I found that as far as my work [...] among the Alberta Metis was concerned [...] I actually got far better support and understanding [...] than I got from our own CCF government of Saskatchewan.” (Dobbin, *One-And-A-Half*, 181) Brady and Norris’ affiliation with the communist Labor-Progressive Party, formed in 1943, no doubt led to the raids on the homes of the Métis who attended their meetings. Norris remained with the CCF until their defeat in 1964. Brady officially left the party in 1950 but remained close to Norris and although politically immobile for long periods, continued to be concerned with the political issues within the party in relation to social justice based on Marxist principles. In 1967, working as geological surveyor for a mining exploration company, Brady and his Cree colleague Abbie Halkett disappeared at Lower Foster Lake. The search and later inquest found no conclusive evidence of what became of the two men, and many theories developed. The enduring theory is that they were murdered for their political views by the RCMP, however, Dobbin’s research unearths no legitimizing evidence: “The RCMP have a history of harassment, brutality and even murder of communists and native people, but have not been cited for political assassinations. In any case Brady, operating in the depressed circumstance of LaRonge, would have been an unlikely candidate. None of Brady’s close political associates give any credence to the political murder theory.” (*One-And-A-Half*, 249-50) Resentment toward the CCF, Brady, and Norris was felt by many Métis who felt abandoned after a hopeful bid for improved living conditions and, above all, a permanent land base. Campbell records: “We never saw any of the men again who had come to lead our people. They had government jobs and didn’t have time for us anymore, Jim Brady went into the north and I never saw him again either.” (*Halfbreed*, 67) The reputation of Brady and Norris survived the disappointment (generated by their stymied political activities in the



1940s and 1950s) felt by the Métis; however, the integrity of the RCMP continues to be questioned. The eight month “Missing Women Commission of Inquiry”, which closed on June 5, 2012 with an extension to present the findings on October 2012, was set up to enquire into the blatant failure of duty in investigating the disappearance of the more than 70 missing, mostly aboriginal, women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. The Vancouver police and the RCMP are both implicated in gender and racial prejudice in the investigations of these cases, as are provincial police and the RCMP across the country in the last 30 years in the cases of over 1200 missing and murdered aboriginal women. I shall return to this imperative enquiry, in greater depth, in Chapter 3.

Campbell’s demoralized father spent long periods away trapping, and when home, drank heavily and became physically abusive to her mother. Campbell told Cheechum of her anger towards her father, who she felt: “was no better for quitting than the Breeds who laughed at him, that he did not have to give up and start drinking.” (*Halfbreed*, 68) Cheechum, who had experienced many periods of Métis political stagnation, replied:

Wait my girl. It will come. I’ve waited for ninety years and listened to many men. I have seen men quit and have felt as you do, but we have to keep waiting and as each man stands unafraid we have to believe he is the one and encourage him. You’ll feel discouraged like this many times in your life, but, like me, you’ll wait. (68)

As an adult, Campbell did not wait to be led, but worked alongside men – with varying degrees of success – in her political endeavours, significantly during the periods of ‘Red’ political awareness and action in the 1960s and 70s.

After her mother dies in childbirth the twelve-year-old Maria is left, along with Cheechum, to care for her siblings, including the newborn. Fur trapping “was finished” and her father’s grief meant he would “disappear for weeks on end.” (71)

Cheechum was instrumental in a healing of Campbell's father's grief, enabling him to help the family to survive their first year after his wife's death. However, Cheechum decided to leave Campbell's home to live with her nephew because she felt:

...she was too old to be anything but a burden to us. She was ninety-six that year. [...] How completely alone I felt! [...] We became poorer and poorer, if that was possible. We never received assistance, for Dad was afraid that if we received help they would visit our house all the time. [...] So our lives continued until our teacher reported us to the relief people and they said there was going to be an investigation into our situation. That night Dad told us we would be moving in a few days. (74).

Change for Métis communities has been a constant, whether geographical or cultural. But it is important, as Emma LaRocque points out, "to differentiate between change that is imposed and change that comes from free choice." ("Time, Tides and Trains", 77) Keeping one-step ahead of social services which had the power to split up the family, forced the Campbell's to leave, along with most of their belongings, their log cabin; this was the familial space where stories were told and kinships forged.

LaRocque considers the colonization of Natives in Canada as coming in three waves. She describes the first wave of colonization as the period of first contact with Europeans that brought the fur trade, "missionaries and disease". The second wave, LaRocque considers more virulent than the first: the creation of the Confederation of Canada and the construction of the national railway. However, it is the third wave, which she likens to a tsunami still affecting her generation, and which:

...took place soon after World War II. This wave was the modernization movement, in which various white agencies seemed driven to whip Indian and Metis into white, middle-class, 'ordinary' Canadians. This is the wave in which governments confiscated or restricted the trapping, hunting and fishing areas and resources that Native peoples loved and used. This is the wave that forced families between town schools and trap lines. This is the wave in which police unabashedly picked up the most vulnerable Native people from Town streets, and in which social workers began 'scooping' children away from their homes. This is the wave that made our village crouch when townsmen came, sometimes striking with brutal rapacity. This is the wave in which disorientation, grief, fear and internalized rage grew among us. (79-80)

As unhappy as Maria was to leave the log cabin home that her father had built, to live in a “barn of a house”, there was a consolation that: “the relief man would not find us and we could be together.” (*Halfbreed*, 75)

### **Survivance of Liberal Canadian Politics**

Save me from the people that mean well!

Maria Campbell (Lutz, 58)

With no housekeeper, Campbell and her brother James took alternate days away from school in order to look after their younger siblings. Their teacher threatened that if they missed any more lessons she would: “have to report us and the family allowance would be cut off.” (*Halfbreed*, 91) They could little afford to lose the subsistence amount of \$50.00 a month and eventually the only recourse was for Campbell to leave school and work part time as a house cleaner. Campbell worked for a Mr. Grey’s daughter who “didn’t like Indians [and] talked in front of me as if I were deaf. She would tell her visitors that we were only good for two things – working and fucking, if someone could get us to do it. She made jokes about the hot bucks and hot squaws and talked like we were animals in the barnyard.” (44) The stereotype of the lustful, exotic/erotic Native persists because, as Richard J. Lane argues, “in the world of commodity culture, certain image tropes [...] function as signs of Western desire” (“Sacred Community, Sacred Culture”, 159). Campbell writes that Mr. Grey’s daughter would:

...go to dances in nearby native communities and sneak off in the bush with the men. I know she made countless passes at Dad. This was common in our area: the white men were crazy about our women and the white women, although they were not as open and forward about it, were the same towards our men.  
(*Halfbreed*, 94)

There is approximate gender equality in Euro-Canadian concepts, as far as inventions pertaining to the nature of stereotypical Native sexual activity is concerned. As Paula Gunn Allen writes: “As a half-breed American woman, I cast about in my mind for negative images of Indian women, and I find none that are directed to Indian women alone. The negative images I do have are of Indians in general and in fact are more often of males than of females.” (*Sacred Hoop*, 44) However, a double-standard applies that dictates an acceptance of sexual exploitation of and aggression by white men toward Native women, who are perceived as voraciously ‘asking for it’, while sexual interaction between a non-Native woman and Native man is predominantly seen as erotically charged, principally without a violent dynamic of power and dominance.

Campbell and her community continually experienced Euro-Canadian’s negative perceptions of their social relations and cultural and political history, not least in the form of entertainment. In St. Michele, a town divided by: “French people [who] lived on the south side, [and] the Halfbreeds and Indians [who] lived in the north and west ends”, films were presented in the evenings. (*Halfbreed*, 96) Campbell recalls that on one occasion a film about the Northwest Rebellion was shown:

Riel and Dumont were our heroes. The movie was a comedy and it was awful: the Halfbreeds were made to look like such fools that it left you wondering how they ever organized a rebellion. Gabriel Dumont looked filthy and gross. In one scene his suspenders broke and his pants fell down, and he went galloping away on a scabby horse in his long red underwear. Louis Riel was portrayed as a real lunatic who believed he was god, and his followers were real “three stooges” types. (97)

Campbell writes that “of course” the commander of the Canadian Militia, General Middleton and the NWMP were represented as heroes. “Everyone around us was laughing hysterically, including Halfbreeds, but Cheechum walked out in disgust. Many years later I saw the movie again and it made me realize that it’s no wonder my

people are so fucked up.” (97). Subjugated by the expansion of the Dominion of Canada whose continuing existence relies on a prevailing jurisdiction over the media, popular culture, education and historical bias to underpin dominance, the Métis, even now, are subject to reinforcing images that become internalized and destructive. LaRocque argues: “Probably more than any other medium, Hollywood westerns have used the least amount of factual material with the wildest imagination. And Hollywood has successfully evaded its societal responsibilities under the guise of art and entertainment, perhaps because the public (including many Native people) has swallowed every inch of the ‘great silver screen.’” (*Defeathering*, 59) The plethora of derisive imagery displaced the attraction that the fifteen-year-old Maria felt toward the twenty-four year old Smokey, a Half-breed with “a reputation that made even Halfbreeds shake their heads.” (*Halfbreed*, 98) Smokey told Maria that her father had given them permission to see each other when she turned seventeen, and could marry when she was eighteen:

I remember looking at him and saying, ‘Marry you? You’ve got to be joking! I’m going to do something with my life besides make more Halfbreeds.’ [...] I couldn’t understand what was wrong with me. I loved Smoky and wanted to be with him forever, yet when I thought of him and marriage I saw only shacks, kids, no food and both of us fighting. I saw myself with my head down and Smoky looking like an old man, laughing only when he was drunk. (101)

Pressures of keeping the family together intensified when the ‘relief people’ threatened to take Maria and her siblings away from their father if he did not marry his common-law wife, Sarah. Refusing to do so Sarah left; Maria worked as a store clerk, and her brother Jamie found work on the railroad. In spite of Maria’s father now looking after the household: “The relief people came again and said they were going to put us in three separate homes.” (104) Deemed too young to look after her family Maria concluded that she had one alternative: “I would have to get married. [...] I thought of Smokey, but knew he had nothing and we had to find someone who

wanted to take over a large family and could support us all.” (104) Soon after making her decision to marry as the only means to keep her family together, Maria met Darrel who she was convinced by the evidence of his “expensive clothes and new car” was wealthy enough to take care of her family. (104) Lying to her father that she was pregnant in order to gain his permission, Maria met with further disapproval: “Darrel’s sisters came and were upset when they saw I wasn’t white, and were horrified with the ‘drunken Breeds’ at the reception. Cheechum was heart-broken; she refused to come when she heard Darrel was white, saying that nothing good ever comes from a mixed marriage.” (105) Cheechum’s apprehensions about mixed marriages would not, presumably, have been over the *mélange* of races but of cultures, particularly as it was more than probable that Maria would be led away from her customs than Darrel would be to embrace hers. Canadian national and social Euro-centric hierarchical forms – particularly gender structures – place a Métis woman two strata below that of a white man. Further, as Cheechum would have witnessed over and over again in her long life, the repercussions of the loss of cultural and kinship ties in the context of self-identification resonate in future generations of Métis, given that, as Bonita Lawrence points out, the “problem [for offspring] is less a matter of belonging anywhere, than living in a polarized society where whiteness and Nativeness are not admitted as existing in the same person.” (“*Real*” *Indians*, 149) While it is problematic to weigh a sense of belonging or separate the questions emanating from the issues surrounding mixed blood identity and self-identification, Lawrence’s point is well made in the context of the Canadian government and mainstream Euro-Canadians’ predilection for binary cultural signifiers. Lawrence further points out that, “it is the European determination to separate the half-breed from the Indian that has allowed Canada to deny its fiduciary obligation to any

community that lacks Indian status and that has forced these individuals to rally themselves, in contemporary times, as Métis in order to survive as Indigenous people at all.” (93)

Maria rapidly discovered that her self-sacrificing marriage to Darrel would not help to support her siblings, whom she had brought to live with them. Losing financial assistance from his sisters who disapproved of his choice of wife, and six months after their marriage, Darrel revealed himself as a violent drunk, lost his job, and beat Maria who was pregnant, calling her a “fat squaw”. (*Halfbreed*, 106) After putting Maria in hospital twice, interventions undertaken by her father and Smokey put a stop to the beatings, but not to Darrel’s vindictiveness. Following the birth of their daughter Lisa, Darrel called “the welfare people” who, through the courts, placed Maria’s six siblings into permanent foster care. In what is now generally seen by the Canadian Indigenous population as a deliberate cultural genocide, the ‘sixties scoop’, applied after the 1951 Indian Act, allowed provincial child welfare authorities to remove status Native children, including those from band reserves, from their homes and into foster care. Thus, as Bonita Lawrence writes, it is important to acknowledge that:

“Métis, nonstatus and urban Native children have always been dealt with by provincial welfare agencies and thus for years have faced a similar devastation to that experienced by status Indian communities in the 1960s.” (*“Real” Indians*, 114) With 70 to 90 percent of the ‘scooped’ children growing up in Euro-Canadian homes – the white families not being told of the children’s Native heritage – generations of Métis were damaged and suffered collective desolation. (RCAP, *“Real” Indians*, 113)

Campbell recalls:

The final big blow for us were the scoops. [...] In our community, just about all of the kids were put in foster homes. My brothers and sisters; one Valentine’s day the big black car came. We were decorating a cake for them to take to school, and they were all loaded up and in fifteen minutes we never saw them

again for 12 years. We didn't know where they were, my father couldn't speak English, there were no court records, there was nothing, there was nothing that he could do. Our families were pretty broken after that. [...] A lot of real ugly violence started at that point. And when we talk about violence against women, one of the things we need to look at, when people are so dehumanized that they can't defend their own families then, in our language we say we become windigos, cannibals; we cannibalize ourselves. Our families were broken and lost with children gone, people moved into urban areas. (*Bronfman*)

In the midst of Maria's depression over the loss of her siblings, Darrel informed her that they were moving to Vancouver. He reminds her that she had "always wanted to go to the big city", but Maria's feelings of guilt over the fracturing of her family prevented her from going to Cheechum for reassurance, or to say goodbye: "I thought of my Cheechum, whose strength and comfort I so desperately missed. I couldn't go to her because I was ashamed. Everything had gone so wrong." (*Halfbreed*, 107-8) As a child, Maria had fantasized about running away to "get a job and make lots of money. Then I would buy a new car, a red satin dress and red shoes, and I would drive by the house, toot the horn and everyone would come out. I would not speak to them and they would be sorry." (59) As a fifteen-year-old girl, Maria understood that it was imperative to prove to the 'relief people' that the family had the financial resources to be self-sufficient whilst they were battling with the realities of the environmental effects of colonization: the loss of land and traditional means of survival and self-sufficiency. The pressures Maria faced to procure enough money to feed and clothe her family were compounded by the social coercion to accumulate material wealth as a sign of success in the dominant culture, and was at variance with Cheechum's teachings of Métis kinship and commonality. Cheechum had cautioned Maria to go "out there and find what you want and take it, but always remember who you are and why you want it." (86) However, it is not until Maria is an adult that she:

...began to understand what Cheechum had been trying to say to me. She had never meant that I should go out into the world in search of fortune, but rather that I go out and discover for myself the need for leadership and change: if our



way of life were to improve I would have to find other people like myself, and together try to find an alternative. (143)

When Maria is returned from the west-coast cities, and her siblings find their way home from their foster placements, their father and Auntie are able to help them, amongst other returning ‘scooped’ children, to find their families and reconnect with their culture. In a resistance to assimilation, Maria and many of her relations, rather than returning to what is understood by Euro-Canadian mis-perception of a static Native tradition, brought to their communities and traditions a contribution of their experiences living amongst the dominant culture. Jace Weaver writes that “the colonized persons, particularly cross bloods, feel themselves [...] at once limnal (sic) and littoral to two ways of being and knowing.” (*That the People*, 36) Rather than what is commonly described of Métis people as ‘living between two cultures’, Maria learns to *straddle* two cultures in what is, eventually, a regenerative continuance that creates a space for an alternative way of living, not as a defeated people, but a people with a knowledge of “who they are, [...] the people who own themselves.” (*Riel’s People*, 46) The self-destruction instigated by the traumas of colonial expansion is interrupted and reclamation of Métis familial and community values makes possible a continuance for future generations through a counter-narrative.

On route to Vancouver, Darrel and Maria stayed with his sister Bonnie and brother-in-law John, and, like Mr. Grey’s daughter, Bonnie charged Maria with stupidity, laziness, and a sexual voraciousness as evidenced by her false accusation of Maria’s plan to seduce John. After a trip to Calgary with Darrel, Bonnie returned home drunk and without Darrel, stating that he would not be returning and that Maria’s daughter Lisa was to stay in Alberta. Fear of losing custody of her daughter, and its echoing of the loss of her siblings into the bureaucratic jaws of welfare services, pushed Maria to strike her sister-in-law, and with the help of John, she

escaped while Bonnie screamed “that I was nothing but a dirty Indian Breed.”

(*Halfbreed*, 110) After further work as a housekeeper where she was again targeted as sexual fair game, Maria found a job and a home at a restaurant run by a Chinese family. Maria identified with the family’s experiences of living as ‘other’ on the margins of mainstream Euro-Canadian society: “Most of the people who came to the café were friendly enough in a strange kind of way. Sometimes when they were drunk they called them ‘chinks or ‘yellow bastards,’ or would say things like, ‘Hey Sing, this meat tastes like dog. You sure you haven’t been killing any strays?’” (112)

Grandpa Sing’s generosity to his Euro-Canadian customers, whom Maria witnessed lending money to when they were in need, was not enough to disrupt racial stereotyping in what Bhabha identifies as a colonialist “discursive strategy”

(*Location*, 66). Indeed, Sing’s humanity and munificence necessitated repetition and reinforcement of negative stereotypes, because, as Bhabha points out, the stereotype is an “impossible object” of “‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness.” (66)

The repetition of the stereotype of an Asian who eats and serves dogs, and identifying Sing as a “yellow bastard” in spite of his humane and empathetic qualities, were efforts to position and fix Sing as the ‘other’ that both “needs no proof, [and] can never really, in discourse, be proved” (66). Bhabha argues that the stereotype “must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed” in order to mask an ambiguity between what is seen and what is constructed in the colonial imagination. Without Cheechum’s support and reminders of pride in her Métis ancestry, Maria’s feelings of guilt regarding her failure to protect her family from the welfare system leave her without the resources to stem the internalization of colonialist racial stereotyping. Outwardly defiant, Maria began “drinking and partying a lot. I figured ‘What’s the use?’ – people believed I was bad anyway, so I might as

well give them real things to talk about.” (*Halfbreed*, 112-113) Or, as Marilyn Dumont put it in a prologue to her prose poem “Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl”: “You are not good enough, not good enough, obviously not good enough.” (*Really Good*, 13) Maria was culturally isolated, spiritually and emotionally adrift without Cheechum’s guidance, and therefore vulnerable when Darrel returned to take her and Lisa to live in Vancouver.

Maria’s introduction to her longed for big city, that she believed promised prosperity and material abundance, disappointed and alarmed her. The apartment that Darrel arranged for his family was dirty, necessitated a shared bathroom and was crawling with cockroaches. Above all, the people she lived among in the squalid apartment block were so dehumanized by poverty that they: “seemed not to see anything or anyone”, and the children were “pale, skinny raggedy kids with big, unfeeling eyes who looked so unloved and neglected.” (*Halfbreed*, 114)

Darrel’s second desertion left Maria destitute and was the catalyst for her decision to work as a prostitute for Lil, a woman she was introduced to at a party. Lil and her brothel offered Maria a possible escape from poverty and a chance to support herself and Lisa. But Maria also believed that prostitution could be the means to fulfil her ambitious dreams of acquiring the material riches venerated by the dominant and consumerist culture. However, after Maria escaped the self-destructive cycle of drugs and prostitution she recognized that while dreams “are so important in one’s life” when “followed blindly they can lead to the disintegration of one’s soul.” (116) Lil altered Maria’s appearance with stylish clothes, and beauty treatments which “seemed like a dream.” (116) Seeing her reflection in a mirror for the first time, Maria “hardly recognized the woman staring back at me. She looked cold and unreal, rich and expensive. ‘Dear God,’ I thought, ‘this is how I’ve always wanted to look, but do

women who look like this ever feel like I do inside?’ I wanted to run away, and yet I had to stay.” (116) The outer transformation of Maria’s appearance was in conflict with the internal instability created by the displacement from her community and culture. Dressed expensively, sexually desirable, and being what Judith Butler would describe as “*performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs” (Emphasis original, *Gender*, 185) Maria felt she had “lost something” (*Halfbreed*, 116). Butler states that “acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause.” ((Emphasis original, *Gender*, 185) Her mother’s wish for Maria to grow up to emulate Euro-Canadian ‘ladies’ was mediated by Cheechum who taught her that women used to perform ‘men’s’ work on the traplines and were “free” of Euro-Canadian patriarchal principles of defining gender identity. (*Halfbreed*, 41) Instructed by Lil in how to wear the costume that would signify a stylishly sophisticated woman in her role as a prostitute, was a construction in a binary of identity to the ‘lady’ of her mother’s wishes. These constructions were the source of Maria’s difficulty in recognizing her reflection and represent a disruptive split between her desire to appear “rich and expensive” and the Métis cultural and community values that Cheechum had taught her. A desire for individual enrichment that Cheechum warned was the undoing of a Métis unity in the Riel led resistances to the Dominion of Canada’s encroachments was played out in Maria’s life in Vancouver, and with it, a painful wound of detachment from her Métis identity. Further, Maria’s discomfort also resided in the disparity between a lifetime of racial slurs labelling her as a ‘dirty Half-breed squaw’ and the urbanely sophisticated, rich

Euro-Canadian styled woman that she saw reflected in the mirror. Like Maria, Janice Acoose feels that because of contemporaneous ideologies, she “learned to internalize the easy squaw, Indian whore, dirty Indian and drunken Indian stereotypes.” (*Is kewak-kah*, 29)

Maria was traumatized by her first experiences as a prostitute: “Life had played such a joke. I had married to escape from what I’d thought was an ugly world, only to find a worse one. Someday, for certain, I would leave. How, I didn’t know, but until then I would do what I had to do.” (*Halfbreed*, 116) Maria was not physically beaten by Lil, as she was when married to Darrel. Although this is the case, I dispute Shawna Ferris’ claim that Campbell consistently portrays Lil as “a sympathetic character in Maria’s life story.” (*Working from the Violent Centre*, 136) Lil did arrange for Maria’s daughter Lisa to live in a convent, where she was well cared for. However, the text reveals a subtle but clear judgement of Lil’s character in the account of Maria’s reflections on her boss: “She was an unusual woman. She was kind in *her own way*, and I got along well with her.” (Emphasis mine, *Halfbreed*, 117) During Maria’s first days in the brothel she encountered one of “Lil’s girls”, who was part Chinese and Indian, and was “tiny, fragile and very pretty.” (117) One evening Maria noticed that the girl was missing, went to her room and discovered her body: “She looked so little, so defenceless and young. [...] She had died from an overdose of drugs. They gave her a welfare burial, and forgot about her.” (117) Above all, Lil was a businesswoman who survived and profited by the commodification of women who were marginalized and desperate. Helping Maria by arranging childcare for Lisa can also be seen as self serving as it freed Maria to work for Lil. Further, Lil, after profitably exploiting the Chinese-Indian girl, amongst others, coldly handed her remains over to welfare services to bury, and she was quickly forgotten. As

transactional commodities, Lil was willing to treat ‘her girls’ well, but when their monetary worth became defunct, she utilized welfare services – in Maria’s experience, a bureaucratic and inhumane monolith – to deal with what had become an inconvenient, dehumanized, and fiscally draining problem.

In order to endure the life she has at Lil’s, Maria began taking “pills”. The expensive drugs, Lil’s share of the money earned, Lisa’s costs at the convent, and other expenses thwarted her dreams of accumulating wealth. Paradoxically, the hoped for, and desperate, means of an escape from destitution and into Euro-Canadian normative materialism was dragging Maria further into poverty’s maw. Consequently, Maria agreed to become the mistress of a “wealthy and influential man in Vancouver” whom she refers to as Mr.-----. Mr.----- moved Maria into a luxurious apartment and introduced her to “important men in both politics and big business”, most of whom knew “Lil’s girls, and who on many occasions brought them to our place.” (118) Many years after breaking away from a self-destructive and self-punishing existence, Maria became politically conscious and cognitive of the hypocritical conduct of innumerable businessmen and politicians whose public and private influences and actions have severe consequences for the powerless and disenfranchised:

When I think back to that time and those people, I realize now that poor people, both white and Native, who are trapped within a certain kind of life, can never look to the business and political leaders of this country for help. Regardless of what they promise they’ll never change things, because they are involved in and perpetuate in private the very things that they condemn in public. (118)

The wealthy and politically powerful in Canada maintain a symbiotic relationship that privileges its members, sustains a hierarchical colonial social order, diminishes their accountability for operating outside of the rule of law, and collude in keeping the marginalized at a disadvantage.

## **Rule of Law and Political Duplicity**

Michel Foucault writes that “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.” (*Will to Knowledge, I*, 86) In the Foucauldian sense, this can also be applied to the public restraint of politicians and their private excesses: “Would power be accepted if it were entirely cynical?” (86) Rather more to the point: if it is to be *seen* as “entirely cynical”. The participation of politicians in transgressing the laws which they have the power to shape and influence is morally reprehensible, not only in relation to the constituents of society who are marginalized and “trapped” by laws that deem the destitute as an abject threat to mainstream Euro-Canadian political and social hierarchical orders, but also because they can be exploited by the very law shapers and enforcers by whom they have been ensnared. Indeed, Stephen Harper’s conservative government formally and publicly apologized in the House of Commons on June 11, 2008 to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis former students, families and communities for the Canadian government’s accountability in the setting up and running of residential schools and their policies of cultural genocide. However, while Harper’s government funds the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it concurrently puts at risk present and future generations of the Native population that will be affected by the tar sands gigaproject in Northern Alberta. It is important to emphasize the correlative thread between the actions and policies of the current Canadian government, which publicly prides itself on sympathetic overtures to Native historical and contemporary grievances, and those of the expansionist Dominion government of the nineteenth century and its disregard for Native rights. The environmental impact on Indigenous territories – that contravenes the Numbered Treaties which were agreed to include protection for First Nation and Métis land rights – in a government and

corporate alliance with Mobil Oil, Shell, Syncrude Canada, Petro-Canada, and Suncor Energy, has already proven catastrophic. Air and water contamination caused by oil extraction from the sands is causing a substantial rise in the numbers of cancers in the Native population, is poisoning the fish, and caribou and wolf numbers have been decimated to the point of a predicted extinction within two decades. The social and cultural impact on the Native population triggered by the tar sands operation, aside from the corrosive disruption of traditional hunting and fishing patterns, has also created a setting where sexual exploitation of Native women by mineworkers in the immediate area surrounding the Athabasca mine, is rife. Moreover, on December 14, 2012, Harper's government passed the omnibus budget Bill C-45 which amends environmental legislation that protected the greater part of the rivers and lakes in Canada, thereby further eroding Treaty agreements regarding Native rights. This sounds disturbingly familiar, and indeed, similar to the land grabbing policies implemented by the Dominion of Canada causing the preliminary dispossession and displacement of First Nations and Métis people, considering that the Numbered Treaties have yet to be legally settled. These policies have generally inspired, to say the least, a crisis of confidence in the present government's rule of law, particularly in the Native population. As I write, the "Idle No More" grass roots movement is spreading across the country aligning First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Euro-Canadian environmentalist and human rights activists, who are assembling at demonstrations, blockades of the Trans-Canada highways, and drumming flash mobs in various and varied public spaces.

The hypocrisy of public law making and private transgressions of particular directives are seen by Sherene H. Razack, in the context of male white privilege, as the elite's notion that moving from the "respectable space" that makes up a wealthy



life, to a “degenerate space” of, for example, prostitution “confirms that they are indeed white men in control who can survive a dangerous encounter with the racial Other and who have an unquestioned right to be anywhere and do anything.” (*Race, Space, Law*, 127) Further, Razack states that once they “leave the space of degeneracy having survived it unscathed, they return to respectability. In this way, prostitution reaffirms not only the hierarchies of gender but also of class, race, and sexual orientation.” (*Race, Space, Prostitution*, 357) Maria lived outside of the law as a prostitute, and the trap was not just of economics, but that of a corrupt political and social dynamic that benefited from keeping her there. Maria’s pill taking developed into an addiction to heroin which she describes as rendering her emotionally detached: “I didn’t care anymore about anything, not even my baby. [...] I was like a block of ice – I had no feelings.” (*Halfbreed*, 119) Maria’s dependency on heroin enabled her to numb her feelings of guilt and shame, and keep Mr. --- “happy” in order to have money with which to buy the drugs. (119) Campbell writes that she “started to go downhill”, and then she “met Ray.” (119) An ex-convict who owned a construction company that legitimized his less salubrious and illegal operations, Ray “knew all the right people and belonged to all the right clubs.” (119) Maria left Mr. ---- before he could leave her, and accepted Ray’s offer to help her give up heroin, acquire an apartment of her own where she could support her daughter Lisa, and work for him. Maria was aware that Ray’s business dealings were not entirely legitimate after overhearing a sinister phone call in the middle of the night when he ordered an associate to break someone’s hands, arms and legs. As with Mr. ----, Ray was well connected with “many governmental people as well as [...] businessmen” that Maria met at both of the men’s parties. (121) The clandestine money/power dynamic that blurs the border between legal and illegal activities – until exposed to the public by

scandal – is understood by Maria to be a closed system to those on the margins. Opting out of Ray’s employ to seek an independent life in Calgary, sans criminal affiliations, Maria was told by Ray that she was free to go, and that he loved her. Maria thought to herself: “‘Love! They all love you if they’re on the gravy train. He can afford to love me. I made him good money.’ [...] He was a means to an end, and I didn’t feel I owed him anything.” (122) As with Lil, Maria saw her relationship with Ray as a symbiotic one that was rooted in a monetary expedience and she found it impossible to believe that she meant anything more to Ray beyond her economic usefulness to him. In her urban existence, although lost in trying to adapt to a life that demands the pursuit of material riches but fails to fill the spiritual and cultural vacuum left by separation from her Métis community, Maria did not try to replicate community amongst Euro-Canadians; she stood, for the most part, emotionally separate whilst trying to survive. And she was not seduced into an expectation of trust in the business/political paradigm of the powerful. Trusting Ray emotionally would have meant rendering herself vulnerable to the possibility of exploitation from another rich, politically powerful, Euro-Canadian man.

**Belonging and Performance: “Dancing for a place in society.”**

Maria Campbell, (*Halfbreed*, 134)

With a short, sporadic, and disrupted education that left her with no training or employment skills, Maria found it impossible to support herself and her daughter in Calgary and returned to Vancouver, where she became re-addicted to heroin and entangled in a violent relationship with another addict. Maria had been avoiding contact with other Native people: “I knew that as long as I stayed away I would

somehow always survive, because I didn't have to feel guilty about taking from white people. With my own people I would have had to share. I couldn't survive if I worried about someone else." (*Halfbreed*, 123) Maria's shame over her dependency on white society for survival developed into an inability to extend communal concern to other Natives and led to hatred of herself and Native men: "The drunken Indian men I saw would fill me with a blinding hatred; I blamed them for what happened to me [...] for all the girls who were on the city streets. If they had only fought back, instead of giving up, these things would never have happened." (123) Taiaiake Alfred identifies the source and repercussions of internalized hatred of Indigenous people:

Cultural dislocation has led to despair, but the real deprivation is the erosion of an ethic of universal respect and responsibility that used to be the hallmark of Indigenous societies. The material condition of First Nations life, pressures exerted on Indigenous people from settler society and this state of overall dependency has created a reality characterized by discord and violence experienced as daily facts of life in most First Nation communities. The self-hating inward turn of this negative energy in reaction to colonization is one of the most damaging aspects of the problem. ("Colonialism and State Dependency", 43)

Campbell describes her trajectory from anger and blame at the men in her community for what she saw as a failure of protection, to political and spiritual understanding, as an apprenticeship that started as a child with her Cheechum. As an adult, in her search for "stories and teachers", Campbell approached the "old women" of her community who directed her to talk to the "old men":

...one of them became my first teacher. It wasn't long after that I realized he was not only teaching me, but he was also doctoring me. [...] You know, as political as I was, I had no understanding of history; [...] I understood history as a victim, not as a survivor. I knew how to blame. I also wasn't much of a thinker. I didn't have time; I was too busy being angry. But those old men taught me to be a thinker. (Gingell, "One Small Medicine", 5-6)

The loss of her Métis community was damaging spiritually, and culturally disorientating for Maria, and it was not until she encountered a Native American family in Arizona that she began the long journey of reconnection with her Métis

familial ethos. Hitchhiking back to Vancouver after being abandoned in Mexico by a dubious male acquaintance, Maria was invited into the Native American home where the grandmother of the family, who reminded Maria of Cheechum, generously listened to her stories without asking questions and discreetly gave her money when she left. The reminder of Cheechum created a conduit that reunited Maria with her great-grandmother's teachings and gave her the strength to withdraw from heroin a second time: "Although it was worse than the first time, in a way it was easier, because this time my Cheechum was with me the whole time. I could feel her presence in the room with me and I wasn't afraid." (*Halfbreed*, 124)

Pregnant, ashamed of her desperate life of prostitution and addiction, Maria would not go home in the belief she would be rejected by her father and Cheechum. Struggling to remain drug free in Calgary, Maria attempted training as a hairdresser but working two jobs while studying led to exhaustion, hopelessness, and an attempted suicide. In conversation with the abortionist that Maria consulted, but rejected the services of, Maria was told that she did not belong in "this rat race." "I went to bed that night thinking, 'If I don't belong here, then where the hell do I belong?'" (132) Here, Campbell signals the awakening consciousness of her 'place' in the dominant society's racially biased poverty trap and her increasing awareness of the political initiate of estrangement from her family and homeland. Unable to make a living wage at hairdressing, Maria was advised by her new roommate Marion, an "Indian involved, after a fashion, with different Native activities in Calgary", (132) about how to successfully manipulate white society: first by applying for Welfare and second by performing 'Indian' for the tourists at the Calgary Stampede. In the first instance, Maria was counselled by Marion to wear a tattered "welfare coat" to her meeting at the Welfare offices. Feeling like a "Whitefish Lake squaw, and that is

exactly what the social worker thought”, Maria was directed to go to the Department of Indian Affairs. (133) Stating that she is a Half-breed and not a Treaty Indian, Maria was told that in that case, she was eligible for welfare, but, the social worker adds: “I can’t see the difference – part Indian, all Indian. You’re all the same.” (133) “All the same” as in ‘not white’, so that Indigenous cultural specifics have no relevancy in the Canadian mainstream consciousness. While the responsibility of First Nations’ bands fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Indian Affairs, Métis and Non-Status people, until 1985, were the responsibility of provincial governments. The establishment of the Indian Act in 1876, and the more than 30 amendments – made without the constitutionally obligated consent of band members – to the original document since then, have had the invariable purpose of assimilating Canada’s Indigenous people into mainstream society. Although the Métis were not included in the Act, the Riel Resistance of 1885 was perceived as a considerable threat and led the Government to apply a more vociferous repression of First Nations’ cultural practices, including the Potlatch and Sundance ceremonies which were rendered illegal. The Métis were seen as Indian enough to cause a destabilization to the formation of the Dominion of Canada, but if repression could be deftly handled, assimilation of Métis and Non-Status people could be comprehensively and swiftly attained, and the assimilation of Treaty bands, eventually but surely, would follow. The 1951 amendments reinstated the legality of Indigenous ceremonies, but were no less focused on assimilation as the ideal resolution in order to attain a homogenous cultural state, and the Act, on these issues, was all but indistinguishable to the original Act of 1876. Governance that has no will to distinguish between band cultural specificities – or, more significantly, as Taiaiake Alfred and Tobold Rollo write: “allow systems of political authority and accountability to take root in Indigenous

communities that will correct the democratically effective and dysfunctional Indian Act system”, is governance that considers Indigenous people as an obstruction and threat to the economic interests of mainstream Canadian society. (“Resetting and Restoring the Relationship Between Indigenous Peoples and Canada”, <http://taiaiake.posterous.com>). It is imperative to emphasize the history of the Government of Canada’s unjust social policies conceived as unilateral legislation created to seize resource-rich land and annihilate Indigenous culture through assimilation, in order to stress how these policies remain, in intent, unchanged since the eighteenth century, and how government interference impacts on Indigenous life on all levels, including intrusion on the public and private lives of the individual.

Belittled by invasive questioning by the social worker, Maria was given a voucher for food, a bus ticket, and a warning to find a cheap apartment, as “government money was not to be wasted”, and left the ordeal “feeling more humiliated and dirty and ashamed than I ever felt in my life.” (*Halfbreed*, 133) Maria remembers her Cheechum telling her that, “when the government gives you something, they take all that you have in return – your pride, your dignity, all the things that make you a living soul. When they are sure they have everything, they give you a blanket to cover your shame.” (137) In the second instance, Maria was “horrified” by Marion’s suggestion that the Calgary Stampede always needed Indians, so they could “fix up outfits for ourselves, and go to pow wows, and put on for white people and get paid. [...] White people said it was a cultural thing, so no one thought it was bad.” (133-34) As in Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulation where there is no reference, no original basis, Maria likened performing as a culturally unspecific Indian “wearing gaudy feathers and costumes and dancing for a place in society” to performing as a poor “squaw” for government welfare money, and rejected both.

Maria's attempts to suppress the "rage and hatred" at her estrangement from home, culture and kinship ties through the use of drugs and alcohol ultimately culminated in a break-down and incarceration at a psychiatric hospital. The condition of her release from the hospital was reliant on her attending AA meetings, but she had previously failed to find mutuality at the meetings that Marion had suggested: "It was bad enough that I had a drinking problem and was managing to stay off drugs – all I needed to add to my troubles was a room full of drunks." (*Halfbreed*, 135) It was Edith, the "part Indian" wife of her sponsor Don , who helped Maria to find understanding of the shared painful history of Indigenous people, and to lose the contempt she felt for the fearful, the drunks, and the 'Indians in suits'. Attending meetings at the Native Friendship Centre, and finding an AA group she liked, where she "understood these people, and they understood me", Maria met politically active members of Alberta's Native movement, including Eugene Steinhauer, a Saddle Lake First Nations, who would serve as President of the Indian Association of Alberta in the early 1980s. (143)

Maria respected Steinhauer for finding a "future as something more than just another drunken Indian", and for being the first Indian she had met who was able to verbalize what he thought of Euro-Canadian dominance directly to white people, while she had kept these thoughts "bottled up inside for so many years." (144) However, when she followed Steinhauer's example of vocalizing her frustrations over colonization and Euro-Canadian privilege and dominance, Campbell writes that:

...his attitude toward me changed. At the time I was hurt and discouraged because to me he was a special person, but it doesn't matter anymore. [...] I realize now that the system that fucked me up fucked up our men even worse. The missionaries had impressed upon us the feeling that women were a source of evil. This belief, combined with the ancient Indian recognition of the power of women, is still holding back the progress of our people today. (144)

As disappointing as Steinhauer's reaction to her was, Maria places culpability of Native men's misogyny at the feet of colonial patriarchal indoctrination of Indigenous people. The Native political groups she was involved in became splintered along gender lines; Maria felt discouraged from attending Alberta Native Federation meetings as "women were not encouraged to attend unless a secretary was needed." (155) Further, Maria's concerns for Indigenous people, particularly women, living on city streets, "did not fit in with their immediate plans" (155). Colonialism, racism and sexism are a destructive triumvirate that Emma LaRocque sees as being successfully resisted by "Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, male and female feminists" who operate under feminism's "ethical component [...] that feminist analysis interrogates, confronts and seeks to transform those realities that compromise women's well-being and human rights." (*Making Space*, 56-57) However, colonialist inspired gender division was not the only pressure on the resurgence of Indigenous political activity; the discord between Métis/First Nations representations caused a schism. Eugene Steinhauer, Jack Bellerose, and Jim Ducharme drafted a proposal that would unite Native reserves and Métis communities in confronting the government with one voice. Campbell writes: "The proposal for a federation was rejected by the Treaty Indians. They felt that the militant stand that would be taken by such an organization would jeopardize their Treaty rights. 'The Halfbreeds,' they said, 'have nothing to lose, so they can afford to be militant.'" (*Halfbreed*, 155) Without a legally sanctioned land base, Métis individuals and communities were viewed as wild cards that could encumber Native negotiations with the government. Maria's friendship and political involvement with the Métis Stan Daniels, who served as President of the Métis Association of Alberta in 1967-1971, 1972-1975, and 1977-1979 also disappointed. Daniels, like Maria, was concerned with the lives of Native women living in the urban



streets, but she saw his political authority ineffectually realized. This is only opaquely sketched in *Halfbreed*, but speculating on what Campbell does write: “I don’t blame him. I only hate the system that does this to people” (145), it could be surmised that disappointment rests in a loss of connection with the concerns of those outside of Government funded organizations that such a position fosters. Maria describes the acceptance of government money as a destructive repeat of Cheechum’s warning of individual concerns triumphing over a communal ethos in Riel’s uprising of 1885, and her father’s political involvement with Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris when government monetary interference caused argument and division: “As government money became available, as well as public recognition, the seemingly inevitable changes which come to leaders happened.” (145) Maria speaks from first hand knowledge about ‘wearing the blanket’ when government money is accepted after her work with Marie Smallface, a militant Blood woman who introduced her to Indigenous political activism. Marie obtained jobs for them both as researchers for Premier Manning’s *White Paper* on the poverty-stricken districts of Alberta, both Indigenous and white. Marie was fired for confrontations with a co-worker, a Euro-Canadian political science student, and Maria had to make a choice between loyalty to her friend, or saving “face for all of us in the community and do a good job on the other.” When Marie was replaced, Maria decided to stay:

I will be very honest about my motive, as I’ve seen the same thing destroy so many good people in the last few years. I had never in my life felt so important, and I liked the feeling; in fact it was like I had just drunk a half bottle of whiskey. It took me two years to finish that bottle, and I was on the biggest ego and power trip any human being could be on. (153)

It could not have been anything less than intoxicating to be regarded as important after almost a century of Métis marginalization and lack of voice or involvement, at any level, with Canadian political policies.

## Returning to the Métis Sovereignty of Home Through Story: Continuance

So sometimes – well, nearly all the time – we have to speak with a strong voice, so the circle will stay strong. Because if we don't do that, then the link to our past and our ancestors is going to break. That almost happened to us. Colonization almost did that to us.

Maria Campbell (“Beth Cuthand”, *The Other Woman*, 170)

In the end I like to rely on stories.

Paul L. A. H. Chartrand (*Niw\_Hk\_M\_Kanak*, 11)

Maria's reconnection with her home and family in Saskatchewan comes after an extensive absence and was a poignant, alarming and, ultimately, politically motivating experience. Maria observed the desolation and dilapidation of the near unrecognizable settlement of Spring River, along with the despair in the town of St. Michel on a Saturday night of drunken misery for local Native people: “it seemed as if the pages had been turned back [only] now it was worse, like a nightmare too horrible to forget.” (*Halfbreed*, 148) Maria witnessed abandoned babies, men beating women, and amongst her friends and family a disturbing scene: “The gentle mothers of my childhood were drunkards now, and neglect was evident everywhere, most of all on the faces of the children.” (148) Nonetheless, visiting Cheechum “was like old times.” (149) Smoking meat was hanging over a burning fire in the yard of the log house where Cheechum now lived with her nephew, and inside the house were the remembered smells of “herbs and roots and wood-smoke, and the rabbit soup simmering on the stove, all made me feel like I had come home again.” (149) Cheechum listened to Maria's unburdening of her painful experiences since leaving her family and advised as she had always done as an elder and great-grandmother – the foundation of Métis family structures: “It is over now. Don't let it hurt you.” (149)

It is important to keep in mind that Maria's reconnection with Cheechum takes place in the known homeland space; referencing "wood-smoke" and "rabbit soup" speaks of the connection with the land for survival, sustenance, comfort, and continuance. Campbell writes of the landscape being "full of stories" that tell of the Métis relationship with the land, its kinship ties, particularly referring to this in the context of the relationships formed during buffalo hunts, and the importance of "re-establishing that relationship. And to think about this as our homeland and not to think about a specific little place, but that this is our land and everything that is on this land is our relative." (*Bronfman*) In *Halfbreed*, Campbell writes for future generational continuance, and, as Janice Acoose argues, story is a returning by remembering to the ancestors and ancestral "'home' – the place that rooted them in nation, territory, family, and community." ("Honouring *Ni'Wahkomakanak*", 231)

When Cheechum died at the age of one hundred and four, Maria remembered her optimism and hope for the future of the Métis people: "My Cheechum never surrendered at Batoche: she only accepted what she considered a dishonourable truce." (*Halfbreed*, 156) At the conclusion of *Halfbreed* Campbell writes that she has found brothers and sisters "all over the country." (157) And so she continues to do forty years after the publication of *Halfbreed* in her solidarity with the "Idle No More" movement – galvanized by the passing of Bill C-45 – and her appearance in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013 honouring the four women founders: Nina Wilson, Sylvia McAdam, Jessica Gordon, and Sheelah McLean.

The dishonour of the Canadian government in pushing through Bill C-45 without consultation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, circumventing the Indian Act, and reneging on the negotiations between the Crown and Indigenous Nations that the wealth of the land was to be shared, in order to gain control of lucrative resources

that will devastate the environment, would be an act familiar to Louis Riel in his resistance to the Dominion of Canada's push West in the mid nineteenth century: "They came without notification. They came boldly. We said: Who are they? They said: We are the possessors of the country." (Court Transcripts, *Queen vs. Louis Riel*, 156)

## CHAPTER THREE

### Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*: Métis Heritage and Canada's Colonial Assimilation Policies

...much of Native writing, whether blunt or subtle, is protest literature in that it speaks to the processes of our colonization: dispossession, objectification, marginalization, and that constant struggle for cultural survival expressed in the movement for structural and psychological self-determination.

Emma LaRocque (*Writing the Circle*, xviii)

I had two older sisters and both of them committed suicide, one when I was fourteen and she was in her early twenties, and then the other sister when I was about thirty-one and she was forty-two – that was in October 1980 and I decided then to write a book.

Beatrice Culleton Mosionier (Makeda Silvera, *The Other Woman*, 311)

In her interview with Makeda Silvera, Culleton Mosionier remarked that when writing *In Search of April Raintree* (*April Raintree*) she did not want to record the experiences of her own family because she did not want to “intrude on the privacy of other people. So, of course, that’s why I wrote fiction.” (*Other Woman*, 311) She says the decision to write after the suicide of a second sister was prompted by her need to explore “what had affected our lives”, the source of their parents’ alcoholism, the effects of growing up in foster homes, and the question: “Why do we have so many problems?” (Lutz, 97-98) Culleton Mosionier attests that there are autobiographical similarities between her and her siblings’ experiences growing up in Canada as the marginalized ‘other’ and her fictionalized characters. However, the novel (which I shall refer to *April Raintree* as, in this chapter, since Culleton Mosionier preferred this term to that of fictitious literature) is an imagined construct of experiences that have been and are familiar to a great many Métis people. Laura Beard points out that autobiographical critical theorists “have struggled for decades to define what autobiography is and what it is not” (*Acts of Narrative Resistance*, 1). Jacques Derrida

hypothesized that the Western “law of genre” is destabilized by the impossibility of sustaining the limits it prescribes:

Genres are not to be mixed could strike you as a sharp order. You might have heard it resound the elliptical but all the more authoritarian summons to a law of ‘do’ or ‘do not’ which, as everyone know, occupies the concept or constitutes the value of *genre*. As soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. [...] Thus, as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity. (Derrida, *The Law of Genre*, 203-204)

Defining and identifying the blurring of boundaries that separate the genres of the novel, autobiography, life writing, memoir, history, and the nonfiction novel is complex and problematic. Jo-Ann Thom writes that Culleton Mosionier employs a literary strategy of working “in the medium of fiction to create narratives that do not claim to tell a true story but that nevertheless reveal ‘truths.’” (“The Effect of Readers’ Responses”, 295) However, in the analysis of *April Raintree*, it is perhaps more constructive to think of the text as an interweaving of these genres that creates a space that exists between these forms. In *April Raintree*, the social and cultural impact of Canadian historical and contemporaneous colonization of Native people and territories is told through the experiences of two Métis sisters who signify a relational individual subjectivity that renders the personal political in a form that Barbara Harlow would identify as ‘resistance literature’. Harlow defines this literature as one that “sees itself [...] as immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production.” (*Resistance Literature*, 28) Culleton Mosionier challenges centuries of misrepresentation of Native lives and histories by employing a form that unites historical narratives and individual experiences that inform and contribute to the expansion of Métis (both rural and urban) community knowledge. Sean Kicummah Teuton argues that “tribal members must hold a view of knowledge and experience that overcomes the Western

tendency to demand a verifiable reality in mutually exclusive categories, such as either authentic or inauthentic, either oral or written, either dream or reality” (*Red Land*, 24), and that “Indigenous peoples can conduct their own counter-appropriation of the means of cultural production” (237, n. 22). Teuton, in what he calls “tribal realism”, explores an “alternative theoretical position drawn from Indigenous oral philosophy” that questions “theoretical assumptions in the field often growing out of poststructuralism, which [he] characterize[s] as a rejection of our human capacity to make normative claims to knowledge.” (xvi) Teuton stresses that the shift in Indigenous scholarship from essentialist definitions of Native identity to a critical conversation that focuses on the “real lives of Indian people” empowers these scholars to “make evaluative claims to normative knowledge, which in turn, better support the philosophical and actual recovery of Indian lands, histories and identities.”<sup>14</sup> (15)

Beatrice Culleton Mosionier’s *April Raintree*, published in 1983, depicts the destructive consequences of colonization on two Métis sisters. Notwithstanding the affect that her reading of Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* had on her personally, and how its publication and success inspired her to attempt to publish her own novel, Culleton Mosionier was unsure of her chances in the Canadian mainstream publishing industry. Primarily, she feared that “it was about Métis people and the market wouldn’t be very wide.” (Silvera, *The Other Woman*, 319) This was a legitimate concern, since before 1980 and the founding of Theytus Books publishing house in British Columbia there were no Native owned publishing companies and there was a discursive vacuum in mainstream publishing concerning Native authored texts. Canada’s major publishers were not, generally, interested in Native voices, and in particular had scant interest in Indigenous women’s voices – specifically after the first wave of Native writers around

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<sup>14</sup> Teuton emphasizes the significance of history as an “epistemological challenge”, and states that he is “committed to historicism as a methodological approach dedicated to refining our ideas in the world, as they refer to a social context to ground the crucial political contentions of our times.” (p. 15)

the mid to late seventies, of which Campbell was a part. In that context the publication of *Halfbreed* would have been seen as an anomaly. Having published *Halfbreed* in 1973, McClelland & Stewart's deliberations on the merits of publishing Basil H. Johnston's *Ojibway Heritage* two years later were met with resistance by several of their readers and editors.<sup>15</sup> Johnston, (Anishinaubae) and a member of the Chippewa of Nawash First Nation Band, has written extensively on Anishinaubae languages and traditional storytelling in order to facilitate a reconnection, continuance, protection, and renewal of evolving cultural practices through Native texts that Lisa Brooks says contain "incredible insights into what it means to be a human being."<sup>16</sup> ("Digging", 259) One of Johnston's editors, identified only as "Jocelyn" in the McClelland & Stewart archives, doubted the book's commercial viability, and was reticent owing to what she calls "a small moral judgement on my part." Her "moral" objection is that she "somehow dislike[s] the thought of people buying books like this and lauding a culture that their ancestors were quite happy to destroy, and who themselves would be most reluctant to restore to the Indians what is 'rightfully' theirs." ('Jocelyn' memo, *Historical Perspectives*) This would be a startling display of ignorance regarding Canada's history of colonization by this editor, but as explored in Chapter One of this thesis, Canadian history has been, and predominately continues to be, disseminated through colonialist systems of power. Jocelyn's racist and colonialist hostility toward what she judged as an unjustified "lauding" of Native people who, she implied, wilfully destroyed their culture through stereotypical inherent flaws of character and temperament, is a viewpoint that persists

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<sup>15</sup> In 1990, Johnston published an essay concerning the Government of Canada's responsibilities, in light of broken treaties and residential schools systemic brutalities to eradicate Native languages by humiliations "that shamed [children] into silence". Johnston said that the federal government "must finance the establishment of either provincial or regional language institutes" in order to "add to the nation's intellectual and literary heritage." (*Native Writers*, 15)

<sup>16</sup> I am employing Johnston's spelling here; Anishinaabe is the spelling most commonly used.



in various segments of contemporary Canada's mainstream population and in Harper's political governance. Pamela D. Palmater, in her report on the continuing chronic poverty in First Nations as a result of Euro-Canada's colonization and "aggressive assimilation policies" as well as the failure to amend the Indian Act to reflect the support for First Nations self-governance, writes that:

Canada's ability to defer, deflect, and deny the problem is bolstered by the blame the victim mentality of many right-wing commentators and media outlets. [...] Canada has used the impoverished condition of First Nations in the last 250 years as a justification for both the assumption of jurisdiction over them and its paternalistic management of Indian affairs. (*Stretched Beyond Human Limits*, 123)

Palmater emphasizes that an understanding of the "historical context and root causes of the current crisis of poverty in First Nations is absolutely essential to developing policy solutions that can turn this trend around." (122) Without an equalizing discourse that includes Native voices in the historiographic, political, social, and cultural spheres, there can never be a comprehensive and informed position from which to alleviate the present impoverishment of Native people which is the result of past and current Canadian colonialist federal laws and policies. Mainstream publishing developments are not, primarily, a passive reflection of social and cultural customs, conventions, thought, and perceptions, but function as an influential determinate.

Jack McClelland decided to publish Johnston's manuscript because of its merit as "authentic"; that is to say, it was written by a Native author in a crowded field where Native stories appropriated by non-Native authors prevailed and where there "still is a relatively limited amount of authentic Indian material."<sup>17</sup> (McClelland,

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<sup>17</sup> Authenticity of "Indianness" is an intricate matter that Deborah L. Madsen rightly says "cannot be ignored by anyone involved in the field. Writers, readers, scholars, communities, everyone concerned with the achievement of social justice and the right to self-determination for Native people must make this question of 'Indianness' in all its complex historical determination a question to which they devote significant attention." (*Native Authenticity*, 16) However, Sean Kicummah Teuton points out that

*Historical Perspectives*, memo) McClelland was also prompted to publish Johnston's manuscript by the guaranteed profit that would result from the support of the federal government's Department of Indian Affairs who contracted to buy "up to \$5,000 worth of *Ojibway Heritage* (931 copies in total)." (Edwards, "Deemed Authentic") Of course, in publishing houses, as in any commercial enterprise, the pressures of the market dominate evaluations of viability and often supersede epistemological judgment. However, McClelland & Stewart's decision to exploit Northwest Coast and Great Plains Indigenous motifs for the covers of their "Indian File Series", which was published as a collection of poetry from a non-Native Canadian poet once a year from 1948-1958, signals and reinforces a Canadian mainstream proclivity to mine Native cultural practices and prosper through the appropriation of what was considered a dead culture. An article in *Quill and Quire* in 1949 regarding the graphic artist Paul Arthur who designed the "Indian File Series" covers, asserted that the motifs were calculated to provide "a distinctive Canadian identity."<sup>18</sup> (Quoted in Antoncic, "To Dress Our Letters") Distortion and misrepresentation of Indigenous people's histories and cultures – while appropriating selected expressions of these cultures – in order to support the construction of a Euro-Canadian identity, are then justified by the utilization of the colonialist trope of the vanishing Indian and a professedly obsolete Native ethos. Debra Antoncic writes that the practice of mainstream Canada's appropriation of Native culture gained momentum through the promotion of cultural "borrowing" by the anthropologist and ethnographer Marius Barbeau, who "believed

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researchers "on postcolonial identity remain so concerned with the 'authenticity' of today's Indians that many Native people view identity as another colonial restriction rather than as a means of preserving culture and knowing the world." (*Red Land*, 242) In a historical and contemporaneous dominance, Native identity in Canada and the United States has been dependant on the demands of colonialist authority through the systems of anthropology, political science, treaty agreements and legal definitions "in order to acknowledge Indianness." (Lawrence, "*Real*" *Indians*, 89)

<sup>18</sup> *Quill and Quire* is a Canadian magazine on the Canadian book trade that has been publishing since 1935.

that [non-Native] artists could provide an important contribution by imagining and reproducing designs and motifs from the ‘soon to be extinct’ races whose artistic and cultural heritage had been compromised by contact with settler culture.” (“To Dress”) Barbeau was working on the hypothesis that it was imperative to preserve Native cultural representations for both future generations and historiographies of a Canadian identity, maintaining that the “popular notion about the vanishing American races is not very far wrong and the *Last of the Mohicans* of James Fennimore Cooper, as it were, closes the picturesque chapter that cannot be reopened.” (*Our Indians*, 695)

Committed to cultural resistance and resisting the pressures and influence of mainstream publishing, Pemmican Publications, established in 1980<sup>19</sup> by the Manitoba Metis Federation, was the first publisher in Canada to be under First Nation ownership and control (Greg Young-Ing, *Looking at the Words*, 186), and helped to initiate a Native canon by activating a continuing, albeit gradual, increase in the number of Native publishers.<sup>20</sup> They remain, along with Theytus Books, the only specifically Native publishing house in Canada. Like Campbell’s *Halfbreed*, *April Raintree* ultimately became a best-seller, and both writers’ works give voice to the Métis despair of colonization, whilst encouraging contemporary and future generations of Métis that they are not alone in their historical, and contemporaneous experiences of marginalization as Métis in the Euro-Canadian dominant society. However, the belief that Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Culleton Mosionier’s *April Raintree* are near-ubiquitously present on the syllabus of Canadian schools – including the archives of McClelland & Stewart who claim that *Halfbreed* is “widely taught in Canadian schools and Universities” (Edwards, “Deemed Authentic”) –

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<sup>19</sup> Culleton Mosionier became manager of Pemmican in 1983.

<sup>20</sup> The publication of Native and Métis authors from independent, indigenously owned ventures, eventually, over many, many years, influenced mainstream publishers (with fluctuating success) to increase their list of Native and Métis authored texts.

believes Deanna Reder's experiences when teaching university undergraduates. Reder remarks that she can "never take for granted that students have ever read a text by a Native author or have even a simple understanding of 'status Indian' or the Indian Act of Canada." ("Strategic Potential", 34) Whether teaching second year or fourth year university undergraduates, Reder states that she has to "go over the 'basics'" in order to "speak to their woeful preparation." (34) This, she points out, is not due to the students' ineptness but to the lack of even the most rudimentary exposure in their early education to Euro-Canadian historical relations with Native peoples or to Native literature. Introducing a fourth year class of undergraduates to Gregory Scofield's *Thunder Through My Veins*, Reder says that when she cited Campbell's *Halfbreed* as the model on which Scofield's text is based, she "discovered that few students knew who Campbell is, and even fewer had even a cursory understanding of Métis history." (34) For Native texts such as Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Culleton Mosionier's *April Raintree* to be truly a part of the Canadian literary canon, there will have to be a federal and provincial will and a resolution to pedagogical inclusion of Native authored texts on Canadian history. For example, the addition of the Métis historian and scholar Olive Patricia Dickason's *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Nations from Earliest Times* to the school syllabus would facilitate an effective disruption to George F. Stanley's colonialist perspective – amongst other Euro-centric versions of Canada's history – currently embedded in and exerting significant influence on the majority of Canadian educational institutions.

In 1983, the year of the publication of *April Raintree*, Emma LaRocque identified Stanley's *The Birth of Western Canada*, and *Louis Riel* (examined in Chapter One of this thesis) as an erroneous telling of a supposed "dichotomy between savagery and civilization." ("The Métis in English Canadian Literature", 87) Writing

in 2010, LaRocque asserted that Native writers and artists “have been retelling the Canadian story because it is their stories that have been erased, falsified, slandered, or stolen.” (*Other is Me*, 162) LaRocque maintains, “some standard Canadian history books would qualify as hate literature, even under the most stringent court requirements. But who will go to court against this hate literature?” (*Writing the Circle*, xxiv) LaRocque also points out that “[t]he onus to deconstruct and to rebuild cannot fall solely on the colonized. The responsibility to clean up colonial debris, whether in popular culture, historiography or in matters literary, lies first with the colonizer. Colonizer sons and daughters need, even more than us, to dismantle their colonial constructs.” (*Other is Me*, 162) This approach addresses the Sisyphean task of countering the voluminous amounts of influential, dehumanizing and racist literatures that have been published over the five centuries of colonization and that are perpetuated through the Canadian educational system. LaRocque concludes – since these publications are unlikely ever to be eradicated from the Canadian academic syllabus – that it is essential that both Natives and non-Natives, teachers and students, be trained to think critically:

Teachers, beginning in grade school, must learn and teach the young how to evaluate information, and school systems must provide anti-racist textbooks and online material. Students and the Canadian public in general should not have to go to universities before learning the art and skills of critical thinking. It is troubling though that even those who have higher education are not necessarily aware of racism in texts. It appears not all academics are prepared to engage in decolonized criticism, either in historiography, literature, or in other fields of research. (*Other is Me*, 72)

In *April Raintree*, Culleton Mosionier explores the way in which complexities inherent in historical and constitutional frameworks of Métis identity, particularly in an urban setting, are exacerbated by a colonial discourse of Native stereotypes

promoted textually in academic materials that form Euro-Canadian, Euro-centric, racist and assimilatory ideologies.<sup>21</sup>

Culleton Mosionier begins her novel with an oblique description of the mixed blood identity of Henry, the father of her narrator April, as “a little of this, a little of that and a whole lot of Indian.” (*April Raintree*, 9) Rendering a more precise representation of April’s mother, Alice, as “part Irish and part Ojibwa”, April’s younger sister Cheryl is described as having their father’s physical characteristics of dark hair and eyes: “[t]here was no doubt they were both of Indian ancestry”, while April has “pale skin” like her mother. (10) April states that while they lived together as a family at Norway House, a small town in northern Manitoba, the variance within the family of physical characteristics did not make “any difference. [...] Then we moved to Winnipeg.”<sup>22</sup> (10) Here, the author strongly signals the devastating split to come between April and her sister Cheryl when they are separated from each other and their parents after moving to a denser urban setting. April and Cheryl, like their parents, are displaced ever further from ancestral lands, culture, community and kinship relations that has its beginnings in the first Indian Act of 1876. This Act was legislated to reduce further the number of legally defined band members by the two statutes passed in 1850: *An Act for the better protection of Lands and Property of the Indians in Lower Canada*, (S. Prov. C 1850, c 41-42) and *An Act for the protection of the Indians in Upper Canada from imposition and the Property occupied or enjoyed by them from trespass and injury*, (S. Prov. C 1850, c 75). These Acts left it to band members to determine who belonged in their communities, which in some cases

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<sup>21</sup> As examined in Chapter One, it was not until 1982, the year after *April Raintree* was published, that the *Constitution Act*, Schedule B, included the Métis as part of the recognized aboriginal peoples of Canada.

<sup>22</sup> At the novel’s opening, set in the 1950s, Norway House was a small northern Manitoban town where Métis made up almost a quarter of the approximately 1,700 people residing on the edges of the Northern Cree Nation reservation.

included non-Native adoptees. The first Indian Act of 1876 introduced the definition of Indianness as one-quarter blood quantum or degree of descent and excluded non-status/non-treaty Native people who the Métis were, and continue to be, in the same legal classification in spite of being recognized constitutionally as Aboriginal people.<sup>23</sup> The divisive tactics employed in the Indian Act in order to realize its assimilation policies, and grant Canada's federal government the comprehensive authority to legislate for Native people and their lands and the legal right to define Native identity, have left a legacy of disruption and discord among disparate Native families and communities and a lack of knowledge in mainstream society.<sup>24</sup>

Generally, non-Native Canadians are inadequately cognisant of Native lives and histories because of the deficiencies in the education system, and the excessive focus of the media on "Native dysfunction and marginality" (Lawrence, "*Real*" Indians, 135). Further, mythologizing 'dead Indians' and their histories creates an illusory expectation of what constitutes a Native identity. Within the Raintree family, the difference between April and Cheryl's skin tones – where Cheryl 'looks' Native and April does not – generates a rupture whereby one sister's physiognomy conforms to the image of Canadian expectations of authentic Indianness and one's does not. This is particularly complex and problematic for Native people living in urban

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<sup>23</sup> Olive Patricia Dickason points out that "responsibility for status Indians was (and is) solely that of the federal authority, whereas the Métis, even though now constitutionally recognized as an Aboriginal people, are classed as ordinary citizens and so come under provincial jurisdiction in matters of property and civil rights. Non-status Indians are in the same legal category as the Métis." (*Canada's First*, 294)

<sup>24</sup> Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913-1932, notoriously stated, "Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department" (National Archives of Canada, Record Group 10, Vol. 6810, file 470-2-3, Vol. 7, pp. 55 (L-3) and 63 (N-3), (quoted in Palmater's *Beyond Blood*, 28). Scott also commented, when responding to the report of a West Coast Indian Agent who was alarmed by the vast numbers of deaths in West Coast residential schools: "It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in these schools, and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this alone does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is geared towards the final solution of our Indian Problem." (Department of Indian Affairs Superintendent D. C. Scott to B. C. Indian Agent – General Major D. McKay, DIA Archives, RG 10 series). (Quoted in *The Aboriginal Healing Foundation*, "The Healing Has Begun", 4)

surroundings. Native people, in mainstream Canadian mythologizing, are presumed to reside in the woods, on the plains, or in the worst racist stereotypical imaginings, lazily receiving government handouts on their reservations. As urban dwellers, Native people lose their authenticity as ‘true’ or ‘pure’ Natives in the colonial imagination. Over the course of *April Raintree*, April and Cheryl, as urban Métis, struggle to negotiate a Métis identity that Culleton Mosionier herself found difficult: “growing up in urban Canada today [...] there is a lot of pressure on you to assimilate and forget totally what you are as a person, what your heritage is” (Lutz, 97).

The move of April’s family to Winnipeg in order for her father to have his tuberculosis treated precipitates her parents’ subsistence on welfare and their alcohol addiction. April’s internalization of negative Native stereotypes begins with her father’s internalization of the same. His attempts to drown the shame he feels over his dependency on government assistance to support his family by an exponential consumption of alcohol, further serves to persuade him of his inferiority by an identification with the colonial construct of a drunken Indian. April observes that “[s]ometimes he would put himself down and sometimes he counted the days till he could walk down to the place where they gave out cheques and food stamps.” (*April Raintree*, 10) When the welfare cheques are cashed, the parties begin at which April’s parents, “aunties and uncles [and] strange men” drank what the children were told was “medicine” (10). ‘Medicine’ is meant here as both a factual and metaphorical noun and spans the continuance of an Indigenous use of healing medicines, both physiologically and spiritually, to modern, mainstream medical pharmaceuticals that she synthesizes into a subversive critique of the destabilizing effects on Native communities and rituals that resulted from the introduction of alcohol via colonial occupation of Indigenous lands. Alcohol, here, is the oxymoronic medicine that



contributes to, and furthers, the destruction of familial ties and results in further loss, in April's family's case, of their Métis identity.

April remembers that her mother did not always drink the 'medicine', and when she is sober, she is able to keep a clean and ordered house, telling her friends that her successful housekeeping "was because she was raised in a residential school and then worked as a housekeeper for the priest in her home town."<sup>25</sup> (11) The impact of the Canadian government funded, Church run residential school system – referred to in Chapter Two of this thesis in reference to Maria Campbell's experience and the findings of *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) – continues to resonate in contemporary Indigenous families.<sup>26</sup> The generations of Métis and First Nations children's experiences of residential schools, where many suffered the brutalities of sexual abuse, loss of family, suppression of language, and estrangement from their communities of elders and healers, for the ideology of Indigenous assimilation, has had devastating consequences for these children. Culleton Mosionier's novel alludes to the effects of the trauma of residential school, and for April's mother, Alice, this results in alcohol abuse, the death of her youngest daughter Anna from probable foetal alcohol syndrome, the loss of April and Cheryl to social services, and her eventual suicide (of which neither the reader nor April discover until the end of the novel).

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<sup>25</sup> The residential school at Norway House opened in 1900 and did not close its doors until 1974.

<sup>26</sup> The TRC, whose interim report was published in February, 2012, met with, and recorded, direct testimonies of former residential school students in every province and territory of Canada. The Commission reported that survivors: "no longer felt connected to their parents or their families. In some cases, they said they felt ashamed of themselves, their parents, and their culture." (TRC, 6) One such student, Marius Tungilik, said, "you begin to think and see your own people in a different light. You see them eating with their hands. You think, 'Okay, primitive.'" (79) Although, ostensibly, the children were taken from their homes to receive an education, many former students reported that most of their time was spent labouring to support the school. Released into mainstream society with few educational skills, most were only equipped to work at menial jobs, as with April's mother who kept house for the local priest. The Commission reports that some former students "compared themselves as lost souls, unable to go forward, unable to go back. Many people lost years of their lives to alcohol, to drugs, or to the streets as they sought a way to dull the pain of not belonging anywhere." (6)

It is not until April is an adult and has consciously forgotten about her youngest sister that she learns that Anna had died in infancy. In the narration of her childhood memories, April remembers coming home one day to find cars parked in front of her house to take her and Cheryl away. This description tragically echoes Maria Campbell's memory of the day "the big black cars came" and her siblings "were all loaded up and in fifteen minutes we never saw them again for twelve years." (*Bronfman Conference*) Legislated, restrictive interference in all aspects of Native life intensified with the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857, the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869, and finally the Indian Act of 1876 which states: "Our Indian legislation generally rests on the principle that the aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the State." (*RCAP*, 3:26) Legislated infantilization of Native lives and the resultant restriction to sovereign agency did not change with the 1951 amendments to the Indian Act, which remained paternalistic. Most crucially, the amendments transferred responsibilities from the federal government to provincial welfare organizations, and their mandate was expanded to include authority over children's welfare on First Nations reservations. In spite of Métis land loss through the extinguishment of title in the Manitoba Act of 1871 and the exclusion of 'half-breeds' from land claims for being 'non-treaty', legislated in the Indian Act, Canada's governing bodies perceived half-breeds, for legal and social expediency, as near-enough-Indians, and argued that their assimilation was also desirable, and therefore subject to similar paternalistic government policies applied to treaty First Nations people. The Residential schools were established to assimilate and civilize Native people into Canadian mainstream society and segued into the disastrous "sixties scoop" (Johnston, 23), whereby provincial governments' welfare authorities, with financial support from the federal government, were given the

powers to remove children without parental rights of appeal.<sup>27</sup> “By 1970 between 30 and 40 percent of the children in care were of Aboriginal status, even though Aboriginal people counted for only 4 percent of the population. Under this system, children not only were taken out of their families and home communities, but, to a significant extent, they were shipped out of the country.” (TRC, *They Came for the Children*, 79) A cycle of abuse experienced by the preceding generation at residential schools was established when many children damaged by the “sixties scoop” in turn, “grew up ashamed and confused about their heritage” (TRC, 80). Abuse in foster and adoptive homes led many to turn “to drugs, alcohol, crime and suicide. In Manitoba, Edwin Kimmelman, the judge heading a provincial inquiry into Aboriginal child welfare, termed it ‘cultural genocide.’”<sup>28</sup> (TRC, 80) *April Raintree* reflects this history.

When Anna dies, welfare services are called and April and Cheryl are removed from their home and taken into care. The siblings’ early years of living with parents who had suffered traumas at residential school are archetypical of survivors of the system that has left a legacy of familial dysfunction, along with a prohibitive

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<sup>27</sup> The term “sixties scoop” was coined by Patrick Johnston in his seminal report *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*, 1983. Examining data from the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Johnston found that the number of Native children in Canada’s welfare system was considerably higher than non-Native children: “In 1955, there were 3,433 children in the care of B.C.’s child welfare branch. Of that number it was estimated that 29 children, or less than 1 percent of the total, were of Indian ancestry. By 1964, however, 1,446 children in care in B.C. were of Indian extraction. The number represented 34.2 percent of all children in care. Within ten years, in other words, the representation of Native children in B.C.’s child welfare system had jumped from almost nil to a third. It was a pattern being repeated in other parts of Canada as well.” (*Native*, 23)

<sup>28</sup> It is important to point out, as the TRC does in its conclusions on the damages that the residential schools inflicted, that survivors of these institutions were the individuals who set in motion “the work of truth telling, healing and reconciliation” over twenty years ago, and “continue to do the heavy labour of sharing their stories, and by so doing, educating their children, their communities, and their country.” (TRC, *TCFC*, 86) These are not stories of passive victimhood, these are stories of how the Canadian government’s policies of assimilation affected Native individuals and communities and are a call to both Native and non-Native Canadians, actively and jointly, to seek out and face these truths. Further, various Aboriginal communities across the country have set up healing centres, including the Healing of the Seven Generations project in Waterloo/Kitchener, Ontario, whose manifesto includes their goal to engage Aboriginal people “in a safe and nurturing, culture-based group healing process that can recognize, address, and begin to resolve the healing issues that come from sexual and physical abuse from residential schools and/or the intergenerational impacts of such abuse.” (Lafrenière, et al, *Resistance*, 123)

vulnerability to “joblessness, [...] sexual abuse, prostitution, homelessness, high rates of imprisonment, and early death.” (TRC, *TCFC*, 78) These pressures, added to the severe effects of poverty and social marginalization, prompted the government to a systematic removal of Native children, instead of preventative measures to assist struggling families. It was, as Bonita Lawrence points out, that “interventions of social agencies reflected colonial attitudes [...] devalued Aboriginal culture [and] overemphasized the importance of material wealth [...] and persistently used non-Aboriginal foster and adoptive placements.” (“*Real*”, 113) As with children who were forcibly taken to residential schools and who blamed their parents for not keeping them at home, April remembers thinking: “My mother should have fought with her life to keep us with her. Instead, she handed us over. It didn’t make any sense to me.” (*April Raintree*, 17) Taken by social workers to a Catholic run orphanage, April and Cheryl’s strict treatment by the nuns echoes that of generations of Natives before them at government and Christian institutions. April and Cheryl are separated from each other in the orphanage after a thorough search of their heads and bodies for lice and the shearing of their long hair, before their more permanent separation when placed with different foster families. April is sent to live with the French speaking Dion family in St. Albert which she describes as a “small French Catholic town south of Winnipeg. The Dion’s lived on the outskirts not far from the Red River.” (23) Culleton Mosionier is, perhaps, prompting the reader, especially one who is familiar with the historical specifics of the Riel Resistances, also known as the Red River Resistances or Rebellions, to note that at the time of the first Resistance of 1869-70, St. Albert was the “largest Métis settlement at that time in the West” (Dickason, *Canada’s First*, 272), before the surge of primarily French-Canadian settlers between then and the second Resistance of 1885. The opportunity for the willing reader, writes

Janice Acoose, lays in a responsive exploration of the text, which “may appear to be simply another box filled with old and archaic images of the wearisome brown blob of ‘Nativity,’ when it is unpacked and opened up, readers may, if they look outside the text and take responsibility for their own education, come to know something about Métis history and culture.” (“The Problem of Searching”, 235)

The structure of the narrative in *April Raintree* begins with indefinite allusions to the families’ Métis heritage which increasingly expands into more specific references that mirror April’s growing awareness and eventual acceptance of her Métis identity. April remembers how her father would “tell lots of stories [and] bring out his fiddle and play while everyone danced jigs.”<sup>29</sup> (*April Raintree*, 52) While remembrance of kinship cultural references appear notionally to connect April to her Métis background, they might also serve to determine distance, becoming, paradoxically, as Sharon Smulders writes “markers [of] estrangement from their origins, for they [...] are denied the opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage as well as their familial history.” (“What is the Proper”, 82) However, when the sisters are bereft by their parents’ absence at a scheduled visit at the Children’s Aid offices, April comforts Cheryl by telling her stories of their displaced family and community life:

That is, I told her the good things. I told her how Mom use to rock her to sleep and sing songs to us; how Dad always laughed and joke and played with us for hours, telling us lots of stories; how we would all go out to visit our aunts and

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<sup>29</sup> *The Red River Jig*, or the Michif title, *Oyache Mannin*, is commonly known as the unofficial Métis anthem that originated in the Red River Settlement, and is still played and danced at most Métis gatherings. Métis stories told through song in French, Michif, and Cree have their origins in the oral tradition and the songs changed as family and community experiences dictated. Todd Paquin, et al, consider that of all the songs from the 1885 Resistance “the most poignant” is *C’est au Champ de bataille*, (The Battlefield), also known as *De tous champs de bataille*, and *L’adieu de Riel* (Riel’s Farewell) composed to accompany the lyrics of Riel written while incarcerated prior to his execution. Song was a way of “maintaining [Métis] heritage and kinship and community bonds. [...] Women [...] helped pass Métis history on to their children through the songs they sang. Songs that reflected the migratory nature of the trapping, freighting, and boating lifestyle were called ‘songs of separation’. They poignantly describe the agonizing necessity of leaving loved ones behind while travelling for extended periods of time.” (Paquin, et al, *Virtual Museum of Métis History*, 11) The fiddle was brought to Canada by French and Scottish immigrants, and dancing jigs (an amalgamation of First Nations footwork, French, Scottish, and Irish dancing) to fiddle music and songs remains a distinctive Métis cultural and social tradition.

uncles or that they would come over to our house; how Dad would bring out his fiddle and play while everyone danced jigs. (*April Raintree*, 52)

April passes on to Cheryl, through storytelling, what remains of what is remembered of their parents' connection to a Métis identity through kinship ties and their family's communal life. April's tenuous hold on familial and communal storytelling briefly maintains a continuance of the sisters' Métis identity. Lawrence W. Gross writes of the role of storytelling in community and individual healing after what he calls the "apocalypse for Indians" that began with the first contact with Europeans. Gross asserts that a "culture cannot go through this type of trauma and not expect to suffer some type of impact; for example, it took Europe about 100 to 150 years to recover from the bubonic plague." ("Cultural Sovereignty", 130) Coining the term "post-apocalypse stress syndrome" that he compares to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but "raised to the level of an entire culture" (130), and that would become "intergenerational in nature" ("Humour and Healing", 70), Gross identifies the consequences of European colonization as:

...abandonment of productive employment; an increase in substance abuse; an increase in violence, especially domestic violence; an abandonment of established religious practices; the adoption of fanatical forms of religion; a loss of hope; and a sense of despair on the part of the survivors. [...] As with an individual suffering from PTSD, the challenge for a culture is to go through some type of recovery. That process principally entails rebuilding the cultural world." ("Cultural Sovereignty", 130)

Culleton Mosionier highlights the intergenerational trauma of the loss of identity through two "colonial tools aimed at dismantling traditional kinship systems [...] residential schools and the child welfare system" (Kim Anderson, *Life Stages*, 30), whilst demonstrating the possibilities of continuance. April, unconsciously, attempts to retrieve her Métis heritage and kinship ties and to create a counter narrative to the Euro-Canadian discourse on Indigenous identity, significantly, through historically traditional oral storytelling. However, April's decision to exclude the telling of the

intergenerational experiences of poverty, alcoholism, and illnesses which she remembers and her sister does not, is to have tragic consequences for Cheryl as an adult when her idealized vision of her parents as “pure” Indians is shattered by the reality of their alcohol dependency and impoverished existence.

April’s stay with the French-Canadian Dion family, who are warm and welcoming, introduces her to television, which she had never seen before, nice clothes, and other consumerist indicators of wealth that lead her to think that “now I was rich, too, just like those other white kids.” (*April Raintree*, 24) April equates her family’s poverty and reliance on welfare money with their Native otherness, however, if she is light skinned, how is it that she is not rich? Yearning to identify with those “other white kids” whom she longs to be necessitates a denial of her identity as Métis, (which at this point is not a term in her vocabulary), and a rejection of her blood relations. April’s relief at being asked to join her fellow students in games overrides her less than enthusiastic opinions of them as “bossy, even haughty”. She “was grateful for their acceptance”, revealing a subtext of unexpressed feelings of a reprieve from being discovered as less than they are, less than white. (25) To be accepted by her foster family April embraces the Dions Catholicism and language, learning to pray in French for her confirmation, while Cheryl, at their first meeting since their separation, conveys a discomfort at the strictness and restrictions applied when she attends Mass. But it is not until Cheryl begins school, discovers a book about Louis Riel, and becomes proficient at letter writing do the divergent methods employed by the sisters, in order to survive and negotiate colonialist social/power structures, become apparent.

## Identity and Colonial Textual Discourse

‘Are you a Canadian citizen?’, I sometimes think to answer, *yes, by coercion, yes, but no... there’s more*, but no space provided to write my historical interpretation here, that *yes but no*, really only means *yes* because there are no lines for the stories between *yes and no* and what of the future of my eight-year-old niece, whose mother is Metis but only half as Metis as her grandmother, what will she name herself and will there come a time and can it be measured or predicted when she will stop naming herself and crossing her own mind.

Marilyn Dumont (“It Crosses My Mind”, *A Really Good Brown Girl*, 59)

As Sharon Smulders points out, after the 1885 Resistance, and government scrip machinations forced on them, that by “the turn of the century, the Métis had lost their land, their status, and their pride.” (“What is the Proper Word”, 78) However, stating that “in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the word *Métis* had, like the people, all but disappeared” (79) is to regard the Métis from a purely Euro-centric anthropological position. Indeed, Smulders draws from the findings of the anthropologist Jean Lagasse’s 1959 study of *The People of Indian Ancestry in Manitoba* for statistics on the self-identifying terms used by mixed blood people of the period. These statistics, including that “Lagasse found that only three of 295 respondents applied the term [Métis] to themselves” and “nearly 42 percent of his respondents, when asked to state their nationality, called themselves Halfbreed; 23 percent, Indian; 18 percent, European; and 10 percent, Canadian” (“What”, 79), are not sufficiently examined by Smulders in a colonial historical context. Smulders does question the comprehensiveness of Lagasse’s survey, particularly as the latter did not include members of L’Union National Métisse St. Joseph who were a unified group with a strength in numbers sufficient to offset the dominant culture’s racial slurs against the ‘traitor Riel’s’ Métis people. But to understand why April and Cheryl Raintree have crippling confusion over their identities, it is crucial to ask: why would a majority of the mixed-blood people canvassed by Lagasse deny a Métis heritage and



use the terms Halfbreed, Indian, European, or Canadian instead? It was certainly safer for Métis people in the late 1950s, who had been suffering racial prejudice since the hanging of Louis Riel in 1885, when approached by a white anthropologist in search of social/economic solutions to the ‘Métis and Indian problem’, to answer in any way that might satisfy the questioner.<sup>30</sup> A Euro-Canadian official, in almost any capacity, had the authority as a member of the dominant culture to intrude in all aspects of Métis’ personal and communal lives. When April is insulted by being called ‘half-breed’ at her second, abusive, foster home, Smulders interprets this as Mosionier severing the term “from its historical association with those Red River residents whose paternal line was English or Scottish rather than French and modifies it pejoratively.” (“What”, 82) However, in the Euro-Canadian colonial imagination, lacking a historical context, a Native identity is not mitigated by the specificities of an English or Scottish, as opposed to a French, paternal heritage. Moreover, the term ‘half-breed’ employed to identify Métis, in its historical association, was an idiom used to exclude mixed-blood band members from the numbered treaties, whether they were of French, English or Scottish lineage. In addition, it was employed for the disenfranchisement to Indian status in the Indian Act, and through this slight of hand, the loss of Métis ancestral lands. From these origins, the term half-breed continues to be used pejoratively – although some Métis, for example Maria Campbell, have reclaimed the use of the word. Marilyn Dumont, in her prose poem “Leather and Naughahyde” relates her encounter with a “treaty guy” of bias, who asks “in the oblique way it does to find out someone’s status without actually asking”, and:

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<sup>30</sup> Lagasse, in an address to the Manitoba Historical Society in 1959, said: “The primary cause of unemployment for Indians and Métis is a cultural one. While it is true that there are few jobs available in their communities, other Canadians in a similar situation would migrate to an area with job opportunities. It is also true that Indians and Métis possess few saleable skills but a person fluent in the majority culture would develop work aptitudes on the job. Two of their main cultural handicaps are their unwillingness to relocate and their irregularity at work. [...] The Métis who is permanently employed is usually well on his way to successful integration.” (Lagasse, “The Métis in Canada”)

I say I'm Métis like it's an apology and he says, 'mmh,' like he forgives me, like he's got a big heart and mine's pumping diluted blood and his voice has sounded well-fed up till this point, but now it goes thin like he's across the room taking another look and when he returns he's got 'this look,' that says he's leather and I'm naughahyde. (*Really Good*, 58)

Further, European misrepresentation of Métis and Indian identities and varying degrees of discrimination dependent on the darkness or lightness of skin tone on a 'sliding scale', provoked many Métis to distance themselves from Indianness, if it was possible. April is intensely aware of the contempt that the dominant culture aims at both Indians and half-breeds and as a result censures personal connection with either identity in a bid for survival amongst racist hatred and discrimination.

April's precarious ease at Mr. and Mrs. Dion's, whom she had begun to call "Maman" and "Papa", is cut short when Mrs. Dion dies of cancer. At her second foster placement with the Euro-Canadian DeRosier family on their farm outside of Aubigny, also in the Red River basin, April is met with instant hostility. Mrs. DeRosier lists her chores and duties, with a threatening strap displayed on a nearby table, warning April that she must keep "yourself and your room clean. I know you half-breeds, you love to wallow in filth." April is insulted by the term half-breed, "I wasn't a half-breed, just a foster child, that's all. To me, half-breed was almost the same as Indian." (*April Raintree*, 39) April comprehends that as a foster child, who is part of a family who cannot, or will not take care of her, she is marked as a socially defective, deviant 'other'. However, it is the expression 'half-breed', which Mrs. DeRosier associates with 'filth', as does April, that April objects to, and is confused by, in its association with her identity as either 'half-breed' or 'Indian'; these are in her consideration near interchangeable.

When the sisters' social workers arrange a meeting, Cheryl gives April a book on Louis Riel, much to April's distaste: "I knew all about Riel. He was a rebel who had

been hanged for treason. Worse, he had been a crazy half-breed. I had learned of his folly in history.” (44) April has also “read about the Indians and the various methods of tortures they had put the missionaries through. No wonder they were known as savages.” (45) The textual propaganda of Métis ineffectiveness and Native savagery teaches April shame and motive to deny and hide her ancestry; she was “relieved [...] that no one in my class knew of my heritage when we were going through that period in Canadian history.” (45) When Cheryl tells her sister that Riel is “Métis like us”, she is emulating her foster-mother Mrs. McAdams, who is Métis and has advised Cheryl to have pride in her heritage in order to help her cope with the ostracism and bullying that she experiences at school. However, after an incident when Cheryl slaps a girl for taunting her, she is told by Mrs. McAdams that she would have to work to earn their respect, to which Cheryl quite rightly asks: “How come they don’t have to go around earning respect?” (45) The advice from Mrs. McAdams for Cheryl to take pride in her Métis heritage is undermined by the books she lends her “on Indian tribes and how they used to live a long time ago” – that is, in the past – which inspires in Cheryl a wish that she and April were “whole Indians.” (45) Having been through corresponding exposure to the Canadian school system which endorses the embedded prejudice of white Euro-Canadian superiority, and with sparse direct contact with Métis communities, Mrs. McAdams reinforces the sisters’ confusion over their Métis identity with her own. Euro-Canadian educational texts, without a counter narrative of Native authored histories, promote a subjugated position for Native people, since, as Edward Said writes, “one of the purposes of colonial education was to promote the history of France or Britain, that same education also demoted the native history.” (*Culture and Imperialism*, 269-70) Like LaRocque, who advocates rigorous teaching of decolonized criticism, especially for Euro-Canadian students and teachers, Taiaiake

Alfred sees education as “the best promise for positive change, because it creates awareness of the inconsistencies between the world as it is and as it should be.” (*Peace, Power*, 168) However, Alfred regards as pointless (and I would argue, so does LaRocque) the superficial papering over of the cracks of systemic racism by an inveigling change of terminology: “What good does it do indigenous people to be called ‘Aboriginal’ if the state continues to deny them legal recognition as the owners of their land? [...] The only value for the wordplay is for the white establishment, most of whom do not have to face the racism built into the structure of their supposedly enlightened country.” (*Peace, Power*, 107) The racism ingrained in the Canadian psyche after centuries of Eurocentric textual discourse that consents to a vocabulary that still employs the terms ‘savage’ and ‘wagon burners’ will not be revolutionized if there are not profound parallel changes in the foundational structures of Canadian law laid out in its historic relationship with Native people.

April is made aware that the ‘medicine’ her parents drank had been alcohol when the DeRosier children, Maggie and Rick, are told by Mrs. DeRosier that April’s parents “were too busy boozing it up to even come to visit”. Pretending to be drunk, Maggie and Rick reel and slur their speech, driving April from the house in her shock as “[t]hey had acted and sounded just like my parents and their friends.” (*April Raintree*, 48) Calling her parents liars for pretending illness as an excuse for taking ‘medicine’ that resulted in her residing with the odious DeRosier family, April’s anguish hardens into an internalized colonialist judgment against “them”: “what I’d read and what I’d heard indicated that Métis and Indians were inclined to be alcoholics. That’s because they were weak people. Oh, they were put down more than anyone else, but then, didn’t they deserve it?” (49) Like Maria in Campbell’s *Halfbreed*, April resolves to be rich in order to reject and disassociate herself from the

racist stereotype of 'half-breeds' as being dirty and poor. Put another way, the intolerable pressures of alienation from her parents and a dislocation of her Métis identity as a result of an internalization of colonialist stereotypical classifications of Indianness, inspire in April a determination to live as a "white" person in order to live with dignity amongst a dominant culture that repudiates her worth as a human being when identified as the Native other. Pitying Cheryl for the colour of her skin that would never allow her to 'pass' as white, April strategizes:

I could pass for a pure white person. I could say I was part French and part Irish. [...] Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. [...] And giving your children to white people to look after. It meant having to take all the crap white people gave. [...] When I got free of this place, when I got free from being a foster child, then I would live just like a real white person. (49)

April longs to qualify as a "pure white person" and be able to live like a "real white person" in order to eradicate the tainted Indianness she has come to believe, through exposure to verbal and textual 'evidence', is deserving of white contempt. However, she also comprehends a flaw in her plan to identify as white: "What about Cheryl?" (49), she asks herself. Her sister's dark skin and pride in her heritage (as confused as Cheryl's understanding is as a result of conflicting discursive sources) bewilders April. How can she square the circle of loving her sister whilst rejecting the negative stereotypes that Cheryl's physiognomy signals? April reasons that "she would never turn out to be like the rest of the Métis people. She and maybe Mrs. MacAdams were special people." (49) The mutual experiences and qualities of "intelligence and moral behaviour" that April shares with Cheryl "dwarf" the physical discrepancy of their appearance. (Delgado, *Critical Race Theory*, 8-9) Yet, the weight of racist "social hierarchies [...] remain firmly embedded in the white Canadian psyche and in social and economic institutions" (Razack, *Race, Space*, 133),

and create a fissure between loyalty to her sister and the demands of belonging to the dominant Euro-Canadian culture.

When Cheryl is given the choice to stay with her foster family or move in with April at the DeRosier's, since there is no room for April to live with her at the MacAdams' home, she chooses to be with April. April derives strength from Cheryl's presence: "From the day she arrived, I changed. I was more alert and openly defiant towards the DeRosiers, sending them silent warnings to leave my sister alone." (*April Raintree*, 55) Despite this affinity and familial protectiveness, Cheryl's combativeness in responding to the DeRosiers' insults soon exhausts April, "I grew tired of feeling I always had to be on guard. I preferred the passive state I'd been in before Cheryl had come." (57) Cheryl is given a fragile confidence by Mrs. MacAdams' efforts to expose her to textual material about, at best, 'dead' Indian culture. This is a tenuous hold on her sense of identity since it reinforces and emphasizes the entrenched hierarchy of racial superiority that places white Euro-Canadians at the apex, and mythologized Indians above the 'impure' Métis half-breed. For all that, April interprets her sister's defiance as a result of having no choice but to defend what she knows about who she is. Her dark skin, as opposed to April's light skin (which the latter hopes will give her the choice of passing as white, and therefore, more of a chance of dodging confrontation with racism in Euro-Canadian society) is not an option for Cheryl. Margery Fee writes that the "freedom to choose one's identity or move among a series of identifications is normally reserved for the majority, while members of minorities have identities – negative ones – forced on them with varying degrees of brutality." ("Deploying Identity", 212) Later, when Cheryl writes an essay on the injustices that led to the Riel Resistances, April wonders why these historical events mean so much to her: "Did it help her accept the colouring of her skin? Was

that why we thought so differently?” (*April Raintree*, 78) In her own struggle to survive within a racist country, April resists an engagement with, and a questioning of, mainstream accounts of Native and settler history. As a result, she is ill equipped to challenge the historical and contemporary injustices that her sister resists.

Now attending the same school as April, Cheryl confronts her history teacher over the representation of “Indians [who] scalped, tortured and massacred brave white explorers and missionaries.” (57) When her teacher takes exception to Cheryl’s angry response that this version of history was “all a bunch of lies” he replies that “They’re not lies; this is history. These things happened whether you like it or not”. To which Cheryl loudly retorts:

“If this is history, how come so many Indian tribes were wiped out? How come they don’t have their land anymore? How come their food supplies were wiped out? Lies! Lies! Lies! Your history books don’t say how the white people destroyed the Indian way of life. That’s all you white people can do is teach a bunch of lies to cover your own tracks!” (57)

Craig S. Womack calculates that “[o]f the thirty thousand or so books written about Native people only 10 percent are authored by Indians” (“Theorizing”, 382). Cheryl’s solitary opposition to the mass of historical discourse that is epitomized by her teacher and the principal, who gave her a strapping for her insubordination, is seen by April as braver act than she herself could achieve. And while proud of her sister, April rightly fears Mrs. DeRosier’s threats of punishment when she is informed of the incident. When Mrs. DeRosier punishes Cheryl by cutting her long hair, her “pride and glory”, to stubble, April is infuriated and finds the strength to protest her sister’s humiliation: “Why did you scalp my sister?” (*April Raintree*, 59) Mrs. DeRosier cuts April’s hair in retribution for her defiance, to which she submits under the threat of being separated from her sister. This sequence of events conflates the experiences of Native residential school children who were degraded by having their hair shorn on

arrival at these institutions, the strength of Métis solidarity during the Riel Resistances (mirrored by April's unanimity in defying Mrs. DeRosier), and finally, echoing, whilst subverting, albeit simultaneously, historical accusations of a 'savage' practice of scalping. Culleton Mosionier anchors and links this experience of April and Cheryl's with a revisionary account, from a Native point of view, of the dominant culture's colonialist version of historical events. As Cheryl writes later in her essay on Riel and the Red River Resistance, "if they show one side, they ought to show the other side equally." (84)

Mrs. DeRosier manages to separate the sisters after her children, Ricky and Maggie, release a bull into the pasture where Cheryl is looking for the DeRosiers' dog Rebel (a poignant reference to Riel) and she is almost killed. Ricky and Maggie lie about the incident and the social worker is called to take Cheryl away. The failure to persuade the worker that their side should "be heard equally" brings with it, for the sisters, the knowledge of the extent of their powerlessness through a lack of a credible voice. April attempts to run away with Cheryl to Winnipeg, only to be picked up by the RCMP and taken to the Children's Aid offices where it is decided that Cheryl will be moved to her new foster parents, the Steindalls. However, from this separation, Cheryl appropriates the power of the colonialist's telling of history in her essays and letters that she sends to April. In her first missive, Cheryl recounts the speech that she makes to her class: "I made mine on buffalo hunting. Mr. Darnell, my teacher, said I was an exceptional Métis, 'cause most would have avoided such subjects." (74) Of course, this is a rather back-handed compliment; Cheryl would need to be an "exceptional Métis" to shine in the eyes of Mr. Darnell whose evident perception of the Métis (caused by his lack of understanding of the historical, colonial transactions that led to loss of land and identity) is of a people simply ashamed over their heritage



and who had voluntarily turned away from their land and culture. But through her writing, Cheryl claims the authority to re-appropriate Métis history, and as Kateri Damm states, writing “is empowering. It is a means of affirming cultures, of clarifying lies, of speaking truth, of resisting oppression, of asserting identity, of self-empowerment, of survival, of moving beyond survival.” (“Dispelling”, 112) April temporarily imagines herself as “an exceptional Métis” before retreating back to the position of the indoctrinated ‘other’ of fear and shame: “For a very brief moment I was caught up in her excitement. Then I wondered how she ever had the courage to stand up in front of her class and give the speech. I would never have that courage.” (*April Raintree*, 75) Then, and for years to come, April would not have the courage to identify with, associate herself with, a defeated, shamed people.

It is notable then, that Cheryl locates empowerment in *writing* about Métis history at the Red River insurrections, and while she protests at “the way they portray native people” (84), the lack of literature from a Métis point of view that is available to her blurs her sense of identity. Cheryl dreams of a reunion with her family, imagining a future when they:

...could move to the B.C. Rockies and live like olden day Indians. We’d live near a lake and we’d build our own log cabin with a big fireplace. And we wouldn’t have electricity probably. We’d have lots and lots of books. We’d have dogs and horses and we’d make friends with the wild animals. We’d go fishing and hunting, grow our own garden and chop our wood for the winter. And we wouldn’t meet people who were always trying to put us down. (90)

Cheryl tells April that she always thinks of their father as “a strong man. He would have been a chief or a warrior in the olden days, if he had been pure Indian. [...] and Mom was so beautiful to me she was like an Indian princess.” (91) This incidence marks a shift in Cheryl’s sense of selfhood; she actively chooses to identify with “pure Indians” and distances herself from identification with, and the intergenerational shame over, the defeated and dispossessed Métis whose leader was

hung for treason. Cheryl's vision of the future is an escapist one created to elude the pain of her present experiences of racial prejudice, and is influenced by the mainstream discourse of a romanticised Native past. This imagining, rooted in the disruption caused by the prominence of a colonial discourse, (which Mrs. DeRosier personifies in her disruption of the communication between the sisters by intercepting their letters) locks Cheryl into an unfeasible search for an impossible future, with no relation to either Métis historical or familial continuance, or to her and April's experiences of living as urban Métis. The grief of the sisters' separation from their parents is compounded by the pain of past and increasing generational separation from land, culture and community. Communal stories that bind kinship relations and connection to ancestral lands are inaccessible to the sisters; for April, this means a willingness to be integrated into the white Euro-Canadian world as a means of survival, and for Cheryl, a confused pride of her Métis heritage undermined by her longing to belong to "pure" Indian relations. April's admiration of Cheryl's essay on Riel and the Red River Resistances could not sway her from her strategy to circumvent oppressive subjugation by the dominant society: "Knowing the other side, the Métis side, didn't make me feel any better. It just reinforced my belief that if I could assimilate myself into white society, I wouldn't have to live like this for the rest of my life." (*April Raintree*, 85)

## Indian Squaw or Princess?: Dehumanizing by Myth

Becoming a character in someone else's narrative, at the same time as being unable to get anyone to recognize your own story, is a debilitating thing.  
Warren Cairou (*W'daub Awaë*, 1)

Drunken squaw.  
Dirty Indian.  
Easy.  
Lazy.

Every Canadian knows these words to commonly describe and identify Aboriginal Women. Many Canadians are fooled by this construction of Native womanhood. This imagery is so ingrained in the North American consciousness that even Native people have, in dark times, internalized these beliefs about their grandmothers, their aunties, their daughters, and themselves.

Kim Anderson (*Recognition of Being*, 99)

April feels the only escape from her identity being reduced to negative stereotypes is to assimilate into white society. Kim Anderson traces negative images of Native women to “western attitudes towards the earth.” (*Recognition of Being*, 100) Initial wonder at the riches of the ‘new land’, deemed *terra nullius*, or land that belonged to no one, inspired representations of Native women as powerful, enticingly dangerous, and nature’s goddesses based on a combination of the power of the ‘virgin territory’ and European concepts of feminine virtue. Anderson writes that “claims to the land would only work if the queen became more accessible, less powerful, and within the grasp of the white man.”<sup>31</sup> Out of this need the Indian princess was born. The queen was transformed from a mother goddess figure to a girlish-sexual figure, for who can own mother or dominate the gods?” (Anderson, p. 101) Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux points out that the introduction of Christianity and its values that were imposed on Native cultures, forced Native men and women to have to “learn

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<sup>31</sup> The New Oxford Dictionary of English definition of “virgin” employed as an adjective as “not yet used or exploited; *acres of virgin forests*” (*New Oxford Dictionary*, 2064).

how to behave differently so as to be acceptable to the missionaries.” (“Trauma to Resilience”, 17) Wesley-Esquimaux continues: “[it] did not take long for the new religion to begin shaping societal and cultural expectations pertaining to sexual behaviours, and to influence standards of dress and even undress.” (17) For her part, Jean Barman states that the “process by which Europeans took control of virtually all the world between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries gave men access to a huge new pool of women who were seemingly there for the taking.” (“Indigenous Women”, 93) The sexual “taking” of Canada’s Aboriginal women, and the aggressive strategies implemented to eradicate Indigenous spiritual and cultural practises in order to replace it with Christian dogma (said guided by a supreme male God), were enacted to accelerate the aims of acculturation policies in order to achieve cultural and ethnic genocide. European patriarchal ideologies and gender suppositions that encompassed the Madonna/whore binary, rapidly constructed the binary of Native women as Indian Princess/whore (i.e. squaw) as an aid to the settler state to dictate and justify the terms of an avaricious dominance with the annihilation of Indigenes as the desired end point. Emma LaRocque reports to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, in 1991:

The portrayal of the squaw is one of the most degraded, most despised and most dehumanized anywhere in the world. The ‘squaw’ is the female counterpart to the Indian male ‘savage’ and as such she has no human face; she is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty. Such grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Native women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological and sexual violence [...] I believe that there is a direct relationship between these horrible racist/sexist stereotypes and violence against Native women and girls. (“The Changing Image”, 479)

Further, Howard Adams’ hypothesis of the ‘sliding scale of discrimination’ also applies to hierarchical assessments of Native women who are relegated to a lesser classification than Euro-Canadian women in the patriarchal, colonialist spectrum of gender bias, so that there is a doubling of the ‘other’ for Native women in Canada. It

is important to broaden this argument to include the perils inherent in the subjectivity of Indigenous women globally, particularly when considering the invasion of poorer countries, whether for natural resources or political supremacy, by richer and therefore more politically powerful nations. There is not space here to give due consideration to the considerable complexities and differences, globally, of specific cultural practices without generalizing. However, in the unambiguous certitude of ethnic and gender domination, I would argue that it is possible, and indeed imperative, to identify, address, and draw parallels between global human rights of autonomy, self-determination, and the expectation of being treated humanely, without resorting to the archetypal propensity of the ‘civilized’ world to judge othered cultures by discriminatory standards. Daniel Heath Justice notes that “Empire is essential to the survival of imperialism, as complications breed uncertainty in the infallibility of authoritative truth claims. [...] Empires can’t survive by acknowledging complexity, so whatever complications they can’t destroy or ignore are, if possible, commodified, co-opted, and turned back against themselves.” (“Kinship”, 155) The commodification, domination and repression of women are a global observable fact, although for obvious reasons this cannot be taken to the extreme of annihilation. However, if we take Heath Justice’s argument that “complications breed uncertainty” into account, then reducing all women to biological function and repressive social control of sexual representation, amounts to an eradication of physical autonomy. Identifying and acknowledging Canada’s ingrained inequality in its treatment of women, at least in theory, is not extended to Indigenous and other marginalized women in Canada, which is often disastrously played out when concessions are made for sexual and physical abuse in the name of cultural difference. While Emma LaRocque points out in her contribution to the *National Roundtable on Aboriginal*

*Health and Social Issues* addressing the crisis of rising domestic violence in Native communities, that there are “indications of violence against women in Aboriginal societies prior to European contact” by “individuals who acted against the best ideals of their cultures”, she also comments that there “is little question, however, that European invasion exacerbated whatever the extent, nature or potential violence there was in original cultures.” (“Violence”, 75-6) In the same report LaRocque says that she is:

...troubled about the popularity of offering ‘cultural differences’ as an explanation for sexual violence. [...] Erroneous cultural explanations have created enormous confusion in many people and on many issues. Besides the problem of typecasting Aboriginal cultures into a static list of ‘traits’, 500 years of colonial history are being whitewashed into mere ‘cultural differences’. Problems to do with racism and sexism have been blamed on Aboriginal culture. When cultural justifications are used on behalf of the sexually violent, we are seeing a gross distortion of the notion of cultural and of Aboriginal peoples. Men assault; cultures do not. Rape and violence against women were met with quick justice in original cultures. (76-7)

Social acceptance of the intolerable lack of investigation into missing, murdered, physically and sexually abused Aboriginal women, together with the leniency of sentencing of those who have perpetuated these offences (if indeed these crimes are judicially dealt with at all) exposes a flourishing Canadian systemic racist misogyny. In her analyses of culture as a defence in Canadian courts, Sherene Razack cites the domestic violence case of “*R. v. S.* [where] a culturally based ‘absolute patriarchy’ explained the offender’s character and tendency to dominate his wife; and in *R. v. L. [K.]* the accused’s and the victim’s South Vietnamese cultural backgrounds sanctioned ‘a pathological relationship’ of physical abuse by the male and passive acquiescence of the women.”<sup>32</sup> (*What is to be Gained*, 917) The potency of

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<sup>32</sup> The dehumanization of women, in general, has been a perpetual strategy in war, and functions as a validation for inflicting sexual violence in order to dominate and humiliate the conflictual enemy. The prevalent tolerance of rape as an innate element of war and an expected circumstance of collateral damage is being increasingly challenged by international law. The systematic rape of women in Bosnia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, in a far from conclusive list,

misogynistic language predominantly leads to authoritative convictions of entitlement to the female body, and when this is coupled with both racist and sexist terminology such as ‘squaw’, incites discriminatory and socially collusive violence against Indigenous women. As LaRocque writes: “[r]ape in any culture and by any standards is warfare against women. And the degree to which any community tolerates sexual violence is an indication of concurrence in this warfare against women.” (“Violence”, 79) The bystander becomes complicit in the tolerance of sexual violence against women, and, as the Cheyenne proverb goes: “A Nation is not conquered until the hearts of women are on the ground.” (Louis Erdrich, *New York Times*, A25)

As a child, Cheryl internalizes the archetype of Native femininity, Pocahontas, who is celebrated for the extremely mythologized accounts of her life as having rescued the colonist John Smith from her murderous father, and her conversion to Christianity.<sup>33</sup> She then remembers her fair-skinned mother as an idealized ‘Indian princess’ (*April Raintree*, 91). Like April, her mother Alice could pass for white if it were not for their association with the dark skinned members of their family.

However, if pale enough not to be mistaken for a sexually voracious ‘squaw’, a

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was agreed by the meeting of the Group of Eight forum that convened in April 2013 to be breaches of the Geneva Convention. However, the likelihood of the proposals being actively pursued and implemented by the richest countries that make up the G-8, of which Canada is one, and who claim the moral high ground in the censuring of inhumane acts in the ‘third world’ is going to be a very slow process indeed; all the more so when the G-8 countries’ proclivity for gender discrimination and objectification is entrenched in their own cultures, as Erna Paris comments: “Yes, we’re shocked when an Indian women is gang raped on a bus. But when a New Hampshire state representative refers to women as ‘vaginas,’ that story is barely reported in the mainstream press.” (“Rape Must be Outlawed as Weapon of War”, *The Globe and Mail*) In early April 2013, within an email debating the proposed amendments to a bill pertaining to the justification of the use of deadly force, New Hampshire state representative Peter Hanson cited “children and vagina’s (sic) as potential exceptions to the amendments. The dehumanization of women by reducing them to their genitalia is a form of “linguistic violence” that William C. Gray identifies as occurring in “a continuum that stretches from subtle forms such as children’s jokes to grievous forms such as totalitarian and genocidal language. This continuum contains numerous abusive forms such as racist, sexist, and heterosexist discourse.” (“Reality”, 469)

<sup>33</sup> As Patricia Penn Hilden and Leece M. Lee point out, the State of Virginia, Racial Integrity Act of 1924, “authorized the State of Virginia to register each of its inhabitants according to regulated racial designations, with an explicit directive to control who would be deemed as ‘white.’ American Indian ancestry of one-sixteenth or less was subsumed into the white category. Because these relationships were typically between white males with particular political interests and American Indian females, the Act became noted as “the Pocahontas loophole.” (“Indigenous”, 76)

Native woman may be fetishized as an erotic 'other' 'Indian princess'; a stereotype that dehumanizes Native woman in the same way as 'squaw' does in its

objectification and resultant effect of vulnerability and loss of agency. In Kim

Anderson's experience:

No one would ever call you a princess, but you can see it in their approach. [...] It is a sexualized identity, which, in my case, has, for example, resulted in the humiliating experience of being called 'my little Indian' as a measure of affection. I have felt stalked by Canadian and European men because of my Indianess, which, to them, was a "bonus" to whatever interest they had in me as a female. (*Recognition*, 106-7)

Anderson scathingly adds that being "half-white" was a contributing factor to her appeal to white men: "Remember, the Indian princess is well on her way to becoming white, so it follows that those of us who are more assimilated qualify for this racist nobility. Mixed-bloods have 'exotic' appeal because we look 'different', yet we are accessible to white people." (*Recognition*, 106)

When April arrives at the DeRosiers' farm she is immediately presented with a lengthy catalogue of chores by Mrs. DeRosier, thereby establishing the nature of their relationship as a non-paying superior and her subordinate rather than foster mother and child. Along with the assumption that as a 'squaw' she is primarily suitable as a domestic drudge, is the inference that she is congenitally sexually promiscuous. Mrs. DeRosier warns April with regard to Raymond and Gilbert, two Native foster children who also work and live at the farm: "you will only talk to them in front of us. I won't stand for any hanky-panky going on behind our backs." (*April Raintree*, 39) By leaving this warning uncommented on by April, Culleton Mosionier disturbs the reader by subtly signalling and not overtly stating what Mrs. DeRosier is suggesting, and it is the more disturbing for April's apparent lack of awareness of what "hanky-panky" might mean. After running away, and being returned by the RCMP, the sisters' caseworker, Mrs. Semple is called to assess the causes of disturbance at the



foster home.<sup>34</sup> Mrs. Semple, believing what she has been told by Mrs. DeRosier (i.e., that April has been flirting with Raymond and Gilbert – whose slight appearances in the novel serve as ghostly spectres who keep silent to escape censure and punishment from Mrs. DeRosier) lectures the sisters on the “native girl syndrome”:

It starts with the fighting, the running away, the lies. [...] And when you go on your own, you get pregnant right away or you can't find or keep jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there, you get into shoplifting and prostitution and in and out of jails. You'll live with men who abuse you. And on it goes. You'll end up like your parents, living off society. [...] Now, you are going the same route as many other native girls. If you don't smarten up, you'll end up in the same place they do. Skid row! (67)

While April rebels against the prediction of her future as a stereotypical ‘native girl’, “I thought if those other native girls had the same kind of people surrounding them as we did, I wouldn't blame them one bit”, she is too young to comprehend the terms used by Mrs. Semple. “So far, I hadn't had a crush on a boy, well, not a major crush. And what the heck was skid row?” (67) She is very aware of the insults aimed at her, Cheryl and her parents. Throughout the narrative April finds herself wedged between protecting her family from discriminatory classifications and an internalization of mainstream Canadian's prejudices that compel her to disassociate herself from a Métis heritage. When April tells Cheryl that, “We are not going to become what they expect of us” it signifies different concepts to the sisters; for Cheryl it denotes an inspiration to live as a proud ‘old time’ Indian, for April it means embracing the materialist values of a consumerist society and living in it as, what she interprets is, a successful white woman. Submerged as they are beneath negative stereotypes, the sisters' options do not include identifying as respected, proud, urban Métis.

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<sup>34</sup> Mrs. Semple, I argue, is named after Robert Semple, appointed governor of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1815 by Lord Selkirk and killed in 1816 at the Battle of Seven Oaks. This battle, called “la Victoire de la Grenouillère” by the Métis, was instigated by the HBC who were responsible for the pemmican theft from the Métis who reclaimed the stolen goods. Cheryl had sent an essay to April that gives a Métis perspective on the historical events at Seven Oaks.

In her preface to *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*, Emma LaRocque states that in “contrast to the inane stereotype of the Indian as soundless, we know from the vast storehouse of our oral traditions that Aboriginal peoples were peoples of words. Many words. Amazing words. Cultivated words. [...] The issue is not that Native peoples were ever wordless but that, in Canada, their words were literally and politically negated.” (*Writing*, xv) Neither April nor Cheryl are listened to or believed when they speak and it is not until they write that they are effectively heard. Beth Brant considers writing to be a form of empowerment, a power “not over anything, but rather the power to speak.” (*Writing as Witness*, 8) Brant argues that for Native people, writing takes courage, as it “requires opening up our wounded communities, our families, to eyes and ears that do not love us. Is this madness? In a way it is – the madness of Louis Riel, a Maria Campbell, a Pauline Johnson, a Crazy Horse – a revolutionary madness.” (*From the Inside*, 17) Brant points out that for Native authors, writing is an active defiance of the hundreds of years of negative stereotypes that describe a “lazy Indian, ugly Indian, drunk Indian, crazy Indian”, and have “been near impossible” to prevent, “being “encoded on our brains.” (17) It has also been impossible to prevent these negative stereotypes being encoded on the brains of Euro-Canadians, as with April and Cheryl’s teachers, who are in the position of perpetuating them.

Like Cheryl, April has her own, brief, sense of empowerment through the written word when she participates in a local journal’s Christmas essay competition. “The title was ‘What I Want For Christmas’ and I ended the story with the sentence, ‘What I want for Christmas is for somebody to listen to me and to believe in me.’” (*April Raintree*, 82) April’s essay reveals the horrific treatment at the DeRosiers’ and includes the gossip that Maggie has recently invented and spread to her mother and

around the school that April is sexually active with Raymond and Gilbert. As a consequence of this rumour, April is whistled at by the boys in her school who also bombard her with obscene letters and comments. The gossip makes its way to the teaching staff and April is taken aside by the school's guidance counsellor:

April, I've heard some disturbing things and I feel I should talk this over with you. I know that you're a foster girl and perhaps that's the reason. You feel a psychological need to be loved. Well, what I'm really trying to say is that you shouldn't be letting Raymond and Gilbert fondle you. From what I understand, you've also been trying to flirt with Mr. DeRosier. (80)

April's humiliation at the accusations is compounded by her comprehension of the double standard that excuses Raymond and Gilbert from the same degrading speech. For the teaching staff and their students, it is a *fait accompli* that a Native girl rarely escapes the "native girl syndrome". In spite of this and after reading her story, the guidance counsellor believes April's version of events. However, determining the story unsuitable for a Christmas themed publication, April's teachers ask her to write a replacement and April judges this censorship as an adequate exchange for the guidance counsellor's promise of reporting Mrs. DeRosier to her social worker. The suppression of April's counter narrative to contemporaneous renderings of liberal 'care' of Indigenous children is a bargain she, as a child, is willing to agree to for immediate relief from an untenable situation. Her teachers are, obviously, aware of April's heritage, and their treatment of her forces a consciousness on her part of this heritage, if only to make concessions for an exchange that alleviates prejudicial treatment. However, as Howard Adams writes:

Without an indigenous consciousness, Indian, Métis, and Inuit peoples' only claim to Aboriginality is race and heritage. That is not enough to achieve true liberation. To accomplish self-determination, we need more than racial pride. We must have Aboriginal nationalism, and understanding of the state's capitalist ideology and its oppression, and, ultimately, a counter-consciousness. (*Tortured*, 38)

At this point, April is a long way from a political consciousness, or indeed, racial pride, that would allow self-worth in identifying with the Métis historical struggle for a sovereign nation. Further, April and her story are silenced in what LaRocque describes as the position of all Native Canadians whose voices historically “served only as shadowy props in the morality plays of White Canadian cultural and political productions, scarcely noticed in the periphery of mainstream Canadian consciousness.” (*Other is Me*, 83)

April’s replacement social worker, Mr. Wendell, believes April over Mrs. DeRosier as to her treatment in her home and arranges for April to be sent to board at St. Bernadette’s Academy: “I would actually be going to an Academy. Rich girls went to Academies.” (*April Raintree*, 88) However, April feels that to be accepted, and to avoid the racial abuse she experiences at her previous school, she must quell any possible rumour of a connection to Native heritage. In order to explain her circumstances as a ward of the Children’s Aid Society, April tells her friends that her parents were killed in a plane crash. “I credited my ability to make friends easily to the fact that none of them knew I was part Indian.” (90) April considers that the swiftest means of freeing herself from the dictates of negative stereotypes and misrepresentation, and therefore survival in a bigoted institution in a racist nation, is to kill her parents metaphorically, and by extension, her Métis self. Further, as a young adult April consults mainstream, women’s magazines for images and stories of how she should look, behave, and perform as a successful white woman, “I was even reading books on proper etiquette, preparing myself for my promising future in white society” (107). April endeavours to disguise her indigeneity and assume a behaviour that would reconcile her light skin with an acceptable conformity to Euro-Canadian social standards in the hope of acceptance. However, at school with the DeRosier

children, April had been made to understand that: “Skin colouring didn’t matter in this school. Everyone treated me like a full-blooded Indian. ‘Grandma Squaw!’” (78)

April’s instincts tell her that the best strategy for survival in Canadian mainstream society means conforming to, and performing, the social precepts of what constitutes an archetypical, normative white woman. As Judith Butler writes:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the “integrity” of the subject. (*Gender*, 185)

April’s graduation from high school is a liberation from her ties to the Children’s Aid society. Moving to Winnipeg, where she had worked the previous summer as a waitress, April crosses paths with acquaintances with whom she had frequented nightclubs. April had found a vicarious emancipation through observing the behaviour of her new Native companions, finding their actions: “Good in that native girls I saw were beautiful and sure of themselves. Good in that natives could go with whites and no one laughed. Good in their open acceptance of others.” (*April Raintree*, 94)

However, she also harshly judges the young Native women without a corresponding consciousness of why they seem to choose self-destructive behaviour, seeing them through Mrs. Semple’s eyes as “bad, in that they went shoplifting, drank liquor even though they were under-aged and had easy sexual relationships with each other.” (94)

A summer later, April is again reminded of Mrs. Semple’s cautionary tale of the “native girl syndrome” when she discovers that among her acquaintances a few were now in jail whilst another had had a baby and was reliant on support through welfare services. Intent on eluding what Jean Hanson describes as “the posited degeneracy of Aboriginal womanhood” (*Through White Eyes*, 19). April, instead, tightly binds

herself into the equally socially restrictive space of many mainstream Euro-Canadian women of the late sixties/early seventies (when the novel is set); she takes a job that gives temporary financial independence and that is non-threatening to male domination – in her case, a secretary – until she marries and subsumes her identity into that of her husband. Of course, with the advent of the second wave of feminism, career options and opportunities had become more socially legitimized practises for women in this period – Cheryl plans to get a university degree and establish a career in social work – however, conservative social emphasis was still weighted toward woman remaining dependent in the domestic sphere, which Rebecca Tsosie points out is a European tendency “to rank gender duties hierarchically, placing domestic duties in an inferior status and privileging public duties”<sup>35</sup> (“Native Women”, 32). Consequently, April seeks refuge in a conservative respectability, in order to obviate a miserable future that is predicted for Native women, and embraces the conventional assigned template for Euro-Canadian women who are taught self-abnegation. April’s bid to achieve social approval via conformity necessitates an acceptance of an ideology that is filtered through a consumerist prism, and which is, to a great extent, based on fairy tales and myths of the ‘Knight in Shining Armour’, ‘Cinderella’, et al. When Hartmut Lutz suggested to Culleton Mosionier that April “was quite brainwashed [...] believing in the white success story, in the ‘Knight in Shining Armour’”, she agrees, stating that April wanted “everything white, you know!” (Lutz, 101) These mythological fabrications are as romantically persuasive to April as the Indian Princess is to Cheryl. April desires what she has been socialized into desiring by a capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal society – and by the poverty, ill health, and despondency experienced when living with her parents who are judged by social

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<sup>35</sup> Canada’s global commitment to the International Labour Organization’s standard of equal pay for work of equal value is yet to be realized; for women in 2013 there remains a pay gap of 29 percent to that of men.

services as stereotypical Indians, not able to take care of their family – a society which sees her entering into a patriarchal relationship where agency is traded for financial security and social acceptance. April makes a mental list of what she requires and what she would reject in a husband: “If my future were to be successful and happy [...] I would not be able to afford to let my heart rule my head.” Although April thinks that she “couldn’t marry for money or I’d be rich but I wouldn’t be happy. So I would have to find someone who was handsome, witty and charming” (April *Raintree*, 107), she is equally concerned that “[w]ith all my planning and everything, I’d probably end up falling in love with a poor farmer or something. And I’d have to work for the rest of my life.” (108) April is able to realize her ambition of living the consumerist dream of having “a beautiful home, a big fancy car and the most gorgeous clothing ever” (100), which she imagines will lend her a mode of protective camouflage, when she meets Bob Radcliff, “my Prince Charming”, who is a businessman from Toronto and whom she dates and swiftly marries. (109) April has choices in Euro-Canadian society – choices that Cheryl lacks due to the ethnically otherness of her dark skin – and is ensnared in the dominant culture’s social privileging of white men. It is hardly surprising that as a young Métis woman, she is tempted to take the opportunity to escape loss of dignity and elect for what is available to her: that is, an approximation of ethnic, if not male, privilege. By contrasting April’s option and Cheryl’s lack of options in choosing a specific representation of their identities – in April’s case, causing a disruption to social displacement – Culleton Mosionier writes against the dominant culture’s authority that bases inferiority on hierarchical proximity to the pre-eminence of light skin. In his argument for an “emergent non-coercive culture” that “shares the sense of a beginning which occurs in all genuinely radical efforts to start again”, Edward Said

says that writing against social regimentation encounters a “push or tension [that] comes from the surrounding environment – the imperialist power that would otherwise compel you to disappear or to accept some miniature version of yourself as a doctrine to be passed out on a course syllabus.” (*Culture*, 405) April’s choice is a damaging intermediate option where she is ‘compelled’ to make her Métis self ‘disappear’, and which demands collusion in her own subjugation. However it is the only choice she is equipped to make at this point as a young woman who is subjugated for both her ethnicity and her gender.

Cheryl successfully finishes high school, leaves her foster home, and with the support of her social worker is able to move into an apartment with April. She volunteers at the Winnipeg Native Friendship Centre for the summer while waiting to begin her first semester at the University of Winnipeg, to which she has earned a scholarship.<sup>36</sup> Almost immediately, the increasingly disparate trajectory of the sisters’ lives creates a friction, each disapproving of the other’s negotiations with the dominant culture. When Cheryl begins her studies, April will meet her socially at the university “where she has already been accepted” but never near her office, her territory, “because I didn’t want anyone at work to see her, to know she was my sister.” (*April Raintree*, 103) Cheryl, who is aware of her sister’s avoidance of being seen to be associated with her but does not confront her about it, tells April about an incident that happened between her and her new white boyfriend Garth, which mirrors April’s treatment of her:

We were walking down Portage and Garth saw some of his friends coming toward us. He told me to keep walking and he’d catch up. I pretended that I was window shopping so I could listen to them. You know what he did? You know what that creep did? He left me there and went and had a beer with them. He didn’t want them to know about me. That goddamned hypocrite. He’s ashamed

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<sup>36</sup> The Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres was founded in Winnipeg in 1972 as an organization for Indigenous Canadians to meet and participate in programs, classes, and services for the continuance of Aboriginal identity and cultural preservation.



of me. (102-103)

April feels guilty about treating her sister as an outsider would, but admits that even witnessing Cheryl's hurt "wouldn't change me." (103) Cheryl decides to keep a journal in order to catalogue future racist treatment, because she has "a feeling there will be a lot more of this kind of thing" and April fears that "I could be in there one day." (103) April's condemnation of the "strays" that Cheryl brought home from the Friendship Centre, are met by Cheryl's criticisms of April's "fantasy" of living unperturbed in white society. (106-7) Nancy, whom Cheryl invites for dinner, is a "dark-skinned native girl" whose traumatic life is dispassionately described by April, in the internalized voice of Mrs. Semple: "The story of her life was similar to that of other native girls Cheryl met. Drinking always seemed to be behind it." (106) The story of Nancy's life tragically entails rape "by her drunken father. [...] Everyone in Nancy's family drank, even the younger kids. [...] Both Nancy and her mother had prostituted themselves. Sometimes for money, sometimes for a cheap bottle of wine." (106) In a discussion over Cheryl's establishing a programme for native teenagers at the Native Centre, April tells her it is a lost cause, as she thinks that "the majority of natives are gutter-creatures. [...] I'm not prejudiced, Cheryl, I'm simply trying to point out to you how I see things." To which Cheryl replies, "Through white man's eyes." (115) April absorbs, identifies with, and reiterates the Euro-Canadian "white man's" dehumanizing gaze. April's judgement of herself and other women – particularly her unforgiving condemnation of Native women – invokes John Berger's theories in *The Ways of Seeing* which explicate men as the "surveyor" and women as the "surveyed". Berger writes that as the "surveyor", "man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies. [...] A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. His presence may be fabricated, in the sense

that he pretends to be capable of what he is not. But the pretence is always towards a power which he exercises on others.” (*Ways*, 45-46) But as the surveyed, Berger argues, a woman has “to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.” (46)

### **“What is the Proper Name for People Like You?”: Métis Mis-Representation and Self-Representation**

Canadians worry about their identity. Are they too English? Are they too American? Are they French Canadians or some other kind of hybrid? Indians worry about their identity, too. For the most part they like to think of themselves as Canadians. But there are towns and cities in Canada, in every province of Canada, where an Indian dares not forget his identity as an Indian. There are towns and cities in Canada where a Canadian Indian simply dares not go.

Harold Cardinal (*The Unjust Society*, 18)

The question of my identity is hard for me to understand; on one hand, when I consider myself an Indian, and I say this, the Indian says, “Who do you think you are: you are nothing but a white man.” And when I consider myself a white man, talk or act like one, the white man says to me, “Who in the hell do you think you are? You’re nothing but a damned Indian.” I am a man caught in the vacuum of two cultures with neither fully accepting me.

Stan Daniels, past president of the Métis Association of Alberta  
(quoted in *The Unjust Society*, 20)

Culleton Mosionier’s emphasis on April’s bid for survival in mainstream society necessitates a pathway of negotiation for April between refutation and a gradual honouring and acceptance of her Métis identity and kinship ties. When she is first released from the guardianship of social services and about to embark on an independent life, April decides to search for her parents. April describes the moment of asking her social worker, Mr. Wendell, for advice on finding them as an

involuntary, disengaged act: “I heard myself asking about my parents and what were the chances of finding them.” (*April Raintree*, 96) Armed with names and locations, including, ironically, the “house where we had lived on Jarvis [which] had been torn down and replaced by a government building” (98), April eventually finds a woman who had known her parents and whose squalid poverty repulses her; as she watches her cook:

I thought she probably used the flies for meat, and then I scolded myself for being so merciless. I couldn't help it, though. I looked at her feet, stockingless, and stuck into a pair of men's backless slippers. Her legs were lumpy with varicose veins or some other disease. Her heels were dried and scaly. Ugly! Her, this house, this kind of existence. (99)

April is aware that she lacks compassion for the woman's impoverished circumstances, but is unable to supplant the dominant culture's racial stereotypes and condemnation of Native people who are believed to be dirty, disease ridden “gutter-creatures” (115), and who are disparaged for living in poverty as if it were a matter of choice. Julia Kristeva writes that the apprehensive reaction to the abject is “not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.” (*Powers*, 4) April responds to the poverty she sees with the fear that this is how she would be living if her family had stayed together, and for the time she is in the “horrible place”, there is for her no meaningful separation between what she sees and who she might be. (*April Raintree*, 98) Back at home and after bathing to wash “off all those germs I'd probably picked up” (99), April symbolically and physically suppresses connections to her parents by pushing the box where she has placed identification papers and the list of addresses that Mr. Wendell has given her into the back of her closet with the thought, “out of sight and out of mind.” (100) However, it is significant that she does not destroy the papers, thus avoiding a finality that belies her declaration that “that part of my life

was now finished for good. I had a plan to follow and from now on I would stick with it, whether Cheryl agreed with it or not. It was my only way to survive.” (100) April’s plan is to survive in a manner that would be most acceptable to the dominate culture’s consumerist conventions and accordingly contrives to displace her family’s marginalization and deprivation with conspicuous consumption.

April and Bob begin their married life in his and his Mother’s mansion in Toronto where April is taught “all that I hadn’t learned from my long-ago books. [...] Mother Radcliffe [...] took me on shopping excursions and on twice-a-week appointments to hair salons, always giving me advice in a detached way.” (113) Mother Radcliffe maintains a cool and the socially correct politeness of her class – the decorous face of systemic prejudice – toward her daughter-in-law, but her laughter, April notices, “seemed reserved only for those on her social level.” (113) When April first discloses to her sister that she had agreed to marry Bob, Cheryl warns her that she “is asking for trouble. [...] Even if Bob isn’t prejudiced, maybe his friends are. And what will they think when they find out he has married a half-breed? If he had to choose, do you really believe he’d stick with you?” (109) Cheryl also asks April what she would do if she had children “and they looked like Indians” because she is aware that April intends to “pass” as white.<sup>37</sup> At this moment April abruptly comprehends that Cheryl has always been aware of her sister’s mortification over her identity, although they had “never talked about it before [...] but all this time she

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<sup>37</sup> April’s resolve to “pass” as white is in accord with the intention of the Canadian historic and contemporary governmental ideology of assimilation. In contrast to the United States’ “one drop rule” or imperative of hypodescent that classifies racial descent for the purpose of segregation of African-Americans, blood quantum restrictions for Native people in Canada and the U.S. are applied for the purpose of promoting assimilation. African-American “passing” as white threatened the “purity” of white supremacy that led the passing in 1924 of the *Racial Integrity Act*. Further, Eva Marie Garroutte points out that “up until 1970, Louisiana state law defined as black anyone possessing “a trace of black ancestry”, which in the same year they amended to define “trace” as “more than one-thirty-second-degree” of “Negro blood” to be identified as black. (*Real Indians*, 46) Garroutte asks if a scenario can be imagined “in which an office of the American government” – which could similarly be asked regarding the Canadian government – “legally *compels* a person professing anything more than one-thirty-second-degree Indian blood to accept identification as Indian?” (Emphasis original, 47)

knew. She knew I was ashamed of being a half-breed.” (110) In the context of Foucault’s systems of meaning with silence as part of “a new regime of discourses” where there “is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say” (*History*, 27), April mistakenly determines that what is not mentioned is not noticed. April also misinterprets the silences in Mother Radcliffe’s house where “[n]ot once had nativeness been discussed” (*April Raintree*, 113). This causes anxiety when she invites Cheryl for the Christmas holidays and believes that her Native heritage will suddenly be exposed. In Mother Radcliffe’s silence, and her “gracious but cool” manner toward April, Culleton Mosionier constructs an ambiguity in the novel, for April and the reader, over whether or not Bob has told her about April’s Native heritage, or whether her “resentment” toward her, as April chooses to understand it, stems from Bob’s not inviting her to their wedding and therefore “married me without her approval” (114). Knowing that she does not have her mother-in-law’s endorsement and resisting confronting the possibility of her Nativeness being its source, April nevertheless realizes “that my Prince Charming had a flaw” because “[in] his mother’s hands he was like putty”(114). This realization subsequently instils the fear that Cheryl may have been right when she had questioned whom Bob would choose if he was pressed; April or his mother, and her trepidation is compounded by her anxiety over what the reaction to Cheryl’s overt indigeneity will be by Bob’s friends and family.

April acknowledges that her principal motive – which temporarily supersedes the embarrassment of association with her sister – for inviting Cheryl to her new home is to impress her with the wealth that surrounds her in the hope that “Cheryl could see how right I had been in my decision to marry Bob.” (112) Cheryl annoys April with her failure to be impressed, because, as April interprets, she is “so religiously Métis!”

(114) On the first evening of Cheryl's visit, April is "dismayed" to find that Mother Radcliffe has invited some of her friends to the family dinner, and watches assiduously for signs of disapproval. However, Mother Radcliffe is initially as "gracious but cool" to Cheryl as she has been to April since her arrival. (114) Mother Radcliffe's social graces do not extend to generous hospitality to her interloping Native 'guest', and she informs April that she does not want Cheryl to be included in all of the planned Christmas festivities, explaining that "it would cause upsets to have an uninvited guest" and "Cheryl would feel out of place." (116) Cheryl's resistance to fulfilling Mrs. Semple's prophecy of the "native girl syndrome" (115), and assisting other young Native girls at the Friendship Centre to do the same, gives her the strength and confidence to deflect the racially motivated ostracism she encounters at Mother Radcliffe's home and she benevolently tells April that she prefers not to attend "the big fancy gatherings anyhow and she was relieved to be able to avoid them." (116) Further, in what Helen Hoy describes as "[s]hape shifting" and a vigilance "against being named into Otherness" ("Nothing But", 166), Cheryl amuses herself at the Radcliffe's New Year's Eve party when she is condescendingly questioned about her identity by the "wealthy and important" guests that April has been praising:

'Oh, I've read about Indians. Beautiful people they are. But you're not exactly Indians are you? What is the proper word for people like you' one asked.  
'Women,' Cheryl replied instantly.

'No, no, I mean nationality?'

'Oh, I'm sorry. We're Canadians,' Cheryl smiled sweetly. (116)

Cheryl is then approached by a guest who says that she used to "have a very good Indian maid" (a play on Indian Maiden) who was "such a nice quiet girl and a hard worker, too" (116). April is appalled at the "patronizing remarks" and is "embarrassed for Cheryl", but not for herself because at this point she has thoroughly dissociated

herself from her Native identity. Cheryl is next asked by two men “what it was like being an Indian. Before she could reply, the other man voiced his opinion and the two soon walked away, discussing their concepts of native life without having allowed Cheryl to say a thing.” (116-17) The men, ostensibly offering Cheryl a platform for self-representation, silence her with their own preferred theories on “what it was like”. These two men are brought into play by Culleton Mosionier as exemplars of colonialist, social, anthropological, and diverse academic appropriators of a Native counter-discourse, which historically, as Craig S. Womack points out, the “analyzing [of] Indian cultures have been owned, almost exclusively, by non-Indians.” (*Red*, 5)

After the Christmas celebrations have ended, April and Cheryl spend a day together which ends in argument and mutual censure of how each chooses to live their lives. Cheryl accuses April of judging Native people’s lives with no first hand knowledge, to which she replies, “I know because I looked for our parents in those kinds of places. [...] I stopped abruptly as I realized I had just let out my secret search.” (*April Raintree*, 118) Having lied to Cheryl as a child about their parents and idealizing them in order to comfort her, April is now concerned that the disparity between the truth and the invented will be vastly damaging to her sister: “I couldn’t take that away now. They were too important for her. Those memories and her too idealistic outlook for the future of native people. Those things helped her and gave her something to live for.” (119) However, because she believes that Cheryl will not succeed in finding their parents with the now outdated information, April gives her the papers which will later have devastating effects on Cheryl when she finds their father is living in the drunken poverty of the “gutter creature” that April rails against.

After Cheryl’s departure for Winnipeg, April reflects on the shallowness of her life in comparison with her sister’s: “I had everything I ever wanted, yet I had

nothing. [...] [Cheryl] wrote about her education and her work at the Friendship Centre. I found myself again in the position of envying her. She had a reason for being. She was her own person. I merely existed.” (124) April’s disillusionment leads her to rebel against Mother Radcliffe as she condemns her for her superficiality: “I was [...] disgusted with her and her snobbish friends and her card games and her charitable works, done only so she would be identified as a philanthropist.” (124-25) The novel’s framework delineates April’s increasing self-knowledge, and, at this point, the narrative depicts her as achieving a significant leap toward an understanding and acceptance of her Métis identity. It does so by revealing her awareness of the slippage between Mother Radcliffe’s posture of liberal patronage that exists alongside her vilification of Native people, and indeed, her own, newly realized negative criticisms of Euro-Canadian that now exists alongside her internalized negative stereotypes of Native people. “Maybe that’s what being a half-breed was all about, being a critic-at-large,” she reasons. (125) Having overheard a conversation between Mother Radcliffe and Bob’s ex-girlfriend Heather – which includes the information that she will be given a “nice large settlement” (126) – April learns of her mother-in-law’s reasons for complicity in their affair and not wanting April as a daughter-in-law:

They’re Indians, Heather. Well, not Indians but half-breeds, which is almost the same thing. [...] They have the same father and the same mother. That’s the trouble with mixed races, you never know how they are going to turn out. And I would simply dread being a grandmother to a bunch of half-breeds. (126)

April confronts Mother Radcliffe and inverts the prejudices she has suffered from her, shouting, “thank God I didn’t become pregnant by your son. I wouldn’t want the seed of your blood passed on to my children.” (127) This conscious ideological shift from idealizing Euro-Canadian supremacy and social values to recognizing their destructive power over the marginalized is a form of release for April, and the



beginning of a rejection of exterior pressures applied by the dominant culture of identity construction.

April, living in Toronto with Bob and his mother, loses contact with her sister; her last letter to Cheryl is returned to her marked: "Moved – no forwarding address." (130) A few months later, during the collapse of her marriage, April receives a phone call from the Health Science Centre in Winnipeg informing her of Cheryl's hospitalization. On her arrival April finds that Cheryl had been admitted intoxicated, concussed, suffering from hypothermia, and had been beaten. She also discovers that Cheryl had quit her studies at university and had stopped working at the Friendship Centre, explaining to April, "I believed I was accomplishing something at first, but then a lot of girls we were trying to help just kept getting in trouble. In different ways it all boiled down to one thing: as a social worker I don't think I would have made the grade. So I quit and got a job instead." (136) Both the reasons for and the extent of Cheryl's disillusionment is not revealed in its entirety until the end of the novel when April finds and reads her journal. However, at this juncture she does tell April about the dysfunctional relationship with her boyfriend Mark De Soto in whose company she has become an alcoholic; she says only that she "used to party a lot and I started drinking a bit." (137) When Cheryl says that she does not want to return to her house or her boyfriend Mark, not even to "go back and get my things" (137), April volunteers to collect her belongings. In doing so April is abducted and brutally raped by three men that recalls the murder of the nineteen year old Cree woman Helen Betty Osborne who was murdered by four young white men (in 1971, in The Pas, Manitoba, about 630 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg). Culleton Mosionier's description of April's abduction and rape is also a near prescient description of the assault and

murder of the twenty-eight year old Saulteaux mother of two, Pamela George, by two young white men in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1995.

### **Naturalization of Violence Against Canada's Aboriginal Women**

I'd been raped a few times. I used to think – I didn't call it rape then, because I used to think that was normal, that's the way you treat Indian women.

Janice Acoose ("Finding Dawn", *National Film Board*)

It has to stop, the violence, it has to stop! It has to stop! And in my family I knew it had to stop with me.

Janice Acoose (Ibid.)

Helen Betty Osborne was abducted in the early morning of November 13, 1971. The Manitoba Justice Inquiry (*Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission*, 1999) report on the death of Helen Betty Osborne concluded that while "racism played a significant role in this case" that it "did not cause any delay in the investigation of the killing or in the prosecution of those responsible." (*Justice*, Chapter Nine) This conclusion was reached because of insufficient evidence, but the Justice Inquiry did report that racism and sexism was prevalent in The Pas where non-Native men targeted young Native women in attacks of sexual violence and that the RCMP was aware of this and failed in their duty of protection. The Justice Inquiry also concluded that Helen Betty Osborne "would not have been killed if she had not been Aboriginal" because "[i]t is evident that the men who abducted Osborne believed that young Aboriginal women were objects with no human value beyond sexual gratification." (*Justice*, Chapter 10) The initial investigation by the RCMP was also found wanting as it was Helen Betty Osborne's Native friends who were questioned as suspects of her brutal murder, while the white men who were widely rumoured to be involved

were not. Only one man, Dwayne Johnston, of the four men initially arrested, was charged, and not until 1987, sixteen years after the murder. He was released on parole in 1997. Paul Houghton was acquitted. The Justice Inquiry also reported that Lee Colgan, who was granted immunity for his testimony, “[i]n the spring or summer of 1972, [Colgan] told a young woman who preferred not to be named when testifying before us, that he and some others “picked up that squaw at the Cumberland Block” and had taken her out to the lake for a “gang bang.” (*Justice*, Chapter 9) In court, Colgan testified that the fourth man, Norman Manger, “while the assault was taking place [...] was cowering under the dashboard of the car.” (*Justice*, Chapter 3) Pamela George, who occasionally worked as a prostitute, was viciously murdered on April 17, 1995 by Steven Kummerfield and Alex Ternowetsky. Sons of rich, privileged, and prominent white families, the two men were celebrating the end of a university term by drinking and cruising Regina’s the Stroll, where prostitutes were known to work and where the majority of the population were Native, poor, and vulnerable. One of the men hid in the trunk of their car after they were turned down by a woman who refused them because she was intimidated by their state of intoxication. Pamela George agreed, not knowing of the second, hidden man. After performing oral sex, Pamela George was beaten by both men in turn, and left for dead, face down in the mud. Sherene Razack states:

...that because Pamela George was considered to belong to a space of prostitution and Aboriginality, in which violence routinely occurs, while her killers were presumed to be far removed from this zone, the enormity of what was done to her and her family remained largely unacknowledged. [...] I deliberately write against those who would agree that this case is about an injustice but who would de-race the violence and the law’s response to it, labelling it as generic patriarchal violence against women, violence that the law routinely minimizes. (*Race, Space*, 125-6)

The Crown prosecuting attorney, in his summation, told the court that the “fact that she was a prostitute obviously is a fact, and you have to consider that as part of the

case.” (Trial transcript, p. 4755, quoted in *Race, Space*, 151) The judge for the trial, Mr. Justice Malone, directed the jury thus:

Now, if you should find that Pamela George consented to the sexual activity of the two accused, notwithstanding Kummerfield’s remark about killing her if she did not give him head, or if you should have a reasonable doubt as to whether the accused consented or not, bearing in mind that the evidence indicates that she indeed was a prostitute, then the Crown has not made out its case with respect to first-degree murder occurring during a sexual assault, and you must find the accused not guilty of first degree murder but guilty of second-degree murder. (Trial transcript, p. 4825, quoted in *Race, Space*, 151-52)

It is necessary to give the full quote of Malone’s direction in order to appreciate fully the dehumanization of Pamela George, especially in relation to the privileged men who killed her in what Razack describes as a “collective understanding of Pamela George as a thing, an objectification that their exclusively white worlds would have given them little opportunity to disrupt.” (*Race, Space*, 140) The men’s defence lawyers contended that “alcohol played more of a role in the crime than did race”, despite the testimony from the men’s friend who was told by Kummerfield that: “We drove around, got drunk and killed this chick. [...] she deserved it. She was an Indian.” (Roberts, *Globe and Mail*, A1) Both men were convicted of manslaughter rather than for the original charge of first-degree murder, and both were released on parole in 2000. Jonathan Rudin finds in his research that “Aboriginal youth were almost eight times more likely to be in custody compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.” (*Aboriginal Peoples*, 15) Further, Razack points out that, “in Saskatchewan a treaty Indian woman was 131 times more likely to be incarcerated than a non-Aboriginal woman, while Métis women were twenty-eight times more likely to be incarcerated.” (*Race, Space*, 134) Razack also reports that Jim Harding, in his testimony to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, in 1993, “connected Saskatchewan’s provincial carceral scene, in particular, to the history of colonization, reminding RCAP commissioners that it was in Saskatchewan that Louis Riel was

hanged and eight Indian leaders were executed in 1886. Perhaps, he speculated, the lessons of 1885 remain “deeper in our psyche [and] in our social structure than we would like to realize.” (*Race, Space*, 134)

When April collects Cheryl’s belongings in a poor and “run-down” part of the city, she is attacked from behind by two men while trying to unhook the gate to Cheryl’s house. (*April Raintree*, 139) April fights the two men, physically and verbally – in much the same way it is reported that Helen Betty Osborne fought her attackers – as she is dragged into the car where a third man is waiting. The physical brutal force applied in April’s repeated rape are matched by the violence of the attackers’ racist and sexist language, “bitch,” “cunt,” “fucking squaw,” “slut,” “savage,” “whore,” and “cocksucker” (139-44). April comprehends that the leading attacker, who tells her that she was “asking for it” and who says numerous “vulgar things” to her, “wanted to reduce me to nothingness.” (142) In spite of April’s light skin that makes it possible for her to choose to “pass” as non-Native, she is mistaken for Cheryl – which she learns at the trial of her attackers – and is ‘misidentified’ as a Native “squaw” by her racist and misogynist assailants. Sean Kicummah Teuton observes that “more often than not what we call passing is actually “misrecognition,” the world assuming or, indeed, insisting we are who we are not.” (*Red Land*, 233) The “misrecognition” of April by her attackers transpired because they expected to see Cheryl in that place, at that time, and the tangible presence of April could not displace their expectations. Further, “misrecognition” of April in addition to the assault that is meant to reduce her to “nothingness” is a doubling of the negation of her identity and her humanity. The final sadistic and humiliating act on April is perpetrated by the principal attacker, Oliver Donnelly, who says to his associates, “Boy, do I ever feel like taking a piss right now.” (*April Raintree*, 144) The driver, presumably the owner

of the car, responds with concern that Donnelly must avoid getting the car “dirty”, while April gags as he starts “peeing. Right into my mouth.” (144) April’s “nothingness” of human worth is rated by her attackers as beneath that of their violent sexual gratification, and even that of the value of their car. Unlike Helen Betty Osborne and Pamela George, April survives her attack, but as in Osborne’s case, only one man, Donnelly, is convicted of the crime.

April is interviewed by the RCMP and is taken for an examination to the emergency room of the hospital where Cheryl had been admitted after her recent attack. The emergency doctor on call “chides” April for washing her mouth before examination, “I couldn’t believe his words. I was supposed to go around with the residue of piss in my mouth for the sake of evidence? I figured he had enough evidence.” (148) April’s repeated bathing after her brutalization when she feels that, “it was no use. I couldn’t get myself clean. I would never be clean again, free from the awful smells, free from the filthy feelings, free from the awful visions” (150), is supplementary to the eradication of the vestiges of her violation and the need to separate herself from the physical claim on, or indeed, colonization of her body. It is also an attempt to rid herself of the evidence that her life has become what had been predicted for her by her social worker Mrs. Semple when she was a child; a native girl who will have a difficult life and end up on skid row. (67) April fears that the rape is symptomatic of what happens to a “dirty squaw” and reawakens the internalization of the stereotype constructed by the white racist and sexist supremacists of Euro-Canadian society, acted on by her attackers. The near ritualistic cleansing after the rape mirrors April’s bathing after she has visited a friend of her father’s, “washing off all those germs I’d probably picked up”, to cleanse herself of contamination of identity through contact with “gutter-creatures.” (99) April’s humiliation is in some

measure relieved when she turns her anger outward against her attackers, resisting the internalization of the indignities inflicted on her: “I wanted them to feel my anguish. I wanted to gouge their eyes out. I wanted to whip the life out of them. Mutilate them. Kill them. Because bathing never worked.” (161)

Aubrey Jean Hanson writes that “the men’s violence against April becomes an important locus in the text, in many ways forcing a crisis of identification” which “forces April [...] to confront her Métis identity.” (*Through White Man’s Eyes*, 23-24) The horrendous attack on April is certainly where her consciousness is raised over ethnic and gender injustices perpetuated against her and other Native women, and when her repressed anger breaks through to expression. However, her anger and sense of injustice – although it is true that she is not conscious of the specific foundation of this anger until after the attack – is first manifested when she learns of her mother-in-law’s revulsion at being grandmother to a “bunch of little halfbreeds” (156). April’s anger at her mother-in-law is not for the assault on her own Métis identity and sense of self, but for that of future generations of Métis children. What she could not, at this point, recognize and protect as something worthy of defending for herself, a Métis identity, because she feels that “being a half-breed, well, there’s just nothing there”, she nonetheless can for a continuance and the prospect of a future pride in Métis selfhood, and the possibility of claiming what are the human rights of safety, respect, and justice. (156)

April repeatedly asks herself why her attackers “had kept calling me squaw. Was it obvious? That really puzzled me. Except for my long black hair, I really didn’t think I could be mistaken for a Native person. Mistaken? There’s that shame again. Okay, identified.” (161) Margery Fee writes that April’s rape forces her into the “identity of the ‘squaw’ – a figure created to justify sexual and racial abuse”,

("Deploying Identity", 220). It materializes at Donnelly's trial that April's attackers had mistaken her for Cheryl and the attack was initially intended to "scare a certain prostitute" whose name is "Cheryl Raintree." (*April Raintree*, 182) The statements of one of the rapists, Stephan Gurnan, who has had his rape charge reduced to forcible confinement for his testimony against Donnelly, and that of his sister Sylvia, reveals that Sylvia has recruited her brother and his friends to frighten Cheryl away from her boyfriend, Mark DeSoto, who has left to move in with Cheryl. April's shock at the discovery of her sister having worked as a prostitute results in a panic of "indignity" at being "mistaken for a prostitute" herself which compounds her shame of being identified as Native, both of which she lays at Cheryl's door, seeing herself as:

A victim of my own sister's folly. [...] Another victim of being native. No matter how hard I tried, I would always be forced into the silly petty things that concerned native life. All because Cheryl insisted in going out of her way to screw up her own life. And, thus, screwing up mine. (183)

April listens as Donnelly's Defence Council addresses the court and:

...went to work on the jury to try and convince them that his client was innocent. He emphasized that Donnelly had been drinking heavily, that Donnelly honestly believed that the girl was a prostitute, but more importantly, had consented by her own silence to have sexual intercourse. The accused further believed that the objections by the complainant were made only because she had not received compensation for her services. (185)

The identification of April as Native and a prostitute – and the defence justifying Donnelly's actions with the postulation that prostitutes cannot be raped, as in the case of Pamela George – insinuates an equating of "Indian squaw" with prostitute and an enforced silence as complicity. Further, Culleton Mosionier structurally bookends a speech made by Cheryl at the powwow that she and April attend with the preliminary hearing of Donnelly and his trial. At the powwow, Cheryl recites to April a piece she had written at university when she was exploring how the "Métis people share more of the same problems with the Indian people" and "guessing" that that was "why Riel



was leader to both.” She was not allowed by the university to publish the piece “because it was too controversial” (168), but had committed it to memory and in a style that evokes the voice of the “old time Indian” of her imagination – a stylization that Craig Womack says, in a different context, “one might [...] call ‘Tonto talk’” (*Red*, 155), Cheryl performs it for April. In a passage that is the most relevant to what I am discussing here, Cheryl speaks of the betrayal by the “White Man” and the “cunning trickery” of broken treaties, specifically Treaty 6 that she partially and inaccurately quotes: “As long as the Sun shall rise” (168). As stated in the original Treaty 6 agreement, signed in 1876, that the Crown made with central Saskatchewan and Alberta’s Cree, Dene, Chipewyan, Blackfoot, Nakoda Sioux, Assiniboine, Saulteaux, Beaver, Ojibway, and Tsuu T’ina bands, the promises of the treaty were binding “as long as the sun shines and the waters flow” (Venne, “Understanding Treaty 6”, 194). Riel’s failure to convince the Crown to include the Métis in the Numbered Treaties and that this is not addressed by Cheryl, who reinforces her identification with “Indian people ever since I was a kid” as does her use of the first person plural when she speaks as “we, the Indian people” (*April Raintree*, 168). After Cheryl lists the consequences of the broken treaties, she censures the injustice of the accusations from the “White Man” who charges the disempowered “Indian” with an inherent lack of dignity and blames the victim for their circumstances: “You say that we are drunkards, that we live for drinking. But drinking is a way of dying. You have given us many diseases. [...] The worst disease, for which there is no immunity, is the disease of alcoholism. And you condemn us for being its easy victims.” (170) While April admits that she finds Cheryl’s piece “powerful” she also comments that the “Indian people did allow themselves to be treated like children. They should have stood up for their rights instead of letting themselves be walked on.” Cheryl replies,

“Yeah? [...] Where did it get the Métis?” (170) In placing Cheryl’s recitation and the exchange with her sister between the preliminary hearing and the trial, when April, in the first instance, undergoes the Defence Counsel’s “sceptical [...] even sarcastic” questioning which causes her to feel “like it was me who was on trial” (165), and the second instance when the Defence Council hopes to rely on the court dismissing his client on the grounds that “the intended victim was a known prostitute” (181), Culleton Mosionier draws a parallel between blaming alcoholism solely on intrinsic qualities of Native people – with no connection to colonialist practices – and rape as an expected consequence of what is understood to be the “native girl syndrome” of sexual promiscuity. Since April has been mistaken for her sister whose physical attributes render her more identifiable as a “pure Indian” and whose prostitution equates her with an “easy squaw”, an acquittal for her rapist would reinforce the position of gender and racist bias that blames the victim of the crime of rape. While April says she “understood full well that it was [the Defence Council’s] job to defend his client in any way he could” she also “felt what he did to me was morally wrong.” (165) Further, when the verdict finds Donnelly guilty, April comments that justice “to a certain point had been done”; the qualifying “to a certain point” stresses the anomalies that exist between legal and moral justice.

On May 17, 2011, Statistics Canada released a report – compiled in 2009 – on violence against Aboriginal women. Amongst its findings is that:

[In] 2009, close to 67,000 Aboriginal women aged 15 or older living in the Canadian provinces reported being the victim of violence in the previous 12 months. Overall, the rate of self-reported violent victimization among Aboriginal women was almost three times higher than the rate of violent victimization reported by non-Aboriginal women. [...] Close to two-thirds (63%) of Aboriginal female victims were aged 15 to 34. (*Statistics Canada*, 5)

Although statistics can be helpful, they can also distance human experience by numbering; the true horrors of the above percentages that are coldly faceless are more pertinently told by stories, orally and written (and as a form of resistance), from those who experience sexual terrorism and violence.<sup>38</sup> Deanna Reder writes that the introduction by her mother to Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and witnessing her "enthusiasm when seeing some reflection of her life in print", Reder "had a hunch about the importance of Indigenous autobiography to Indigenous readers." ("Writing", 154) The sharing of knowledge, of the personal experience of the damaging effects of colonization, on the body and on the spirit, is a form of resistant emancipation that compounds as the stories proliferate. In her interview with Hartmut Lutz who asked her if *April Raintree* was autobiographical, Culleton Mosionier answers: "In a general way. I grew up in foster homes. My family were alcoholics, there were suicides in my family, I was raped, and, of course, I had the thing with identity." (Lutz, 311) Kim Anderson relates the story told to her by Emma LaRocque of an experience she had as a child:

I was sitting in a café in my home town, reading a comic book, as I was wont to do. Minding my own business. [...] I just remember a big, fat, red-face white guy coming in. Leering at me. I don't even think I could identify what that look was, because I had been so safe at home and in my community. I had never been attacked, and I didn't know what that was. This guy, he throws a quarter. I still remember, and I still see that quarter rolling right past my coke bottle. He threw a quarter and he said, 'Want to go for a ride, little squaw?' (*Recognition*, 108)

In her autobiographical essay, "Tides, Towns and Trains", LaRocque tells of the persecution practised by local police in her community: "Many times I saw police roughing up and/or picking up Native people, among them my uncles, my aunties, and even my mother. Years later I was to learn, with horror, that there were times when

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<sup>38</sup> For just this reason, The Native Women's Association of Canada launched the "Faceless Doll Project" in 2012. A collection of faceless dolls made out of felt is being exhibited across Canada in order to actively engage the Canadian public, as Jennifer Lourdes of the NWAC says: "to remember that a beautiful Aboriginal is represented by every number shared, that each statistic tells a story." (Faceless Doll Project, [www.aswcc.sk.ca/pdf/NWAC%Faceless%doll%20project\\_2.pdf](http://www.aswcc.sk.ca/pdf/NWAC%Faceless%doll%20project_2.pdf))

the police picked up defenceless women just to assault them!” (*Living the Changes*, 81) The historical lack of protection for Métis, Native treaty and non-treaty people in Canada in order to advance assimilation policies exponentially intensified into systemic racism and sexism that persists. There are over 1200 missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada – some organizations were rightly sceptical when the official number was reported as 600 and maintained that there were well over that number – but as Amnesty International writes in their report, the lack of certainty is down to:

...gaps and inconsistencies in the way that the identities of victims of crime are recorded and made public in Canada, that question simply cannot be answered. However, we do know with certainty that the marginalization of Indigenous women in Canadian society has led to an extremely high risk of violence. (Amnesty, *Stolen Sisters*)

Or, as an RCMP member commented when asked about the approximately 18 missing Aboriginal women on British Columbia’s Yellowhead Highway, or Highway Sixteen – also known as the Highway of Tears – when interviewed in Human Rights Watch’s report *Those Who Take Us Away*, published on February, 2013: “The Native girls on the highway – I was up there. If they’re natives, nobody gives a shit.” (*Those*, 37) The *Missing Women Commission of Inquiry in British Columbia* (the Commission) began its examinations on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 after more than 20 years of pressure from the families of the missing women along with Aboriginal, women’s, and civil liberties organizations, to inquire into the conduct of the RCMP and the Vancouver Police Department in their investigations into the women reported missing from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside between January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1997 and February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Robert Pickton, a Port Coquitlam pig farmer was eventually arrested in 2002 and convicted in 2007 for the murder of only 6 of the 26 Aboriginal women whose remains were found at his farm. The original convictions against Pickton for the murder of the other 20

women were formally stayed because of an administration error. Further, Pickton told an undercover police officer that he had killed 49 women who worked as prostitutes in the Downtown Eastside. However, in 1997 Pickton viciously attacked and nearly stabbed to death a woman sex worker from Downtown Eastside who was subsequently interviewed by the police as she recovered in the hospital, and according to the Commission: “Following an RCMP investigation of these events, Pickton was charged with attempted murder, assault with a weapon, unlawful confinement and aggravated assault. A trial was set for February 2-6, 1998. Crown Counsel stayed the prosecution of these charges on January 26, 1998.” (*Missing Women*, 26) The Crown prosecution attorney, Randi Connor, found the victim named “Ms. Anderson” who was acceded witness anonymity for her protection, lacking credibility because of her heroin addiction and her work as a part-time prostitute. The incriminatory evidence amassed from blood samples and DNA results was quashed along with the stay and Pickton was released to murder for another five years. In spite of this, Welly T. Oppal, QC concludes that “the stay decision was made with integrity.” (79)

Testimony from emergency operators working at Vancouver’s Police Department said that they were told by their sergeants “they weren’t going to spend ‘valuable time and money’ looking for prostitutes”, and that “if callers had no fixed address for the person they were reporting missing, the file could be blown off.” (Burgmann, *The Star*, 1). Rae-Lynn Dicks, one of the emergency operators, testified: “It was systemic. It didn’t matter. They were marginalized women, most of them were aboriginal.” (Burgmann, *The Star*, 1). Extraordinarily, Oppal concludes that although there was bias evident in the investigations of the missing women by the Vancouver’s Police Department, he “underscore[s] that this finding of systemic bias should not in any way be taken to mean that the police did not care about the women or that there was

any intention to dismiss or devalue the missing and murdered women.” (“Nobodies”, Vol. II B, 290) As Dawn Martin-Hill writes:

...it is not an exaggeration to suggest that Native women continue to be oppressed and to be seen as disposable. The state turns a blind eye when it is open season on us, justifying the murders through labelling us as prostitutes, street people and addicts. We are not seen as victims of the oppressive colonial regime that institutionalizes racism and sexism against us. (“She No Speaks”, 117)

The 89-page report from Human Rights Watch, which includes interviews in British Columbia with 42 Indigenous women and 8 Indigenous girls, along with Indigenous community service providers and current and former RCMP officers, summarizes its report:

Human Rights Watch heard disturbing allegations of rape and sexual assault by RCMP officers, including from a woman who described how in July 2012 police officers took her outside of town, raped her and threatened to kill her if she told anyone. Human Rights Watch strongly urges an independent civilian-led investigation of these allegations with the aim of achieving accountability for the alleged crimes. (*Watch*, 8)

The official response from the RCMP to this report, offered by Chief Superintendent Janice Armstrong in a press conference on February 12, 2013, was that claims were being taken “very seriously” and advised that individual “complaints could be made to the RCMP directly” (*CTV News*). In his response to questions in Parliament over the claims against the RCMP, Prime Minister Harper said that the women who knew of “serious allegations involving criminal activity, [...] should give that information to the appropriate police so that they can investigate it. They should just get on with it.” (*Global News, YouTube*) What in the past has been thought of as official indifference to the safety and wellbeing of Canada’s Aboriginal women can now be seen as part of an active and wilful sabotage by the Harper government to undermine and suppress all Aboriginal voices by specifically targeting associations that are involved in research that is independent of mainstream and government organizations.

In the past 3 years, the Federal Budget has either severely cut or cancelled all funding for an escalating list of Aboriginal organizations including; First Nations Statistical Institute, Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Sisters in Spirit, Métis National Council, Native Women's Association, and the National Aboriginal Health Organization. The current determined suppression of Canada's Aboriginal voices by Harper's government policies is an aggression reminiscent of the colonial assimilation and genocidal strategies of preceding centuries and the writing was on the wall a year and a half into Harper's first term as Prime Minister when his government voted "no" at the United Nations General Assembly's resolution on September 13, 2007 to adopt a UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In 1969, Harold Cardinal appealed to Pierre Trudeau to acknowledge and act on the Native call for a nation-to-nation dialogue with the government:

We want the beginnings of a real and purposeful dialogue with non-Indian people and government representatives in order to get on with the business of solving some of the most basic difficulties that we face. When we enter into a dialogue, we wish to have the respect and the courtesy of the non-Indian society in their recognition that we are talking sense, that we have the intelligence and capacity to judge for ourselves what is good or bad for us. (*Unjust Society*, 11-12)

Over forty years later, the Canadian government is not only ignoring Native concerns and advice on the most constructive ways to help alleviate hardships that are the result of colonialism and assimilation policies, it is actively closing avenues of Native research that are designed to be shared with government agencies as advisory knowledge. The experiences of April and Cheryl that Culleton Mosionier relates in her novel (and, indeed, her and her family's experience living as urban Métis) describe the position of Native women across Canada who are considered, generally, by mainstream Canadians as deviant to the normative behaviour of middleclass white women, which is reflected in federal and provincial policies of past and current

governments. Further, the withdrawal of government funds that may result in the loss of Native organizations that contribute crucial information and research on the social conditions and circumstances of Canada's Native women, as Sisters in Spirit and Native Women's Association do, is a cynical and compassionless exercise on the part of the government in light of its intermittent public hand-wringing over the missing and murdered women, and a professed concern for their families and communities.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Land, Language, Memory: Storytelling and Defending Métis Blood



My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirits back.<sup>39</sup>

Louis Riel

I don't call myself a poet. I see myself as a community worker or a storyteller: that's the closest I can get as far as being a 'writer'. A storyteller. So far, the stories that I've told have all been the stories within me. The stories that are based in autobiography.

Gregory Scofield (Richards, "Interview", *January Magazine*, 6)

Gregory Scofield's body of work has steadily developed, particularly his poetry, from his first collection *The Gathering: Stories for the Medicine Wheel* in 1993 to his latest *Louis: The Heretic Poems* in 2011. The diversity of his work and its richness is, perhaps, not as evident in *Thunder Through My Veins* as in his other published literary achievements, however, I have chosen to give the most analytic attention to this text, as it is one of his works that is the most influenced by Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*. Indeed, Scofield dedicates the book to Campbell and throughout the text, reiterates his indebtedness to her strength and the courage that she gave him to embrace his Métis identity. There has been a generational passing on of a Métis

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<sup>39</sup> I have not been able to find a written source for this quote but, like Jo-Ann Episkew from whose text, *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* I am quoting, I have come across this attribution to Riel on many occasions. Episkew writes that she was told by Maria Campbell that "she first heard this quotation in the mid-sixties when she interviewed Métis leader Jim Brady. [...] Brady predicted that one day Canada would be full of brown artists, literary and otherwise, because of Riel's prophecy. Maria said that Jim Brady often spoke about the role of artists, especially writers, [play] in creating change." Campbell also told Episkew that Brady was "the first person whom she had heard call Riel an artist poet, explaining that this was why Gabriel Dumont listened to him. Brady told her that in the old days the people loved and respected artists, particularly poets, because their poetry mirrored the soul of the people." Campbell said that she assumes that the quote credited to Riel "might come from the Métis oral tradition since Jim Brady and Joe Dion, both early leaders of the Métis and non-Status Indians, collected many oral stories from elders." (*Taking Back*, 192)

literary baton from Campbell, to Culleton, to Scofield that facilitates the continuance of the past, the present, and the future of Métis history and culture.

The physical and political history of the Métis and their homeland are major concerns in Gregory Scofield's texts. In distancing himself from the term "poet" in the above quote, Scofield aligns himself with the role of "spokesperson for a community's heritage" (Radar, *Speak to Me Words*, 134). As such, he is a storyteller of not only the historical violence and suppression of the Métis people during and after the Dominion of Canada's encroachment of the Northwest, but also of their survivance, thereby mirroring "the soul of the people." From his first collection of poetry, *The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel*, published in 1993, to the compilation *Louis: The Heretic Poems*, published in 2011, Scofield's work is rooted in a "ceremony that involves others, including the readers, who are given the opportunity to bear witness to [...] ceremony and take it away into their own lives." ("Sitting Down to Ceremony", 292) Neal McLeod argues for an "organic" understanding of Cree stories and storytelling rather than one based on Western theoretical principals: "Instead of theory being abstract and detached from concrete experience, theory (critical poetic consciousness) emerges out of concrete situations and through conversation and storyteller." ("Cree Poetic Discourse", *Across*, 117) Jace Weaver, too, writes that he was cautious of abstractions in Western critical theories when he coined the term "communitism" – a combination of the words "community" and "activism" that he relates to Gerald Vizenor's phrase "survivance". Weaver says that he does so with "genuine trepidation [since it] runs the risk of being merely one more obscure bit of technical vocabulary in an academia that currently seems in love with jargon to the extent that much of so-called postmodernist scholarship is comprehensible only to the cognoscenti (and often not even then)."

(*That the People*, xii-xiii) Nevertheless, Weaver considers it a useful and necessary term in relation to Native literature which he regards as “communitist to the extent that it has a proactive commitment to Native community, including what I term the ‘wider community’ of Creation itself.” (xiii) Weaver argues that the promotion of communitist values allows “the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them” and is necessary in light of the destructive effects of centuries of colonialism on Native communities. (xiii)

Scofield’s work demonstrates the significant role of Native literature to continuance through what LeAnne Howe calls “tribalography”. Howe writes that she uses the terms “story, fiction, history, and play” interchangeably as the power of native stories lie in the interconnectedness of “all living things.” (“Tribalography”, 118) Howe asserts: “acknowledging the wrongs committed against our ancestors is how we speak to future generations.” (124) Jill Doerfler employs Howe’s term in her article that explores the disparity between Western and tribal concepts of identity on the White Earth Reservation in the 1910s. Doerfler writes that she connects, through the “methodology” of tribalography, “multiple elements in a textual weaving” that “go beyond the “facts” in order to enliven the (hi)story, [and] to offer an alternative way of remembering the past.” (“Anishinaabe”, 296) In the beautiful epilogue to her article, Doerfler describes a family of Anishinaabe women weaving baskets of sweetgrass while they “spoke of children and politics”: “As the baskets took shape, words stitched the variegated families together. The malleable coils of sweetgrass built upon each other like generations, seamlessly connected by skilful women.” (318) Doerfler correlates the weaving of the sweetgrass baskets with the weaving of generational stories that connects specific landscapes, kinship ties, and history; indeed, the baskets both tell and are a part of the stories told. Through his texts,

Scofield tells stories of, and to, his mother, grandmother, aunties, himself, Métis and Cree ancestors. He tells stories of contemporaneous kin from the specific location of the Prairie Provinces, and to those of the diasporic generations scattered after the Riel Resistances. As discussed in the previous chapters, it is not only crucial to create a spatial and ideological platform for Native voices in Canada, but it is also imperative to tackle and displace sources of racist bigotry in order to disrupt the trajectory of destruction of Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty through colonialist misinformation and cant.

Scofield's memoir *Thunder Through My Veins (Thunder)* like Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*, integrates Canadian Native and settler history with full or partial personal narratives.<sup>40</sup> Campbell, Culleton Mosionier, and Scofield all interweave their individual stories with that of their Métis community's historical relationship with the colonialist Canadian government's nation building strategies and chronicle the intergenerational damage on Métis families and communities. In a separate context, Anne E. Goldman describes the relationship between history and the autobiography that gives equal weight to academic accounts and the personal narrative, thereby redefining history "as a contingent phenomenon, constructed, and constructed differently, by the very individual subjects it has in more scholarly philosophical accounts found wanting in authority." ("Autobiography", 295) Goldman argues that this fusion invests "daily life with the attention and dignity typically accorded only to the sweeping changes of governments or the rise and fall of civilizations, 'history' in this formulation is twin to life history, not the master narrative engineered to supplant it." ("Autobiography", 295) Arnold Krupat, theorizing on the writing of autobiography in relation to Native

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<sup>40</sup> Scofield credits Campbell and Culleton Mosionier for inspiring him to write and giving him a sense of "something larger than myself, something more profound than the pain, fear, and anger. They led me to a place of belonging, a permanent home where I have found a voice to speak with." (*Thunder*, xv)

American “tradition” maintains that “the self most typically is not constituted by the achievement of a distinctive, special voice that separates it from others, but, rather, by the achievement of a particular placement in relation to the many voices without which it could not exist.” (*Voices*, 133-34) In their introduction to *I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers*, Krupat and Brian Swann, as joint-editors quote, without identifying her, a poet included in the anthology, who in her cover letter with her contribution writes: “You should realize that focusing so intently on oneself like that and blithering on about your own life and thoughts is very bad form for Indians. [...] I grew up and continue to live among people who penalize you for talking about yourself and going on endlessly about your struggles.” (*I Tell You*, xii) However, as Swann and Krupat point out, while “a sense of awkwardness and embarrassment at being asked to write about oneself is a deeply traditional feeling for Native Americans”, it is “important to recall that whatever they may have in common as “Indians,” there are also differences among them both culturally and individually.” (xii) Swann and Krupat’s reference to the specific nullifies their generalizations over Native epistemological approach to the “I” of the autobiographical. Scofield points out in the conclusion to *Thunder* that he is “neither unique nor different. My story, in one way or another, has been told hundreds of times and will be told again and again. As long as our stories continue, so will the healing.” (*Thunder*, 202) The individual in the collective is important in telling stories that heal through the maintenance, and indeed the creation, of community through common experience. As Native autobiography on both sides of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel has exponentially contributed to the changes in the landscape of Indigenous writing since Krupat and Swann wrote the above quotes in the mid 1980s, it is fitting to refer to

Deanna Reder, the Cree-Métis scholar, who in 2002 proposed an allegory to “describe Native autobiography (including autobiographical fiction) in Canada”:

...First Nations autobiography ought to be seen as fireweed, the textual equivalent of the relentlessly enduring perennial that is first to reappear in earth, scarred by fire, ironically spreading ‘like wildfire.’ [...] While Canadian Native autobiography grows out of many different, disturbed landscapes, beautiful and relentlessly enduring, its beauty does not celebrate the destruction of the fire but is undeniably the result of it. (“Stories of Destruction”, 277)

In *Thunder*, Scofield traces the recovery of his Métis, Cree, Scottish, English, and French heritage. Scofield’s memoir explores the in-betweenness of Métis existence in Canada – the straddling of two cultures as a non-Indian, non-white and non-straight man. The pain and shame of his Métis identity experienced while in pursuit of a physical and spiritual home and a sense of belonging is intensified by his gay identity in a homophobic and racist society. Homophobia in Canada’s dominant society is echoed in some Native thinking post contact with European Christian doctrine.<sup>41</sup> In deviation of the “norm” and privilege of white and straight, Scofield says that during his first experimentation with writing he produced “short erotic stories that had nothing to do with being Native, but being gay.” (*Thunder*, 189) He credits these stories with “helping me to express my desires, poetic sensibilities, and ultimately the fusion of two voices that would reflect my spirit distinctly” (189). He was also anxious that the evident adoption of colonial homophobia by many Native people would place him outside the “norm” of Indian and Métis heterosexuality and “that being gay had somehow destroyed [his] place in the Native community.” “I feared my writing would be less credible if I ‘came out’”, he explains, “and I would bring shame

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<sup>41</sup> Some bands and tribes use the term “Two-Spirit”; others use tribal specific terms, and still others use GLBTQ, an umbrella term referring to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer individuals. Gilbert Deschamps, coordinator of the Mino-B’maadiziwin Project, writes, “Before first contact with the Europeans, First Nations people across Turtle Island recognized the special people given the responsibility of carrying two spirits. Very often we were the visionaries, healers, the medicine people.” (Deschamps, 1) For Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee), using the term Two-Spirit “helps us decolonize our bodies and minds from the homophobic, sexist, transphobic, and racist ideologies that are entrenched in European occupation of Turtle Island.” (“Call Me Brother”, 224)

upon myself and those who mentored me.” (*Thunder*, 189) Qwo-Li Driskill contended in 2003 that “Scofield’s poetry cannot simply be seen as ‘Native,’ ‘Queer,’ ‘urban,’ ‘Canadian,’ or any of the other words one might want to use to describe it”, arguing instead that his “work must be understood within the complexities of overlapping identities” (“Call Me Brother”, 223). Driskill notes that having a Métis identity “often means to feel at war with your own identity. The frustration with feeling otherized by Native communities as a Métis person is also a frustration with a racist, colonial and Indian-hating culture that otherizes him for being Indian.” (231) Throughout his writing, Scofield weaves together his poetic investigations into the diverse strands of his identity that Driskill refers to, including the subsequent discovery that his late father, whom he never met, was Jewish. He explores this fact in *Singing Home the Bones*, published in 2005, drawing a parallel between Jewish and Native genocide and diasporas. On this level, Scofield’s work may be problematized by trying to understand it “within the complexities of overlapping identities”. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I shall focus on Scofield’s reflection on and reconciliation with his Métis identity and, specifically, the function that his historical knowledge of Riel and the Métis Resistances performs in bringing about the healing of an inherited shame about his Métis identity which ultimately leads to his sense of “coming home.”

In the epigraph that prefaces his memoir, Scofield reproduces the poem “Between Sides” from his first collection *The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel*, which asks where the writer belongs. As a grey-eyed Métis, and with skin that is neither light nor dark enough to identify as either white or Native, Scofield challenges the censure from “authentic” physically identifiable Natives of dark skin and eyes, registered band members, and Euro-Canadian judgement:

So why those disgusted stares?  
I speak the language

Eat my bannock with lard

I am not without history Half breed labour built  
this country defending my blood has become a  
life-long occupation

White people have their own ideas  
How a real Indian should look  
In the city or on the screen

I've already worked past that came back to the  
circle my way is not the Indian way or white way

I move in-between  
Careful not to shame either side (*Gathering*, 81. Lines, 7-19)

In asking, both of himself and his detractors, the question regarding where he belongs – with a marked exasperation at the necessity of a “life-long occupation” of “defending [his] blood” against stereotypes – Scofield progresses through the poem and arrives at the forceful conclusion that he is “in between” Indian and white cultures, and that he and his Métis communities have a justified and an honourable place in Native and Euro-Canadian history and culture. Scofield references the circle of the medicine wheel that many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people employ to denote wholeness, inclusion, femaleness, eternity and spiritual reference to the sun and the moon. In his memoir, Scofield writes of the structure of his first collection of poems as “focusing more on a Métis sensibility”. He adds: “I wanted a spiritual element to the book and looked to the Medicine Wheel as a sort of map. The directions, *North*, *South*, *East*, and *West*, became sections in which I was able to chart my spiritual and healing journey.” (*Thunder*, 183) Moreover, the double circle of the infinity symbol (∞) employed on the Métis flag represents two meanings; the joining of the two cultures of European and Native peoples, and that the Métis culture and people shall endure to infinity. In “Between Sides” Scofield conveys his struggle to reconcile with, and defend, his Métis identity whilst commemorating and honouring



the unique position and perspective that the Métis have in and on Canadian historical, social, and cultural politics.

In the Foreword to *Thunder*, Scofield describes the memory of the homes he grew up in as “loom[ing] like misshapen rocks, jagged with the indecipherable ghosts of my childhood which to this day remain so much a part of me.” (*Thunder*, xiii) However, it is the homes that he describes as having “faded over time, submerged in that river of my blood that has always been home”, that signal a differential between memories of direct experience and that of accumulative, ancestral, communal experience. The theoretical contentious terms: racial memory, blood memory, or in Chadwick Allen’s coinage “blood narrative” (*Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary Activist Texts*), continues to engender intense deliberations in the context of “authenticity” of Indigenous identity. In his influential text Allen discusses N. Scott Momaday’s “memory in the blood” in the latter’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The House Made of Dawn*, and, as Allen notes, it is a theme that “is developed in all of his subsequent works to date” (*Blood*, 93). In *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday writes of following the “ancient trail” of his Kiowa ancestors before, during, and after their forced removal from ancient lands to the final location of his grandmother’s grave:

Though she lived out her long life in the shadow of Rainy Mountain, the immense landscape of the continental interior – all of its seasons and sounds – lay like memory in her blood. She could tell of the Crows, whom she had never seen, and of the Black Hills, where she had never been. (*House*, 114)

Krupat takes acerbic exception to Momaday’s phrase “memory in her blood” calling it “absurdly racist” and claiming that “there is no such thing as memory in the blood” (*Voice in the Margin*, 13). However, as Allen points out, Momaday’s term “achieves tropic power by blurring distinctions between racial identity and narrative.” (*Blood*, 178) Allen sees Momaday’s trope as “an obvious appropriation and redeployment of

the U.S. government's attempt to systemize and regulate Indian identities through tabulations of blood quantum." (178) Further, Allen identifies reclamation of the authority to self-identify in Momaday's "provocative juxtaposition of *blood* and *memory* [that] transforms that taxonomy of delegitimization through genetic mixing into an authenticating genealogy of stories and storytelling. Blood memory redefines Indian authenticity in terms of imaginative re-collecting and remembering." (Emphasis original, *Blood*, 178). In response to what he calls Krupat's "erroneous and misguided criticism", Jace Weaver states that tribal communal events cannot be forgotten "not because of some genetic determinism but because its importance to heritage and identity are passed down through story from generation to generation. I would contend that what writers like Momaday and Allen mean is the multiplicity of cultural codes that are learned and go toward shaping one's identity." (*That the People Might Live*, 7) Scofield's employment of the principle of memory in the "blood" and "bones" is, I argue, in keeping with that of Momaday's and Allen's use and understanding of the trope, respectively, functioning as an expression of the Native self, and as a repositioning within the current debates of identity and band membership based on the Government of Canada's – which some bands continue to adhere to – requisite of proven blood quantum. Here the phrase underlines the need to restore ancestral, generational continuance and entrustment of specific Indigenous communities' knowledge built on enduring relationship with historic lands, and identity through storytelling. Crucially, ancestral histories told through contemporary narratives are part of a collective memory, are living memories, and are a rejuvenation of embodied memories.

As an adult, Scofield is able to trace his ancestral lineage back five generations to the Red River Settlement. In *Thunder*, the poet writes that he "grew up in a world

of half-truths and broken blood ties” (*Thunder*, 6) and that his childhood confusion and discord over his cultural heritage and identity is the result of his maternal grandfather’s residual shame of the defeat of the Riel Resistances, the loss of ancestral land, and the consequential secrecy, shared by the majority of his family, over their Métis connections. Scofield’s Métis legacy, customarily passed on to descendants through intergenerational storytelling, is disrupted by the internalization of racist rhetoric and characterization, and government census taking. Scofield relies on written documents in the form of letters “from various relatives, marriage, birth and death certificates” (7) to retrieve ancestral history and stories. The letters “from various relatives” he consults are a continuation of established storytelling codes and practices. However, Scofield also reclaims individual and communal stories within governmental documents that are a colonial narrative of dehumanizing bureaucracy intent on assimilation and disinterested in the specifics of band kinship intricacies. In the case of an appalling number of Native communal histories, not being in situ when the government census agents came to call meant the loss of “authentic” Native identity.<sup>42</sup> Further, many Native women never appeared on government records except as “wife of”, and consequently, without communal storytelling, recovery of

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<sup>42</sup> Researching the branching strands of my ancestors, preceding my paternal Cree grandmother, I found in *Archives Canada* documents from Canada’s Department of the Interior: North West Half-Breed Commission, of 1885, and the scrip certificates issued to my great-grandmother, Marguerite Allary, and great-great grandfather André Allary in September, 1885 – two months before Riel’s execution. The issuing of \$240 required a signed statement that read: “I will take a scrip for \$240; I have lived here [Willow Bunch via Moose Jaw] continuously since 15<sup>th</sup> March last & I have taken no part directly or indirectly in the recent rebellion.” (Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN no 1497186). Neither of these relatives was literate and it is not clear whether either spoke English as well as their first language of French; their X mark obfuscates their understanding and therefore the level of consent to accept \$240 in lieu of 240 acres of territory represented in these documents. Scott Lyons, in *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*, makes the case that there was an element of Native agency in the signing of treaties between Indians and Americans in the nineteenth century, and that it is patronising to assume that “the Americans “forced” them to sign treaties “they didn’t understand” and were “broken anyway” (127). Lyons writes that he is “arguing that at least on some level Indians who signed treaties were making a choice to modernize and nationalize.” (127) This is emphatically not the case in the signing of scrip certificates in the North West; between the “choices” of accepting land – that was typically far-flung from ancestral land in order to separate geographically and dissolve the Métis Nation – or money, was a contrived option offered to a mainly destitute people, many of whom were resisting inflexible policies that restricted title to land.

countless women's "official" existences would be hopeless.<sup>43</sup> Neal McLeod, the Cree poet and scholar, remarks in the context of Cree narrative memory and discourse that contemporary Cree voices connect "to the stories and embodied experience of the ancestors." ("Cree Poetic Discourse", 121) McLeod points out that the Cree "narrative memory is essentially open-ended" and that the "storytellers, *kâ-mamâhtâwisiwak*, engaged in this process open up new possibilities of narratives in light of new experiences, recovering old voice echoes lost due to colonialism, and discovering new understandings of narratives due to intra-narrative dialogue (*âniskwâpitamâcimowin*: 'the act of inter-textual connecting')." (117) Through an "intra-narrative dialogue" of government archives and generational storytelling, Scofield layers and retrieves the narrative story of Métis/Cree history that is both independent and entwined with a Euro-Canadian historiography.

The secrecy of his grandfather's life is, indeed, as Scofield contends, "reflective of that time in Canadian history when there were few, if any, opportunities for those of mixed ancestry" (*Thunder*, 7). Official documentation of a "halfbreed" identity dwindled ever more rapidly after Riel's execution. The lack of a close affiliation to Scofield's Métis community and kin created a disruption to the narrative of family story-keeping and telling; until the poet reconnected with his maternal grandmother's "recollections" of their family history – and was able to expand and create kinship ties with those outside his immediate family. Scofield struggled with "the price of silence" that "deeply affected each generation of my family." (11) Throughout his work,

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<sup>43</sup> Walter J. Ong points out that the importance and integrity of oral testimony over the written was recognized in European courts before the opposite was taken to be true. Citing a case of an English customs dispute in 1127, Ong writes that the juries were selected from both sides of the dispute to testify, and that each: "juror swore that, as 'I have received from my ancestors, and I have seen and heard from my youth' [...] They were publicly remembering what others before them remembered [...] Witnesses were *prima facie* more credible than texts because they could be challenged and made to defend their statements, whereas texts could not." (*Orality*, 96) Citing Ong's findings is not to enter into the debate – for which there is a lack of space in this thesis – over the problematic binary and historical trajectory of Native oral and written storytelling.

Scotfield writes of honouring, recovering and heeding the unheard voices of his ancestors, in particular, the un-recorded, non-documented Cree and Métis women who came before. Moreover, Scotfield uncovers his own voice, abandoning the comparative safety of a “refuge in silence”, the title of his sixth chapter in *Thunder*. *Kipocihkân*, the title of his last collection of poetry to date, is Cree slang for “someone who is unable to talk; a mute.” (*Kipocihkân*, 5) Scotfield’s published texts demonstrate an increasing use of the Cree language and terms that he chooses to gloss. When asked in an interview with Robert Ouellette why he uses the Cree language in his poems, Scotfield explained that he grew up with the Cree language, having been taught by an Aunty who spoke Cree fluently, and although he regards himself as “not fluent, fluent in a conversational way, I’ve always written a lot in Cree, whether those are poems that have started to come to me in Cree, staying true to the spirit of the poem, I will write it in Cree.” (Ouellette, *Interview*) Referring to the poem entitled “A Settler’s Almanac” in *Louis: The Heretic Poems*, Scotfield points out that he quotes, verbatim, from the almanac issued to prospective European settlers, “so that they may know what to expect in those regions of Canada lying west of the Ontario border” (*Louis: Heretic Poems*, 47). Each section of advice from the almanac is followed by a counter narrative from the oratorical “last great speeches” of the Saskatchewan based Cree Chiefs Poundmaker, Big Bear, and Starblanket between 1878-1887:

***Who Should Go to Canada:***

Canada is a healthy country, but not a land that all classes should go to in the hope of doing well. Man cannot live in idleness there, any more than anywhere else. [...] The Canadians are a nation of workers; they hate a lazy man.

The old years leave us.  
The famine year is coming.

Already I see the ribs of my grandchildren.

They do not play in our land.

It is said to be idle, kikâwînaw-askî.  
We are said to be lazy

*Our Mother Earth*

Like the last leaves of summer.  
I have considerations;

niwekimakanak, my wives  
niawâsisak, my children

nôsisimak, my grandchildren  
niayisiniwak, my people

âsay nohtehkataynân.  
Already we are hungry

There is gold in the street.  
The white men are in good health.

- Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear), Chief of the Plains Cree (*Louis*, 48. Lines 1-16).

The Euro-centric perception of land not exploited for monetary gain as “idle” is extended to the Indigenous population who are seen as too “lazy” to have identified and acted on the riches to be utilized. Without a Native counter narrative, historical and cultural documentation and texts such as this settler seeking almanac, dominate and, indeed, exorcize Native histories. This domination is not of the past; the Canadian political and cultural discursive has yet to include a balance of voices in relation to contemporary political and social inequities between First Nations and Euro-Canadians. A recent statistical report that half of status First Nations children live in poverty, for example, has been met with reactionary responses, from the government and some of the general public, questioning why Natives cannot seem to take care of themselves and with suggestions that they should ‘pull themselves up by their bootstraps’, instead of questioning how Canadian nation building is still impoverishing and displacing First Nations people. In Scofield’s poem, four sections advising potential settlers that include: “The Best Classes to Emigrate”, “How to

Reach Canada”, “Cost of Passages to Canada”, and a table of temperature and average rainfall in the area of the “Newly Completed Canadian Pacific Railway” are quoted from the original almanac. (50-54) These segments that offer practical advice in a prosaic style to would-be-settlers are followed by the moving and poetic speeches of the Cree Chiefs, as if in answer to the information presented to the settlers. Scofield clarifies that the reaction of the chiefs is “my poetics, but their responses [...] and of course they would be talking in Cree.” (Ouelette, *Interview*) However, it is Scofield’s use of a glossed Cree that emphasizes a pre-contact dominion over Indigenous lands that is underpinned by a linguistic sovereignty. Susan Gingell when discussing the poems of Neil McLeod, who often uses titles that employ un-glossed Cree words, argues that his use of Cree “goes some way to redressing the imbalance between the dominant English and the *nêhiyawêwin* [the Cree language], an imbalance produced by colonial governance [...]; his use of *nêhiyawêwin* has the power to confront those who don’t know Cree with reminders that they are on territory originally held by others” (Emphasis original. “Lips’ Inking”, 27). Craig S. Womack, in his essay examining tribal and band identities in the context of a theoretical analysis of “American Indian experience” that is “mediated by the slippery effects of language” (and interpretation) (“Theorizing”, 354), considers the debates over the use of English versus Native languages to be “false binaries [that] are corrosive” (358). Womack sees these binaries as politically and theoretically problematic, to say the least: “arguments for saving Native languages, which are a central tribal issue of grave importance, can be made in reference to the integrity, excellence, and value of indigenous languages” (405). He argues that the functions of both Native and English languages can be measured by the same standards, without:

...denigrating English itself, a language hugely important to us. Native languages should be saved because they are beautiful and of great intrinsic worth, not

because of the way they compare to an English that is supposedly inferior for conveying Indian ideas. [...] Indian languages, Indian experiences, Indian perspectives can, in fact, be claimed by Indians without relying on arguments of isolation, purity, incommensurability. They are Indian because Native peoples, like all peoples, have the right to speak, to teach languages, to claim experiences, to articulate perspectives. (“Theorizing”, 405)

Qwo-Li Driskill regards Scofield’s use of Cree as a “radical act, especially considering the violent history that means many of our languages are endangered or not spoken at all. By using Cree in his work, Scofield encourages other Native poets to use our Native languages in our writing and lives.” (“Call Me Brother”, 223) I agree with Driskill’s assessment of the potential effect of Scofield’s communication in Cree with his readers, Native and non-Native – the latter who, possibly, could be enticed into further engagement with Native texts or perhaps even be inspired to learn the Cree language themselves. Scofield states that he “strove to create poems that were highly lyrical: songs that were rich with the images of the northern landscape and Cree language.” (*Thunder*, 195) The use of Cree by Scofield is, indeed, a political act, primarily in the context of Métis, Cree and other Native peoples’ relationship with ancestral land, which Bonita Lawrence points out, is fundamental to Indigenous identity: “[w]ithin Indigenous traditions, land is central to the survival of the people as peoples. For most of the Indigenous nations, their languages are intricately linked to the land itself.” (Emphasis original. “*Real*” *Indians*, 38) The question whether language and stories connect Native people to the land was played out in the Supreme Court of British Columbia in *Delgamuukw v. The Queen*, 1984-1997, in a claim filed by 35 Gitksan and 13 Wet’suwet’en Chiefs over ownership and jurisdiction of property and resources on ancestral – but non-treaty – lands in northwest British Columbia. In a discussion between the bands and government foresters who claimed the right to log on traditional Gitksan land, a Gitksan elder asked “If this is your land, where are your stories?” (Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land*, 1)



In his foreword to *Thunder*, Scofield wrote that the thunder referenced in his title is translated from a Cree creation story that “tell[s] of the sacredness and power of the spirit world” and his story, “like all stories, songs, dances, or any acts of creation, comes from the Thunderers, the Spirit-keepers of the West.” (*Thunder*, xv) Jack Jacobs (Haudenosaunee) explains that “the Thunderers are often referred to as our Grandfathers, being a common description in a relationship with the people. Everything in the ‘Aboriginal World’ is related or has a relationship with the other.” (“The Thunderers”, 2) The intricacy and inclusiveness of the relationships between all human beings and the natural world, as understood by “most Native people in North America”, is expressed through the common phrase, “all my relations”. That phrase is decoded by Thomas King who describes “the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined” and explains that this “world of relationships is described through language and literature.” (*All My Relations*, ix) In his foreword, Scofield concluded that his eventual understanding of the relationship, through storytelling, between the Métis and the landscape of the prairies – and the specific culture that is in and of this landscape – of his Métis and Cree ancestors, allowed him to take possession of his Métis identity. He stresses that he does not speak for any particular community, even though his:

...ancestral and spiritual homeland, is among the scrub poplar and wolf willow rustling along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River, the fiddle as it echoes through the empty coulees at Batoche<sup>44</sup> – the very place where my ancestors fought to keep our nation alive. [...] The Thunderers of my great-great-grandmothers flourish in my veins, rumble from somewhere deep within.  
(*Thunder*, xvi)

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<sup>44</sup> The Battle of Batoche, explored in Chapter One, is the site of Riel’s surrender when the Métis were outnumbered and defeated (in their only defeat of the 1885 uprising) by the Canadian militia, led by General Frederick Dobson Middleton.

Scofield's work is located in the honouring of his "spiritual home", and of his mothers, grandmothers, great-great grandmothers – biological and adopted – in an infinite spiral, connecting him to Métis land, language, and history.

### **Storying the Ancestors: Making Relations**

Old women told the stories for didactic purposes. The stories provided the tellers and listeners with a cognitive map which allowed the participants to negotiate their way through the world.

Neil McLeod (*Coming Home*, 52)

From every corner  
Of the land, from all sides,  
In every manner,  
Bring me good friends, good guides.

Louis Riel (*Collected*, 409)

Scofield writes of his "hunger to unearth my grandfather's legacy, my mother's inheritance" in order to uncover, recover and give voice to the "secrecy" that he identified as the site of intergenerational damage to his family. He discovered that his maternal great-great grandmother "was a Cree woman whose ancestors probably came from Saskatchewan or Manitoba" and, most likely was "the country wife" of a Hudson's Bay factor." (*Thunder*, 7) Scofield writes that their daughter, his great-grandmother Ida May, "took up with a French half-breed farmhand and trapper, Johnny Custer" and "had my Grandfather Wilfred George and another girl and boy." (7) The importance of Scofield's research into the history of his lineage, and the publishing of his findings, can be seen as a form of resistance to government policies with genocidal intentions toward Métis identity, culture, and sovereignty. Scofield stories his ancestors and communities into the mainstream Canadian historical discourse, recovers a connection with his community, and acquires an understanding

and pride in his Métis culture that centuries of a colonial ethos disrupted by encouraging shame in a Native identity. In *Singing Home the Bones*, published in 2005, six years after the publication of his autobiography, Scofield recovers the names and partial histories of his great-grandmother Ida M. Scofield, his great-great-great-grandmother Mary Mathilde Henderson, and his great-great-great-grandmother Margaret Whitford. In the notes to his poem “Prayer Song For The Returning of Names and Sons”, Scofield documents the findings of his research into the records of the Hudson’s Bay Company archives to retrieve details of his maternal ancestors. He finds “meticulous” data on his grandfathers who migrated from the Orkney Islands and London to work for HBC in the “mid-to late 1700s” (*Singing*, 106). The HBC information on his English ancestor, James Peter Whitford, include: where he landed on his arrival – York Factory, HBC’S principal post on the South Western shore of Hudson’s Bay in north-western Manitoba – “his full name, the parish he belonged to in London, the date he entered service, his various appointments and positions, the dates of his postings and his death on May 5, 1818 at Red River Settlement.” (106) In contrast, scant information of his “country wife”, which is merely tagged on to that of her husband’s, is documented: “*Wife: Sarah, an Indian woman. Married pre-1795 at Severn (?) Buried 27 Apr. 1845, 70 years old, at Upper Church.*” (106) The poem itself is prefaced with an epigraph of a Cree prayer song, taught to Scofield by his adopted brother Dale Awasis from the Thunderchild First Nation, which ceremonially calls to and honours by naming, the Cree and Métis “women of my blood” (107). It is necessary to quote the poem at length (if not in its entirety) to be able to appreciate the rhythms of repetition that Scofield uses to call to and invoke his ancestors through their names and ‘sing home the bones’ of their appropriated sons.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> In his notes on the poem, Scofield explains how HBC’s chief factors sons were frequently sent to

Â-haw, ni-châpanak Charlotte,  
Sarah, Mary ekwa Christiana.  
â-haw,

*an invocation, my ancestral grandmothers  
and*

kayâ ochi nikâwîmahk

*my mothers of long ago*

natohta  
my song, nikamowin

*listen  
the song*

âw,  
this song I am singing

to give you back  
the polished swan bones,

the drawing stone, the pounding  
choke cherry stone, âw

the spirit of your iskwew  
names, the ones

*woman*

not birthed from the belly  
of their ships, not taken  
from their nanitowimasinahikan,

*bible*

ni-châpanak Charlotte,  
Sarah, Mary

ekwa Christ-i-ana,  
these are the names

I've thrown back across the water  
I've given back (*Singing*, 29-30. Lines, 1-33)

The denouement of the poem emphasizes the reclamation of Scofield's ancestors'

Native identity through a denunciation of their colonial, "nanitowimasinahikan" given  
name that serves to erode Indigenous specificities, and connect the lost sons to their  
mothers and ancestral lands:

the prayer song  
I am singing

to bring back  
your stolen sons

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England or Scotland to be formally educated and that often they remained in Great Britain "thus  
leaving behind any connection to their mothers and to their Cree or Ojibway heritage." (*Singing*, 107)

whose sons and sons  
and their missing bones

are unsung geese  
lost in a country

across the water  
ni-châpanak

I've thrown back  
your names;

nâmoŷa kîŷawaw  
Charlotte, Sarah, Mary

*you are not*

ekawa Christina.  
nâmoŷa kîŷawaw mônîŷaskwewak  
(*Singing*, 32. Lines, 57-72)

*and  
you are not white women*

Charlotte, Sarah, Mary, and Christina “are not” their Christian names and they “are not white women” who have lost their Native identities in the face of colonial interference. This prayer of “singing home the bone” and names of his ancestors is a healing and a recovery of those who have been displaced through colonialist practices of cultural genocide and a process of reclaiming ‘off the record’ untold stories that represent relational association to land, language and Métis and Cree communal knowledge.

Scofield’s childhood with his mother (who struggled with alcoholism, undiagnosed lupus, and depression) was one of physical, communal, historical and spiritual displacement and marginalization that effectively suppressed agency and voice. Retrospectively examining the many disruptions in his childhood – recalling how he lived in numerous rural and urban settings, as well as two placements in foster homes – Scofield writes that despite the damaging absence of a clear Métis identity, he realized that it was the result of the good intentions of his maternal grandfather’s attempts to provide a “better life for my mom and aunts, at least as far as racism was

concerned”, by distancing them from a “shameful” Métis connection. (*Thunder*, 11)

The uncertainties of an unstable home-life due to his mother’s depression and alcoholism that resulted in her incarceration in various hospitals and mental institutions left Scofield vulnerable to shifting vagaries of emotional and physical support. Life in his first home in the Yukon with his mother and her partner, Tommy, was relatively settled until his mother was crippled by headaches caused by her lupus, misdiagnosed as mental illness, and was sent to a psychiatric hospital in Edmonton – where, Scofield learns years later, she had received more than seventy shock treatments. Tommy was unable to cope with both his job and domestic duties and as a result, Scofield was sent for short consecutive periods to live with abusive neighbours: Tommy’s work friends, his grandmother, and finally his Aunty Sandra in Washington. After years of feeling repeatedly abandoned, Scofield was eventually reunited with his mother with whom he moved to British Columbia, finding a small apartment where “a lot of single mothers on welfare lived [...] as well as numerous alcoholics and drug addicts.” (*Thunder*, 31) The excessive number of shock treatments his mother received caused severe memory loss to the point of amnesia, and she forgot many events in her life (a cruel physical echo of successive Canadian governments’ theft of Métis land, community, cultural and political history). At one point, she temporarily lost memory of giving birth to a son. In his poem entitled “Red Devil” in his collection *I Knew Two Métis Women* – a biographical celebration of his mother Dorothy and aunty Georgina – Scofield recalls a puppet/doll’s head Dorothy had made while in the hospital:

She made him  
in the loony bin  
after the dreams started –

just the head, a goat’s head  
with hollow eyes,

a pointed chin  
and two perfect horns.

Still  
his hooves clomped  
at night  
and his tail flickered  
at the foot of her bed,  
snakes slithering  
from his mouth.

The doctors diagnosed  
delusions of Christian guilt,  
hooked electrodes to her head  
so angels would sing,  
sweep their wings  
where lizards crawled.

But God saw everything –

the silver sparks  
eating up her brain, chewing  
the memories  
so when the social worker  
shoved a form under her nose,  
told her to sign me away,  
he worked her lips  
into the shape of no

and the devil laughed  
at how they saved her tongue  
with a mouthguard.

Two years later  
she came to get me.

*(I Knew Two, 67-69. Lines, 1-34)*

The poem's title, "Red Devil", is a mordant coupling of the words "red", a pejorative reference to First Nations people, with the word "devil", the Christian personification of evil. As a child Scofield was told, facetiously, that half-breed meant "half devil and half angel" (*Thunder*, 42) positioning his Native heritage as evil and his white as angelic.<sup>46</sup> The head created by Dorothy correlates with Christian images of the devil:

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<sup>46</sup> In his book of the history of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris, Dobbin relates the story of the Scottish settler at Red River, James Dreaver, who was told by a Catholic priest that the dark skinned inhabitants

a goats head, horns, with an imagined tail and hooves. However, I read Scofield's representation of this essence or spirit as that of the moral ambiguity of the many trickster characters of disparate Native stories, and not of the unambiguous Christian binary concept of good and evil. The treatment of electric shock therapy for misdiagnosed "Christian guilt" by Dorothy's doctors is, I argue, Scofield's poetic interpretation of the pervading Euro-Christian "wings" and voices where "angels would sing" by overshadowing Native spiritualities that are connected to the land "where lizards crawled" (67. Lines, 16-20). But this is a poem of hope and continuance. In spite of her memories being under assault from "the silver sparks", Dorothy is assisted by the "God who saw everything" who enables her to retain enough autonomy to be able to decline a consent to hand over her son to a social worker, and eventually reclaim him. (68. Lines, 21-22) The "devil"/trickster is amused by the hospital staff's paradoxical efforts to prevent her from biting her tongue during the shock therapies, given that the administration of these therapies facilitates a suppression of memories and therefore voice and story.

On her release from the psychiatric hospital, Scofield's mother, self-medicated with alcohol, was reported to welfare officials and sent to an alcohol treatment centre for two months. The Métis scholar, Emma LaRocque, states that "forced spatial displacement and subjugation ravage the human spirit" and the abuse of alcohol by Native peoples is "best understood as a symptom of dispossession rather than as some cultural reflex to an alien item." (*Other*, 88) LaRocque believes that following the defeat of the Métis, Louis Riel had been dying of a broken heart before he was tried and hanged, and also believes that "of all the Native peoples who have been dying since the Europeans began invading, a great majority of them have been dying from

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who were "obviously not Indians", were "one-and-a-half-men"; "half Indian, half white and half devil." (*One-And-A-Half*, 5)



broken hearts. The death toll among Native peoples, particularly the gross rate of suicide among Native youth, cannot be explained entirely by cold, sociological facts.”

(88) Sean Kicummah Teuton argues that poverty and its consequential familial and community dysfunctions of “alcoholism, child abuse, suicide, and domestic violence” should be “externalized as a colonial imposition – not internalized as evidence of Indian inferiority.” (*Red Land*, 208) Survival and continuance means breaking the internalization of the colonial trope of congenitally deficient Natives.

Under the care of his grandmother, who had moved into his mother’s apartment while she was being treated, Scofield had his first encounter with Georgina Houle Young; Aunty Georgina. This was a significant meeting and the entryway to the location of his Cree and Métis identity. On their way home from school and approaching the apartment building where they both lived, Scofield and his friend Abby, whom he describes as sharing the same “humiliating shame” of poverty and whom his Grandma called “poor white trash”, they heard a woman “singing an Indian song” (*Thunder*, 35). Scofield stopped and saw an “Indian woman” who calls to the children: “Hey, you kids,” [...] “What did you learn at school today?” (35) Abby’s mother has warned her “not to talk to Indians” so she dismisses Georgina because, as she explains, they are “all drunks you know.” (35) Scofield remembers “feeling angry at what Abby said, but also strangely embarrassed, as if she had attacked me personally.” (35) Abby repeats what she has learned from her mother who herself reiterates what she has absorbed from the Canadian public discursive that reduces Native individuals to negative cultural stereotypes. In his powerfully moving poem, “Conversation With The Poet: Who didn’t know my aunty”, Scofield alternates between relating the reading of a callous poem about an Inuit woman and the stories that his adopted Aunty Georgina (little mother) has told him about her life:

a few years ago                    at a reading  
of erotic poetry  
a poet read a poem  
by another poet  
about a toothless Eskimo woman  
in a bar  
looking for someone, anyone  
to buy her a drink            and  
what she did, what  
that Eskimo woman did for a drink (*Singing*, 55. Lines, 1-10)

Scofield counters the unspecific, unnamed “Eskimo woman” with the particularized experiences of his Auntie Georgina:

Long ago when my aunty was no longer Mean Man’s wife –  
Punching Bag Woman she was called – she had met a moniyâw,  
a white man. He was the one who called her Good Cooking Day  
Woman, or Good Laundry Day Woman, or sometimes, Good  
With The Money Day Woman. (55. Lines, 11-15)

Scofield tells of his aunt’s TB and the loss of her three sons: two through illness and the third in a car accident. The repetition of the first stanza functions as an incantation, and after the last line “about a toothless Eskimo woman”, the poem continues:

who could be:

ni-châpan, Hunting To Feed The Family Woman

*my great-great-grandmother*

who could be:

ni-mâmâ, Holding Up The Walls Woman

*my mother*

who could be:

a kaskitewiyas-iskwew,

*a black woman*

a sekipatwâw-iskwew,

*a Chinese woman*

a moniyâ-iskwew

*a white woman*

running from a white man,  
any man  
into the arms of a poet

in a bar  
looking for someone, anyone  
to buy her a drink (56-57. Lines, 32-45)

Scofield challenges the poets who might have been expected to exhibit rather more insight and instead persecute the vulnerable for entertainment in “a room of white faces, a poetry hall / of uproarious mouths” (60. Lines, 96-97). He equates the judgment by the poets of the Inuit woman with that of the patrons at the bar where she sought a drink, who saw her as “fat, a seal / for the taking / she was dirty, a bag / of muskox bones / crawling with lice / she was dumb, her language / click, click / made people laugh.” (58. Lines, 68-75) The objectification and depersonalized portrayal of the “Eskimo woman” and “what she did / that woman / did for a drink” (55. Lines, 9-10) is answered by Scofield with particularized accounts of his mother and aunty:

I will not say my mothers did not have trouble with drinking or  
they did not lose days keeping the house in order. It is true: they  
had weaknesses here and there, just like other people. (59. Lines, 79-81)

Scofield ends his poem, after a brief allusion to Aunty Georgina’s rape, “the man / who took her like a monument, / step after violent step” (60. Lines, 102-104) with a final, poignant, note:

This is as much as I am able to tell you about my aunty. But there is  
another thing, one more thing you should know: I loved her very much and I still  
think of her whenever I am lonesome. ekosi,  
I am done. (61. Lines, 115-118)

Scofield’s response to the reader and writer poets of this racist, misogynistic poem is an appeal to the failures, or more accurately, the denial of their imaginations, where they might have considered the “toothless Eskimo woman” as someone who loved and has been loved, who has suffered, whose experiences might have been that of a woman of another minority group; a “black woman”, “a Chinese woman” or even that of a “white woman” whom *they* might love, and not separate from the rest of humanity that places her outside the realms of compassion.

The vagueness of Scofield's heritage and the allusions to an underlying suggestion of a Native identity that will not, indeed *cannot*, be verified within his family for fear of social vilification, are signalled in the first chapter when he relates the history and genealogy of his grandparents. Scofield writes that when his Grandfather met and married Grandma Avis, whose parents were early and prosperous settlers in Saskatchewan of Dutch and German/English extraction, he did not tell his wife that he was Native. "It seems odd to me that my grandmother would have never identified him as being Native. Although he was fair-skinned, he had dark eyes and hair, predominant Cree features." (*Thunder*, 9) Speculating that perhaps "she did know or suspect something, but chose to overlook it", (9) Scofield remembers that his grandmother told him that although she was told little about her husband's family, she recalls that after infrequent visits with his brother and sister that were conducted "in private [...] that Grandpa would be quiet and withdrawn for days after. She always wondered about their secrecy but respected it." (9) Scofield's feeling of being "attacked personally" by Abby's insult to "Indians" in general, suggests early memories of connection and association with Nativeness, although he may not consciously recall them. While this calls for a certain amount of speculation on my part, nevertheless, the "secrets" of Scofield's Native lineage within his family could not have been so tightly sealed as to contain or suppress all codes of reference to the Scofield's Native connections and affiliations.

When he was invited for the first time into the apartment of Georgina, who soon "verbally" adopted him in the "Indian way" and instructed him to call her "Ne-ma-sis (my little mother; Aunty)" (43), Scofield was introduced to Cree words and an amalgamation of Cree and European cultural references: beadwork, moccasins,

records, a guitar, and a picture of the Virgin Mary.<sup>47</sup> Simply because Scofield had been influenced by essentialist colonialist textual references as to what physical attributes and cultural practices constitute a Native identity, he was confused by Georgina's appearance and possessions. Sean Kicummah Teuton describes essentialism, in the context of Native epistemology, as presuming "that cultures have an 'essence', an immutable core of identifying characteristics", (*Red Land*, 235, n. 9) that denies a "fluidity of the self" that is problematic for those of plural heritages. (205) Craig Womack asserts that "[e]ssentialism has to do with making universal claims in ahistorical modes" ("Book Length", 6). Interpreting identity as having fixed and static cultural markers in order to draw clear demarcation lines between categorizations is to be unaware of, or to wilfully ignore, the historical process through which they have been created. When Scofield asked Georgina if she is Indian because she "didn't really look like one, not like the Indians in my picture books", (40) she replied "I'm a Cree – a Nay-he-yow!" However, when Scofield is reciprocally asked about his heritage, he writes that he was "suddenly aware that [I] didn't know anything about my background", (41) Georgina answered for him, "I tink you must be an *Awp-pee-tow-koosan*, like me [...] I see it, too, in your mama. [...] Dat's a half-breed. Half dis and half dat." (41-42) Scofield replied that he did not think that this could be true, as he identified with the Indians in his books, "I think I'm a great chief like Sitting Bull and Red Cloud." (42) Georgina did not discourage this fantasy; indeed, she colluded with an amused reply, "Oh, yes, now I can see it." (42) Like Maria Campbell, and the adult Scofield, Georgina reclaims and subverts the

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<sup>47</sup> Scofield creates another strong female relation when he is adopted by Dorothy Francis (Saulteaux) who watches him dance at his first powwow. Feeling out of place by looking "too white", he again doubts his Native identity, but when he dances he impresses and makes an emotional impact on Dorothy – who is celebrated for her work conserving and supporting Native culture – that regardless of the vagueness concerning his Cree-Métis heritage, tells him to call her "Grandma". In addition, Scofield dedicates his collection, *Louis: The Heretic Poems*, to his mother Dorothy and Maria Campbell – whom he calls "Mom Maria". (*Louis*, 6).

term “half-breed” neutralizing its colonialist, derogatory usage; however, she appears to be indefinite about identifying as Métis.<sup>48</sup> As a Cree speaking “half-breed” whose “Nay-he-yow” mother taught her the “Indian” song that Scofield had heard her sing, she pointed out that her “fadder, he was French. [so] I can sing in French, too!”<sup>49</sup> (42) It is unclear in the text whether Georgina was deliberately concealing a Métis identity out of a historic shame of the ‘defeated generations’ after the Riel Resistances, and self-identifying as Cree-half-breed, or Cree, along her mother’s line of descent. Scofield is perhaps emphasizing her Cree identity, in his recollections as a child who had a limited understanding of historical context, in order to stress the shame and confusion he, and previous generations, had over a Métis identity. There is a brief reference to Georgina’s “surprising disapproval” when the teenage Scofield decided that no one would stop him “from finding my tribe” and began attending powwows. Although it is not stated, Georgina’s disapproval possibly stems from her uncertainty regarding why Scofield would want to participate in a traditional Cree event that had not, perhaps, in her experience, been a part of traditional Métis customs.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to separate distinct traditional teachings of the Métis and Cree people because of their deep historical connections, and there are many and varied combinations of self-identifying band relationships that represent kinship ties between the various Cree Nations and the Métis besides Cree-Métis; there are Cree-Saulteaux, Métis-Michif,

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<sup>48</sup> In an interview in 2007, Scofield comments on self-identifying as “half-breed”, “As Métis people that’s how we consider ourselves. We use the term proudly.” (Reid, “The Message”, *Times Colonist*)

<sup>49</sup> The Cree are a matrilineal society, as many clans are/were, pre-colonization. The interference of the Indian Act of 1867, “negatively impacted First Nations women and girls more than any other group” by creating policies that recognized Indian identities and status through patrilineal descent. (Native Women’s Assoc., “Revitalization”, *Issue Paper*)

<sup>50</sup> Contemporary powwows are often inclusive of varied bands, clans and non-Native participants. However there are also exclusive powwows for clan and band members only. During the Riel Resistances and before the Métis defeat, Métis people often attended, participated, and were welcome at powwows. Métis gatherings consists of “jigging”, a complicated dance pattern to the rhythms of fiddle music that amalgamates many different styles, including Scottish and French, that continue to evolve from its approximate inception at around the early to mid eighteenth century. Jigging is also an amalgamation of First Nations footwork, and French and Irish jigs, with some dances that imitate indigenous wild birds of the Prairie Provinces.

Swampy-Cree-Métis, and Plains Cree-Métis, to name a few.<sup>51</sup> Georgina, who did not look like the Indians in “his picture books”, taught Scofield, through storytelling, of their shared history of a Cree heritage. Despite this, one wonders if she also omitted the history of the struggle for a Métis Nation and Métis relationships with ancestral lands. Or if she did include this history, was it not enough to counter the immense weight of racist texts about romanticized Indians and the supposed inferiority of disgraced Métis constructed by the dominant culture?

Georgina taught Scofield fundamental intricacies of “old time medicines: how to prepare and use them, what their names were in Cree, the need to be quiet and respectful when [he] used them”, (44) and of her childhood in northern Alberta and “how her mother taught her to hunt and trap [...] She told me stories about the convent school she attended, the nuns and priests, and all the mischief she and her chum Agnes got into.” (42) In his collection *I Knew Two Métis Women*, Scofield commemorates Aunty Georgina and her friend Agnes’ irrepressible strength, humour, and subversiveness in the residential school they lived in together. In the poem “Oh, Dat Agnes”, Scofield retells the story he has been told by Georgina of when she and Agnes, who were put to work to clean the school’s chapel, wonder “what dah fadder’s always drinkin?” (*I Knew Two*, 21. Line, 13) They experiment by consuming one jug of sacramental wine and then open another, speaking and singing in alternation between Cree words, and Cree and Michif accented English, “I ton’t gare what de say

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Chartrand, Métis Professor of Law, writes of the historical alliances between various First Nations and Métis and Michif people: “In 1868 there had already been a huge gathering of Cree, Michif, Saulteaux, and Nakoda in the area of Regina today. [...] The stories of great patriots and chiefs like *Mistahi Musqua*, *Pia Pot*, and the Métis leader Gabriel Dumont have found their way into the written histories, as have the stories of earlier leaders like *M\_ski-Piton*. Other stories about these leaders are not published but they are known and shared today among the people. In these stories one comes to know about the close relationships our peoples had. The complete stories about the past and *K\_k\_-m\_yahkamikahk* [Cree for: the time when things went wrong] are the heritage of their peoples and they are not widely known.” (Chartrand, *All My Relations*, 15)

/ all dah mooneeyas iskwaysuk keetasay...<sup>52</sup> / Well, dat Agnes / was laughin so hart / she farted an falled over.” (22. Lines, 33-38) Georgina and Agnes are caught by “Sister Tennis” from whom they “gatch hell”, however, Agnes’ father “laughed about it, dough, / toll everyone / we got trunk on Ghrist’s blood.” (23. Lines, 47-59) The bawdy humour in this poem functions as a counterbalance to the pathos of Georgina’s experiences in the school; however the last line of the poem, “An dere was dah dime we...” (23. Line, 52), leads the reader into the poem that follows, “A Jig For Sister”, which tells more explicitly of Georgina’s distressing encounters with “Sister Tennis”:

Aunty got slapped  
one two many times,

yanked around by her hair  
like a rag doll,

squeezed or pinched  
told to hurry up, shut up

in Mass or the dining hall.  
It was that Sister Dennis,

French right to the core  
and mean as a wolverine. (24. Lines, 1-10)

The second line of the poem warns that the malicious treatment of Georgina by Sister Dennis had reached a denouement and that the built up hostility within Georgina was primed for a reaction. The touch paper was lit after Sister Dennis humiliated a young fellow inmate who had started menstruating for the first time:

and Sister dragged her

from the bed, marched her  
up to the alter

in her soiled nightgown,  
pointing and screaming,

“You dirty thing!

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<sup>52</sup> Cree; translated by Scofield as: “All the white girls take down their pants” (*I Knew Two*, 23).



You filthy, filthy girl!” (25. Lines, 20-26)

When Sister Dennis next physically and verbally abused Georgina, she defended herself:

and her hands like a badger’s  
snarled around Sister’s neck,

pushed her to the floor  
so the girls screamed,

“Pukamow, Georgina! Pukamow!”<sup>53</sup> (26. Lines, 39-43)

In spite of a desperate cry for retribution from her contemporaries (and instead of punching her tormenter with her then clenched fist) Georgina opened her hand and slapped her face, thereby practicing a little more restraint than Sister Dennis seemed capable of. When threatened with further punishment by the school’s Mother Superior for “such evil acts” that “wouldn’t be tolerated”, Georgina replied that she was sixteen, and “turning on her moccasined heels” went “cross-jigging out the door.” (27. Lines, 53-57). Scofield’s poetic narrative in these two poems relates Georgina’s stories of resistance to subjugation through her subversive acts that confront the imperialist epistemologies of Canada and its systems of power. Lee Maracle emphasizes that continued domination and occupation necessitate the “[d]estruction and expropriation of knowledge, particularly language, medicine (science) and culture, [and] is a prerequisite for the unabated persecution of pockets of resistance. [...] Loss of power – the negation of choice, as well as legal and cultural victimization – is the hoped-for result. It can never be wholly achieved.” (*I am Woman*, 93-94) It had not been achieved in Georgina’s case; at sixteen, she had reached the age of emancipation and could not be compulsorily kept at the school. Further, “turning on her moccasined heels” and “cross-jigging out the door” signifies that in spite of

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<sup>53</sup> Cree; translated by Scofield as “Hit her! Hit her!” (*I Knew Two*, 27)

acculturation and assimilation policies, Georgina retained dominion over her culture and jiggled out the door to a continuance through the telling, and Scofield's retelling, of her stories.

Scofield remembers learning the Cree language from Georgina, noting "I picked it up quite quickly, as if I'd heard it before, as if the words were buried somewhere within me." (44) Scofield says he had a sense of being transported "to another time and place" when Georgina told Cree stories, of "*We-sak-e-jack*, the First Man, the Trickster" and about "*We-tik-koow*, the cannibal monster who roamed in the bush at night". (43) Neal McLeod writes that "[t]hese old stories mark our bodies with meaning and live on within us, despite colonial encroachments" ("Cree Poetic", 120) and that:

Cree poetic discourse is an old, ancient activity, stretching back to the beginning of Cree consciousness and ceremonies. *mamâhtâwisiwin*, 'tapping into the Great Mystery,' describes this process within the Cree language. [...] Through our dialogue with these older stories (*âniskwâpitamâcimowin*), pathways of understanding are retravelled and indeed expanded. (121)

Teaching Scofield the stories of Cree creation myths, their ancestors' knowledge of hunting and trapping, and numerous generations' experiences of residential schools, Georgina connects him to an accumulative knowledge that continues to expand, thereby incorporating and building on ancient and contemporaneous knowledge between past, present and future generations in the service of continuance. Georgina introduced Scofield to aspects of collective experiences of the Cree of the Prairie Provinces and these were constructive lessons for the valuing and the continuance of Cree and Métis knowledge. However, it is important to note too, that if there was a reflexive omission by Georgina that these cultural teachings *are* a part of Métis knowledge, this would have contributed to the source of Scofield's identity confusion.

Scofield's mother, Dorothy, dated and married the recovering alcoholic Don whom she met at AA meetings, and who became increasingly violent. In time, Don physically abused him and his mother. Scofield immediately recognized Don as Native but when he attempted to share his newly acquired knowledge about the nature and uses of traditional medicines that he had learned from Georgina, Don was uncomfortable and impatient. Presuming that Don would have been interested, and confused because he was not, Scofield says: "But you're an Indian." Don viciously squeezes Scofield's arm and warns him never to "fucking call me that again!" (*Thunder*, 45) Don's violence toward his step-son escalates from this point; beating the Indian out of Scofield in an attempt to extinguish and deny the Indian in himself, Don said that he would no longer tolerate "Indian stuff in the house" (46) and Scofield was forbidden to see Georgina. She later told Scofield that Don was, indeed, Native, and that when she had previously asked him "what tribe he was from", he angrily replied that he was "a Black Scot and God damn proud of it! He huffed off and refused to speak to her again. 'Dem are da worse kinda Indians,' she told me. 'Apples! Red on da outside and white on da inside.'" (48-49) With the temporary loss of Georgina's support, Scofield searched for new kinship ties and relations. Scofield's early friendships at school were with strong girls, like Abby, who defied the marginalized roles they were socially allocated due to their poverty, gender, and/or ethnicity. Scofield began his studies at the local high school and, again, feeling a misfit he sought out and made friends with "other kids like me: kids who came from-fucked up homes or homes where their parents didn't give a damn about them" (*Thunder*, 63). He became close to "the only other Indian in school", Emma, who, like "Abby, [...] was tough-looking and had an attitude to match." (64) Scofield and Emma find common ground in their similar experiences of physical abuse at home, foster

families, and the intrusion of social services in their lives. He felt isolated when Emma was not at school, but when together they were more obvious targets for discriminatory slurs; he was called “chief” and mocked for being with a “tough squaw” (64). With only a slippery grasp on a solid location of where he might belong, Scofield’s convictions were split between a loyalty to the “other Indian” and wanting to be associated and popular with white friends. His sense of dislocation was exacerbated by a “Canadian history in social studies” class when the teacher reads from a textbook that “talked about Indians as if they were all dead or living in a mysterious cave somewhere in the Grand Canyon. By the time we got to the settling of the West and the Northwest Rebellion, I was humiliated.” (64) From the lesson, and not having been exposed to a counter-narrative that would challenge a Euro-Canadian assessment of political history, Scofield asked how:

...could Aunty possibly say we were half-breeds? Louis Riel was crazy and a traitor to the Canadian government. The Métis weren’t Indians at all, but Frenchmen pretending to be Indians. They had no culture or language and nothing to be proud of. At least the Indians, no matter how ragged and poor, had an interesting culture. They had beautiful costumes and danced and sang. They spoke different languages – like Aunty and me – and had medicines and secret knowledge about the spirit world. I decided Aunty must be wrong about us being half-breeds. We were *Nay-he-yow-wuk* – Crees! (*Thunder*, 64-65)

The affirmative power of stories and storytelling is mirrored by its potential as a harmful force. Jo-Ann Episkenew states that as a:

...Métis person, I am intimately aware of the destructive power of stories. I grew up in Winnipeg, once the centre of the Métis homeland, in the 1950’s and ‘60’s, when Indigenous people faced overt personal and systemic racism. Through their stories of the ‘rebellions,’ our teachers taught us that the Métis were traitorous and prone to insanity. Stories taught us that not only our environment but also our very identities make our lives perilous. (*Taking Back*, 13)

Scofield writes that the only “clue” to his identity had been “the mirror and books”, and ruling out various ethnicities he concluded that he “must be Native. But a different kind of Indian – a white Indian like Dustin Hoffman in *Little Big Man*.”

(*Thunder*, 65) Certainly, it was the mirror and books that defined his identity for him, but they also reflected the tidal wave of stereotypes of the dominant society's commodified representations of Native identity in texts and films. However, as an adult who has found his way home through knowledge of the history of the Métis people, he is able to add his Métis voice to the dominant Euro-Canadian discourse. In his collection *Louis: The Heretic Poems*, Scofield answers colonialist accounts of the history of Canadian expansion and political chicanery with a counterbalance by means of two Métis voices, Louis Riel's and his own. Throughout the collection Scofield interweaves his poetry with citations from Riel's diaries and publications. The second segment of the collection, "Le Président / The President", opens with "The Orange Poems", in which Scofield explores the consequences of the immense influx of Orangemen settlers from Upper Canada and the active role they played in the suppression of the Riel Resistances.<sup>54</sup> In the poem entitled "The Revolutionary", Scofield bookends his response (in the mimetic style, if not the vernacular, of Riel) to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald's (1867-1873, 1878-1891) historic reaction to the first Métis uprising, placing it between direct quotes of Macdonald and Riel. The epigraph to the poem is a citation from Macdonald who made evident his feelings and policies toward encroachment of the Red River Settlement:

*The impulsive half-breeds have got spoilt by this émeute [rioting] and must be kept down by a strong hand until they are swamped by the influx of the settlers.*

– Sir John A. Macdonald<sup>55</sup> (Emphasis original. *Louis*, 33)

Scofield, as Riel, counters:

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<sup>54</sup> As covered in Chapter One, the Orange Order was, and is, a Protestant organization that originated in Ireland and Scotland. Established in Canada from 1830, the Orange Order's epicentre was Toronto and its politics anti-French, anti-Catholic, and anti-First Nations people. Settling in the Métis Red River Settlement, they created a discord between the Métis, white English-Canadian settlers, and First Nations communities. The execution of the Orangeman Thomas Scott in 1870 led to Riel's five year banishment from Canada and, ultimately, his hanging as a traitor.

<sup>55</sup> George Stanley includes this statement of Macdonald's in *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions*. ( 95)

Countrymen –

Va chier! I say to him, pointing to all  
the puppets of Parliament,

*go fuck yourself!*

va chier! (33. Lines, 1-4)

In the tenth and eleventh stanzas, Scofield blends the Cree and English languages with  
Christian and Native spiritual incantations in a poetic and political plea:

Now let us pray:  
â-haw kisê-manitow  
*O Great Spirit*  
mâmaw-ôhtawîmaw  
*Our Father*  
who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

â-haw kisê-manitow  
mâmaw-ôhtawîmaw  
give us this day our daily oranges;  
and forgive them their trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into war.  
but deliver us from theft. (34. Lines, 28-35)

In the two stanzas above, Scofield references Riel's religious pacifism that asks  
forgiveness for the Orangemen who trespass on Métis land and autonomy. Riel also  
appeals to Macdonald who has the power to avoid conflict if he would prohibit the  
theft of Métis land by Orangemen settlers. Scofield ends the poem with the last stanza  
of Riel's ode, "The French-Canadian-Métis":

*Manitoba, still a sapling,  
Dibbled by deft hands in firm ground,  
With sacerdotal nurturing  
Its taproot is secure and sound.*<sup>56</sup> (34. Lines, 42-45)

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<sup>56</sup> This is a significant analogy. Riel is saying that like the taproot, which when pulled the root stays in the ground and resprouts, the Métis are difficult to transplant.

The continuance of the Métis, in part, lies in access to counter narratives, for both Natives and non-Natives, of Canada's historical nation building. When writing *Thunder Through My Veins*, Scofield said that he was "very, very conscious" of the issues pertaining to "belonging and acceptance and self acceptance". He hoped that his book would be a powerful aid for people who might find it in the school library (unlike his own experience of having no alternative to the dominant discourse available to him), a book that confronts the issues of "[t]he whole history of denial. The whole history of the Métis people. That's all about politics and it's all about histories of shame. [...] Histories of poverty and coming out of disadvantaged environment. This book is the contemporary – if you will – of those politics to date." (Richards, *January Magazine*)

### **"A Voice Cries Out"<sup>57</sup> : The Dark Road Home**

Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement – now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of 'global' media technologies – make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by *culture*, a rather complex issue.

Homi K. Bhabha (*Location*, 172)

Perhaps culture is ultimately about what people do together. It has been suggested that as long as Aboriginal people continue to do things together, there will be Aboriginal cultures alive.

Emma LaRocque (*Restoring*, 170)

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<sup>57</sup> This quote comes from a poem entitled "Une Voix Émue Dans Beauport/ A Voice Cries Out" that was written by Riel in the Beauport Asylum in Quebec when he was living in exile after the 1869-70 Métis resistance. Riel melancholically writes of the betrayal by John A. Macdonald's government, which withdraw its offer of amnesty to Riel over his implication in the execution of the Orangeman Thomas Scott, and the perfidy of Macdonald over the settlement in the Manitoba Act agreeing to the terms of the Métis Nation regarding Métis land rights and the promise of Métis political autonomy. Riel writes in the second stanza: "Manitoba, forsaken, / Lets (sic) its cry reverberate. / So much has now been taken / God pity my nation's fate!" (*Selected*, 73. Lines, 5-8)

Examining the erosion of Indigenous culture and the loss of languages, the Kahnawake Mohawk scholar and activist, Taiaiake Alfred considers that:

...it is impossible to understand an indigenous reality by focusing on individuals or discrete aspects of culture outside of a community context. However knowledgeable and rooted the individual, one cannot be truly indigenous without the support and inspiration, as well as the reprobation and stress, that a community provides. Ideas transform when they make the journey from the mind of one person into the collective consciousness. And our peoples' reality is communal. (*Peace*, 14)

Scofield's uncertainty over his identity, sense of dislocation, lack of a Native "community context", and the tyranny of his step-father Don – who had himself been damaged by a disconnection with his Native community and by Euro-Canadian systemic racism – led to a suicide attempt and hospitalization in a psychiatric unit. He was encouraged by a Native liaison worker, assigned to help him orientate within the hospital environment, to discover more about his heritage, and on his release he wrote a letter to the sister-in-law of his maternal grandfather for background information on his family. When Scofield received the response to his letter he discovered the secrecy of his Cree grandmother, Kohkum Otter, and the familial shame regarding half-breed Great-grandma Ida. He was also "disappointed that we weren't *pure* Indians. I recall thinking that maybe Grandpa and his brothers and sisters were right to feel ashamed. Half-breeds were nothing." (*Thunder*, 107) Scofield threw the letter away in an attempt to "disassociate myself from anything white or mixed-blood." (107) Disregarding evidential, written and oral family stories that confirmed his lineage, Scofield determined that because his Kohkum Otter was Cree, "so I was Cree too." (107) He still thought of his "Mom and [...] Aunts as white. How could I think of them differently?" (107) Reasoning, or rather, repudiating the logic that since his Mother and Aunties "didn't seem interested in anything Native", and therefore lacked manifestations of cultural signifiers, Scofield denied them their identities as Cree *or*



Métis. He ignored the irrationality of his hypothesis that if he worked hard enough learning “the old ways – the Cree ways”, their line of descent would skip a generation of half-breed ‘impurity’ and a Cree line would continue through him. This was a painful and emotionally damaging thought process that injured the relationship with his mother and aunts and threatened the Métis codes of survival and continuance that rely on community and communal relations. Scofield emphasizes this threat by retelling Auntie Georgina’s story of the Trickster who convinces a flock of ducks and geese that he will teach them the “Blind Dance”, a “very sacred dance taught to me by my grandfather. You must keep your eyes tightly shut while I am singing, for if you open them, the medicine of this dance will be lost.” (107) The Trickster drums and sings while the ducks and geese dance, but:

...every now and then the drum would stop for no apparent reason. One little duck, who’d grown suspicious, decided to take a little peek. To his horror, he saw what *We-sak-e-jack* was doing. “Brothers,” he cried, “*W-sak-e-jack* is killing us for his supper!” the birds took off in every direction, but *We-sak-e-jack* only laughed. “Blind Dance,” he chuckled to himself. “Stupid birds!” (172)

Sean Kicummah Teuton summarizes that “the trickster in the traditional tribal narrative [...] most often serves as a negative example to remind tribal people to regulate tribal values. [...] To restore balance to the world, for example, the trickster must invoke a moral theory through which to evaluate which tribal values might be helpful or harmful in achieving balance.” (“Writing”, 115-116) There are several lessons contained in this trickster story, and I respectfully attempt to interpret these, but the main thrust appears to be a reminder to the “clan” of birds that their survival depends on the sharing of information amongst all community members. They are at first separated by a paradoxical communal blindness that is only broken by one of their flock when he “opens his eyes” and discovers the dangers inherent in the practise of an ethos of individualism. The unreflective pursuit of sacred knowledge that the

trickster promises closes their eyes not only to the motives of the trickster, but also to what is happening to their families, their neighbours, and their community. Sharing knowledge of the trap that has been set for them by the Trickster, as the Cherokee philosopher Brian Yazzie Burkhart argues in a separate context, the Native philosophy “[w]e are, therefore I am” saves them. (“What Coyote and Thales”, 25)<sup>58</sup> The importance of individual experiences in many Native philosophies, lies in how they enrich, protect, and equip future generations for individual, and therefore communal, survivance. Mainstream society has taught Scofield that his heritage is shameful and induces him to abandon his ‘half-breed’ relations in order to seek new kinship ties and a “tribe” to which he might belong in an endeavour to replace his Métis heritage with a “pure” and, what he had been socially conditioned into considering, superior Native identity.

Scofield’s collection of poems, *I Knew Two Métis Women*, is a lyrical biography of his mother Dorothy and his aunt Georgina. Warren Cariou describes the work as a “compelling meditation on the meanings of lineage and family.” (“Hybrid Imaginings”, 141) Scofield [re]collects his memories and the stories he has been told by both women, honouring their strengths that enabled them to persevere throughout difficult lives – their love of singing, guitar and accordion playing – and celebrates their capacity for loving support. Scofield remembers feeling uncomfortable as a child when his mother appeared at his school: “I was embarrassed / of the Indian cowboy who sidled up to the front door”, and admits that “It wasn’t until my late teens, / until someone said, / “Is that your mom or dad?” / that I told the truth.” (*I Knew*, 60. Lines, 28-29, 35-38) However, as an adult, Scofield observes and remembers Dorothy and

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<sup>58</sup> Burkhart examines the key differences between Western and Native philosophies from a Native perspective. In the Western template, René Descartes’ use of the Latin phrase *cogito, ergo sum* “I think therefore I am”, identifies and promotes the “I” as paramount. Burkhart argues that Native philosophy “tells us [that] “We are, therefore I am.” (“What Coyote and Thales”, 25)

Georgina through his own experiences of being judged through the callous lens of racist categorizations and therefore with a mature, clear, and empathetic eye. In his poem “They Saw”, he writes of the censorious judgements of his mother by whoever saw her in public spaces:

They saw

how she picked over  
the bargain jeans at Zellers,  
how for the tenth time  
she didn't need their help,  
them hovering  
just in case she might (95. Lines, 1-17)

The staff at the shop assume they saw a woman who “might” steal, not a woman who “might” need help. The following stanza recounts Dorothy’s experience in a bank where she cashed her welfare cheque; “They saw her”:

and barely spoke two words to her  
thinking she wouldn't understand,  
or worse yet, she'd be drunk.  
One time, she said, a woman  
whispered behind her back,  
“Just look where our tax  
dollars are going.” (96. Lines, 22-28)

Customers and bank staff made their assumptions (with a measure of resentment for their injured sensibilities over their ‘wasted’ taxes) based on centuries of damaging stereotypes of drunken, feckless Indians. However, in the final two stanzas Scofield replaces the judgemental perspective of the dominant mass with the appreciative and moving personal knowledge of his mother:

I saw her

my patch-quilt mother  
with a hat so beat up  
only a miracle  
kept it on her head.  
Running to meet her,  
I saw her eyes charm up a smile.  
“Look!” she said,

glowing in her new sweatshirt:  
METIS & PROUD OF IT. (97. Lines, 44-53)

The palimpsest of generations of Métis people whose identities had been written over and partially obliterated by supremacist colonialist policies, could not be retrieved by Scofield or his mother until he was able to find his way home to a reconnection through the knowledge and the history of his Métis relations in the context of Canadian nation building. The triumphant declaration on Dorothy's sweatshirt challenges social and cultural oppression, and echoes one of Riel's essays written while he was awaiting his execution. Riel defends the Métis against government policy and settler objections to Métis self-identification that honours their "Indian blood", whether or not their physical appearance would allow them to pass for "pure White." He writes:

Here is how the Métis think privately. "It is true that our Indian origin is humble, but it is indeed just that we honour our mothers as well as our fathers. Why should we be so preoccupied with what degree of mingling we have of European and Indian blood? No matter how little we have of one of the other, do not both gratitude and filial love require us to make a point of saying, 'We are Métis.'" ("The Métis of the North West", 42)

The filial love that Riel mentions does correspond to an honouring by generations of Métis whose historical ties to their ancestral lands come with the responsibility to ensure a continuance for future generations. Honouring of both European and Native inheritances does not contradict nor negate these ties and responsibilities.

Scofield was politically radicalized when he continued his education at the Native Education Centre in Vancouver, where he met fellow students whom he identified with because "to some degree, we were all displaced people, survivors who had either been through foster care, in jail, or on the streets." (*Thunder*, 110) He writes that although most "of the teachers were white", they were "sympathetic to the Indian cause" and informed their students about the politics of American Indian

Movement and “Canadian Native history: the truth behind the government’s broken promises and the residential schools – all of the information that was avoided in high school.” (110-111) This helped to change the relationship with his mother, which became one of equal and reciprocal teaching and learning; Scofield shared his books on Canada’s historical relationships with Indigenous people from a Native perspective and his mother talked “about her feelings and childhood experiences.” (111) Because she seemed “genuinely interested” in the politics of Native history, Scofield found himself seeing her in a new light and writes that he included “her more in my newfound awareness.” (111) Moreover, attendance at the Native Education Centre, where he felt he had been accepted as an equal amongst a diverse range of tribal band members from across Canada, was an important juncture in his path to self acceptance. However, his progression toward an acceptance of his Métis self was, at first, impeded by his experience of a summer job at “Spirit Song”, a Native theatre company that ran a program to train Native youths in theatrical skills. Scofield says the director, whom he doesn’t name, made him feel self-conscious about his appearance, and they had a distressing conversation when she told him that he did not look Native. “I mean, look at you! – she glared at me- ‘you’ve got grey eyes and blond eyelashes.’ ‘Well,’ I hesitated, ‘I was born that way.’ She was silent for a moment and then her face grew even colder ‘Well, you’ll never get cast in a Native role.’” (114) Scofield felt humiliated, and after a week’s absence from the theatre, decided to confront the director with his decision to quit his job. She responded angrily and told him he will have no reference from her, to which Scofield replies, “I may look white [...] but you fucking well act it.” Scofield writes that he was proud of himself because it “was one of the first times in my life I said how I truly felt.” (115) In this moment, the poet had begun to find a voice and the strength to question and oppose judgements of what

constitute an “authentic” Native identity. However, when he resumed his studies and was introduced to Maria Campbell’s *Half-Breed*, he remembers, “I took one look at it, saw the title, and set it aside. I thought it was irrelevant to who we were as Indians [...] *What could some half-breed woman possibly have to say?*” (Emphasis original. (116) Scofield writes that he resented Campbell, feeling “as if she was somehow describing Mom and Aunty Georgie, even me [...].” He describes the rage he felt toward his “Mom, at Aunty, our poverty, my grandfather’s shame, my own shame” and that he hated Campbell for “telling the truth” (116). Recognizing Campbell’s stories as similar to his and his family’s experiences, he could not accept them because he thought of himself as “Cree – not some forgotten half-breed who didn’t belong anywhere.” (117) For Scofield, Campbell’s *Half-Breed* was a public exposure of private shames in the hidden histories of the Métis people after Riel’s execution that revealed the fractures in his sense of identity. John Berry describes, in the context of a social identity in relationship to the “emotional significance”, of belonging to a specific group as “conflicted” or “inconsistent in the sense that individuals don’t know who they really are, or they have incompatible ideas and feelings about themselves.” (“Aboriginal”, 6) Scofield’s love of his family was in conflict with his longing to feel part of what he, some registered band members, and mainstream Canadians determine as legitimate, “pure” Nativeness.

In his collection *I Knew Two Métis Women*, the shame regarding his identity and the familial association with his mother Dorothy and his Aunty Georgina is replaced with pride, respect, admiration, and poignancy. In “Too Many Blueberries” Scofield recounts the effects of the beatings that they sustained from abusive partners:

Their eyes  
So black and blue  
Not even wet rocks  
Compare, hold a flame

To the bones  
I've heard snap, crack  
And bust  
Like skinny twigs

Beneath an evil eye  
Or heavy hand  
That kept them in line,  
In place (98. Lines, 2-13)

Comparing their dark bruises to blueberries and their breaking bones to snapped twigs, Scofield grieves for and endeavours to carry the weight of their suffering that was hidden “So the cops and doctors never asked / If ribs didn't heal, if berries / collected beneath the skin” (99. Lines, 25-27). In the harrowing poem “Half Of Another Story”, Scofield writes of Georgina's death and his disbelief of the official version of a “poisoned liver” and a “blood clot in her head / from falling” (92. Lines, 3-5) as its cause. He suspects her abusive and parasitic partner Harry:

Harry said, “Oh yes,  
she was drunk and fell.”  
The cops  
took it as gospel,  
didn't bother  
taking statements  
from Virgie or me. (92. Lines, 7-13)

Scofield writes that from a message left on his answering machine by Harry, “a skinny willow / about to bust”, two days before Georgina's death convinced him of Harry's complicity, “sure as a wolf knows / the hunter's trap, / how to chew off his foot / to survive.” (93. Lines, 20-23) Scofield discovered that Harry was also guilty of colluding with a man who had raped Georgina:

I found out this guy  
named Roy  
had raped her a few years ago.  
He ripped her so bad  
she had to be sewn up  
and Harry took money  
to keep her mouth shut.

He doesn't think I know

but I do.

I know the whole story,  
black as night  
and crow's wings  
that flutter her words  
in my sleep,

that hover outside and speak  
the silences  
of many mouths drunk

on her wine. (93-94. Lines, 30-47)

The tragedy of Georgina's suspected murder by Harry is compounded by the official indifference of the police (whose systemic racism and misogyny is the corollary of centuries of governmental colonialist policies) who have the authority but no moral or judicial imperative to conduct a thorough investigation. Further, Georgina speaks to Scofield and points to the shame in the silence of those who exploited Georgina's generosity, drank her wine, and know her murderer but will not speak for her in bringing him to justice.<sup>59</sup> However, these are not poems of victimhood and the strength of spirit and resilience in both Dorothy and Georgina are commemorated the most powerfully in relation to their music. In "Picture 5 (1988)", Scofield describes how his mother brought home an accordion she had bought from a pawnshop:

At first

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<sup>59</sup> Scofield's poem "No Peace" in his collection *Singing Home the Bones*, was inspired by the documentary *Senorita Extraviada, Missing Young Woman* by filmmaker Lourdes Portillo. In the poem, Scofield draws a parallel between the 230 Juárez, Mexican women who have been kidnapped raped and murdered and "my own dark-skinned sisters" who "turn in a grave of silent rages." (63. Lines, 32-33) In his note to the poem Scofield writes, "The disturbing testimonies of the victim's families reminded me of my own aunty's unsolved murder and its place in a legacy endured by many First Nations across our continent: a shared suffering of missing mothers, aunts and daughters, a suffering that is allowed to happen time and again. I've spent a great deal of time writing about my aunty. Her influence and voice has only become stronger, more powerful. Always, I think of her in the present: a warrior woman who cannot be killed." (*Singing*, 107) On his Twitter site, Scofield tweets "A Name A Day" to "find/honour our missing/stolen sisters" of whom there are over 1200. On November 13, 2013, the 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Helen Betty Osborne's murder, Scofield tweeted, "A Name A Day. Helen Betty Osborne. Honour Our Sister." (<https://twitter.com/gregoryscfield>)



it sat on her lap  
like a new baby,  
keys carefully polished  
and polished again  
so its ivory and black teeth  
gleamed beneath her fingers.

One time  
she called it her squeeze box,  
grinning so I got the joke.

“Mom!” I scolded, embarrassed,  
as if sex  
should be unknown, possibly  
outlawed, to mothers. (119-120. Lines, 13-26)

Scotfield appreciates the playful ribaldry that embarrassed him when he was younger  
and writes of Dorothy and Georgina’s guitars as their:

one true love  
who never got tired  
or left for younger,  
smoother women.

Their duelling guitars  
Were the twelve strings  
I climbed to dreams on.

Once I overheard them  
laughing downstairs.

“Hey, Dorothy,” Aunty teased,  
“how bout we warm up  
dat squeeze box. She’s lookin  
a little lonely.” (120-121. Lines, 35-47)

Listening to the music and the joy it gave to Dorothy and Georgina made Scotfield feel  
secure enough to sleep and dream in stark contrast to the domestic tyranny and  
violence suffered when they lived with husbands and partners whose brutality and  
lack of respect reflected colonialist policies that since contact, denied Native women  
the human rights “to life, the right to freedom, and the right to be safe.” (Fontaine,  
“Our Cherished Sisters, Mothers, Aunties, and Grandmothers”, 346)

In chapter seventeen of *Thunder Through My Veins*, titled “The Weight of Belonging”, Scofield describes his second suicide attempt after the ending of a destructive relationship with his lover Kevin. He was again estranged from his mother, Auntie Georgie, and Auntie Sandra at this time, and distanced himself from associative half-breed shame. Scofield’s “incompatible ideas and feelings” that left him conflicted over what constitute his family and kinship ties, once more led him to seek familial and community affiliations elsewhere. He met Yvette Jonas (Tlingit) at a “Neighbourhood House Family Night”, and Scofield writes that she was valued by the families who attended these evenings because she was “kind and caring and full of good advice. She followed the Indian way and seemed to help anyone in need.” (*Thunder*, 124-125) Scofield points out that in “Cree to be without a family is to be “*chee-maksow*” (very poor)” and he was desperate to acquire kinship riches. (129) Scofield summarizes the fur trade and colonial settler domination that disrupted community and family kinship structures and that segued into residential schools and the “Sixties Scoop”, as being a continuing intergenerational destruction on Native communities that had left many people “searching for their families and communities, making “*ne-toh-temak*” (relations) along the way.” (129) However, together with the rejection of an acknowledgement to kinship with his half-breed Métis family and community, the young Scofield, in his pursuit to build new connections and kinship ties, did so with romanticized colonialist images of a “pure” Indian-ness. This was a Baudrillardian “abstraction” that Gerald Vizenor describes, in a separate context, as an invention of Native lives as static “and [...] stuck in coins and words like artefacts.” (Bowers, Silet, 41) Emma LaRocque advocates a decolonization that refrains from etherealizing “our colonized history or our colonized condition in the name of beauty [or] faith” and warns, that although reinvention of “ourselves, our

country, our Americas, our world” is a must, it is also necessary to avoid “refabrication and myth-making.” What she seeks instead are “new possibilities for reconstruction.” (*Other*, 158-159)

Scofield, who trusted Yvette Jonas as a valuable mentor for instruction in following “the Indian way”, moved in with his new guide and her very large, extended family. The house was decorated with “Native posters” and had a workroom filled with the materials for making “moccasins, earrings, or dance regalia.” (*Thunder*, 125) Soon after moving in, Scofield discovered that “[a]ll of [Yvette’s family] had been taken from their home reserve as children and sent hundreds of miles away to St. Joseph’s Mission School in Williams Lake. This school was one of the worst in Canada, notorious for physical and sexual abuse by the nuns and priests.”<sup>60</sup> (126) Yvette and her family had “never talked about their experiences, although each of them had suffered a great deal. Most of them had spent time on the streets and had battled alcoholism and drug addiction.” (*Thunder*, 126) Yvette and her relations had previously been “involved with the Native Church of North America” and Scofield describes the church as a fusion of Christianity and Native beliefs that “celebrated Christianity through what was called the ‘Peyote Sacrament’ and sought to teach its

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<sup>60</sup> St. Joseph’s Mission Residential School opened in 1896 and didn’t close its doors until 1981. Although a report was published in 1991 by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs documenting abuses in residential schools, in 1992 several St. Joseph’s priests had been convicted of sexual abuse, and by 1996 there were 102 suspects identified in an RCMP investigation, no provincial British Columbia enquiry into the school’s abuses was instigated. The experiences of the children occurring in hundreds of residential schools across Canada, and the systemic official indifference to the inhumane acts perpetrated on generations of British Columbia Native people as Ian Mosby concludes in his study of the nutritional experiments forced on starving residential inmates that, he writes, were “one among many examples of a larger institutionalized and, ultimately, dehumanizing colonialist racial ideology that has governed Canada’s policies towards and treatment of Aboriginal peoples throughout the twentieth century.” (“Administering”, *Social History*, 172) Ian Mosby’s study, published in May, 2013, exposes the monstrous nutritional experiments, in spite of the newly minted “Nuremburg code of experimental research ethics”, that were conducted in the 1940s and 1950s on already nutritionally deprived Native people. The majority of the subjects of these experiments were children, impoverished by the collapse of the fur trade and the withdrawal of government funding. In residential schools, some children were denied provision of, in one experiment, milk for two years to create a “base line that could be used to assess the later results.” (“Administering”, 161) These experiments were performed without seeking consent, or indeed, informing students, their parents or adult victims, that this research was being carried out, or that they were, essentially, used as lab rats.

followers ““morality, sobriety, industry, kindly charity, and right living.”” (126) Yvette’s leadership of her urban community – teaching “traditional beliefs” by appropriating ceremonial rituals from disparate clans, specifically the Peyote Ceremony that many bands and tribes practice – quickly revealed itself to Scofield as a potentially perilous situation. Scofield’s uncertainty about where he belonged and his lack of community and knowledge of comprehensive cultural specificities made him vulnerably open to the persuasions of a “pure” Indian who appeared certain in their role as spiritual leader. The danger for Scofield, and the family, was not in Yvette’s adoption of ceremonies that had not been practised historically by the Tlingit band; Scofield determined that it was Yvette’s powerful autocratic authority that distorted spiritual teachings into a destructive community comprised of the damaged leading the damaged.<sup>61</sup> Craig Womack asks whether or not “open-ended approaches to tribal experience threaten the kind of tribally specific practices”, and concludes that he thinks not, because “tribally specific experiences are constantly expanding, even beyond their own borders and out into non-Indian realms. [...] I [...] critique those elusive searches for cultural purity that seek a shrinking world rather than one inclusive of the realities and opportunities that surround it.” (“Theorizing”, 406) The peyote “family meetings”, as Scofield describes them, thereby avoiding the use of the term ceremony, were held both in the communal house in Vancouver and outdoors in a tipi away from the city. At the conclusion of his first peyote experience, Yvette told him that she would be adopting him as her son, and that “the Creator had spoken to

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<sup>61</sup> Amy Bombay (Ojibwe), et al, in their study on intergenerational trauma, found that “chronic or repeated adversities in childhood may lead to inferential process in which the child attempts to understand why such abusive experiences are happening to them. Over time, children may internalize the belief that these adverse events are stable, have negative consequences and are attributable to aspects of themselves.” (“International Trauma”, 18) Further, the report found that the “severity of physical abuse children experienced was associated with abuse-specific symptoms that were either internalized (e.g., depression or anxiety) or externalized (e.g., aggression).” (18) Yvette appears to be externalizing her experiences in St. Joseph’s by aggressively replicating its modes of operation, if not its specific abusive practices.

her, had told her to help me on my life's path." (*Thunder*, 128) Despite his feelings of uneasiness, Scofield was grateful to be part of a new family who "followed traditional ways and [...] were proud to be Indians." (129) He felt that he belonged, that he had come home.

Scofield writes that he "honoured the sweatlodge [and] the drum, rattle, eagle feathers, and the medicines like the sweetgrass, sage, and cedar. But I didn't honour the peyote. To me, it was a drug and it went against the Creator's laws of living a clean and sober life." (132) Uncomfortable with the peyote "meetings" that occurred "whenever there was a problem", and which had begun to feel "cultish" and now frightened him, Scofield shared his feelings with Yvette who told him that he was "acting white" and was "being disrespectful to Grandfather Peyote." (132) Yvette betrayed him by telling everyone in the family about his homosexuality, who begin to watch him "like a hawk whenever I was around Kyle", Yvette's son. (132) Scofield writes of her manipulating duplicity in the poem entitled "Deceiving Honour" in his first collection of poetry, which he reproduces at this point in his autobiography: "What do I owe her honour, a life / story that kept her mouth busy? / How easy to impress me, making / relations in a peyote ceremony. / K Mart clothes sealed new blood / ties; ever a sneaky way how she / worked." (131. Lines, 1-7) Scofield's resentment toward Yvette's violation of his trust, and her manipulations to appropriate his painful experiences by exploiting his need for kinship ties and community, developed into the exploration of what she demands of him to secure a place in her family: "Her rush training me to act the / proper son left me thinking we / should be married. She didn't / want to hear my troubles, just my / sex life." (131. Lines, 1-12) The power of the poem lies in its segue from the present personal to drawing an historic parallel with Yvette's abuse of power and the running of residential schools

by Catholic nuns and priests: “She would have done well running / a residential school / The whole family confessed on themselves. / They sat around gloomy, awaiting / her priestly wisdom. I was too stubborn. Her ulcer was a good / excuse, blaming me for being too private.” (131. Lines, 15-22) Scofield was ostracized by Yvette’s emotionally fragile family, which had also been stripped of their defences, for questioning “Grandfather Peyote”. Yvette utilizes, as a controlling device, an *ad hominem* argumentative strategy that attacks Scofield personally (skilfully targeting his insecurities regarding his identity) rather than taking into account his objections and discomfort concerning her *ad hoc* ceremonies. Scofield hid his feelings and continued to attend the meetings in order to protract his sense of belonging, “even [trying] to win back [his] place in the family, but it was too late. The damage was done.” (132) Scofield was able to break the emotionally toxic hold of Yvette and her family when he made new Cree relations in Montana on the way back from a trip taken with Yvette to procure supplies of peyote in Arizona. Staying on the Rocky Boy Reservation, Scofield says that he met his “own people for the first time. They were Chippewa-Cree and many of them were the descendents of the half-breeds who had fled from Saskatchewan to Montana after the resistance in 1885.” (133) This was a significant meeting, not only for the part it played in persuading Scofield that he had the right to agency in breaking away from the sway of Yvette, but also for the introduction to descendents of the diasporic half-breeds scattered after the battle of Batoche, Riel’s surrender, and the devastation of the Métis Nation’s people who were evicted from their lands, overtaken by settlers, and betrayed by the Government of Canada. In particular an elder woman named Alice, who reminded Scofield of his Auntie Georgina, told him that she “didn’t feel good” about Yvette and her clan whom, she said, were “not your family. You’re a Cree and we have our own sacred

ways.” (133) She told him that he is always welcome at Rocky Boy reserve, which he should think of as his home; this gave him a sense of security and the courage to break away from Yvette and continue his search for a belonging. And at this point he may yet be some distance from claiming a Métis identity, but he is gathering the means to do so with the sustaining foundations of the kinship ties of new relations.

### **The People Who Own Themselves<sup>62</sup>: “Pekewe”; Time to Come Home**

What, pray tell, does this man seek?  
His native soil, the air breathed  
In the soft clear surroundings  
While the sounds emanating  
From his lungs and moving upward  
Now repeat the sky’s chosen words:  
I have given you birth here.  
To two nations man is born.  
Remember, you who languish so  
In exile. This is the sorrow  
The world to every man bequeaths.

Louis Riel (“Those of Homeland Dispossessed”,  
*Selected Poetry*, 65. Lines, 35-45)

The claim of white historians that the Metis society was static and non-competitive in the survival sense of the word is denied by even the most superficial examination of Metis relationship and adaptation to the major external influences on their lives.

Duke Redbird (*We Are Metis*, 11)

After leaving Yvette’s circle, Scofield reconciled with his mother and found an apartment to live on his own in Vancouver. He concentrated on his writing “about the *power* of being Native, the *power* of the Grandmothers and Grandfathers, even the *power* of my own heart and spirit.” (Emphasis original. *Thunder*, 138) While working at the Native Counselling and Referral Centre, Scofield met Ryan Peeyaychew, a

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<sup>62</sup> The original Cree word for the Métis is *otimpemsuak*, meaning the people who own/rule themselves. Scofield writes, “Our Cree relations called us *Awp-pee-tow-koosons* (Half sons), [...] However, we called ourselves *Bois brulé* (Burnt-wood People), half-breeds, Métis, mixed-bloods, or *Ka-tip-aim-soo-chick* (The People Who Own themselves). (*Thunder*, 170)

“Cree from North Battleford, Saskatchewan.”<sup>63</sup> (138) During their first conversation, Scofield laboured at finding commonalities with Ryan when he learned where he was from and of his band affiliation. His need to assuage the pain of having “no *real* place of belonging” (142) prompted a physical identification with Ryan: “both [of us were] tall and slim, with the same strong Cree features and similar mannerisms, only he had black curly hair, dark skin and eyes.” (Emphasis original.142) Having been asked by Ryan which part of Canada he is from, Scofield replied that his grandfather was born in Portage la Prairie, in Manitoba, but swiftly added, in order to locate himself nearer to Ryan’s Cree origins, that “he resettled in Prince Albert”, Saskatchewan. (139) At this point, Scofield instigated a switch from conversing in English to speaking Cree, and embarrassed himself when he was questioned about how much and which Cree words he knew. Pointing to his hair he called it “mistuguy”, which does not mean hair, but is a claim to possessing a big penis. (139)

Scofield followed Ryan and his family to the northern British Columbia reservation, Kitwancool, (called Gitanyow by the Gitxsan people) where Ryan had accepted a teaching job, but these adopted relations ended in a rift too. (148) As Ryan’s family disintegrated while on the Kitwancool reservation, and his and Scofield’s relationship ran aground, Scofield, by then collecting welfare, strayed from Ryan’s policy of following “traditional ways” of abstaining from alcohol. “Everyone [in the reservation village] drank, and at some point I just gave in. It seemed a lot easier to be like everyone else and forget about the future.” (149) Regretting his

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<sup>63</sup> Fort Battleford is the site that lodged the largest concentration of the North-West Mounted police in the West, and was the centre of operations during the Riel Resistance of 1885. The, approximately, 500 settlers who also resided at the Fort were frightened when news reached them of the battle at Duck Lake between the Métis and the NWM, and took refuge in the Fort’s stockade. Pitikwahanapiwiyin (Cree Chief Poundmaker) and his clan, who were starving as a result of the scarcity of buffalo, came to the fort expecting to meet with an Indian Agent in order to claim promised rations that were guaranteed by the settlements of Treaty Six, but found the town deserted. Pitikwahanapiwiyin tried to prevent the looting of the deserted buildings, but his followers took advantage of the opportunity to alleviate their emaciated state.



decision to leave his life in Vancouver, where he had been sober and had established a constructive form of stability working at the Native Centre and through his writing, Scofield left the reserve for Saskatoon, Saskatchewan “feeling ashamed of myself. I had been proud of my sobriety, of following the Red Road. [...] I could hear the taunting remarks of the white kids I’d gone to school with – the cruel things they’d said about drunken Indians and reserves. I felt completely disgusted with myself for becoming one of their stereotypical jokes.” (149)

Scofield’s first acknowledgment of his Métis or half-breed identity was a public occurrence that took him by surprise. Finding it impossible to gain employment when using Ryan’s Cree name, because “like most other prairie towns and cities, [Saskatoon] was highly racist. Although I wasn’t visibly Native, many prospective employers would see my last name (Peeyachew) and, without even looking at me, say, ‘Sorry, but the job is filled.’”<sup>64</sup> (155) Soon destitute, he applied for welfare support and was asked why he had not applied to Indian Affairs for help. When he “mumbles” that he is non-status, it was pointed out to him that he was receiving social assistance while living on a reserve in British Columbia. When he repeated that he is non-status the social worker “indignantly” asks, “‘Then what are you?’” Feeling humiliated, Scofield whispered, “‘Half-breed,’ [...] unsure whether or not I had actually said it.” (156) When she pressed him with further questions about why he had been receiving government benefits on a reserve as a non-status, half-breed no less, she exemplified both of their confusions over what signifies Native self-identification, and what governmental policies dictated as defining parameters. Bonita Lawrence points out that the “fluctuations in the colonial regulation of Native identity continue to demonstrate its artificiality and its uses in dividing Native people.”

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<sup>64</sup> Scofield had renounced his family’s name and adopted Ryan’s surname of Peeyachew.

(“*Real*”, 222) She emphasizes that “*status is not ‘heritage’*” (Emphasis original), as implied by the Indian Act, which she states was “in fact Canada’s way to pre-empt the rights of Indigenous nations to govern themselves, a signifier that the colonizer, not Native people, controlled Native destinies.” (223) Further, Lawrence stresses that status for distinct and varying First Nations membership is a:

...way of saying that you are part of a specific tribal heritage. Status then is equated quite openly with cultural knowledge or heritage. Nonstatus Indians and Métis people, by comparison, are often seen as being ‘detrribalized’ (even if they are part of a specific Métis community), as coming from untraceable roots and therefore having lost their heritage. (221)

The social worker lacked an understanding of the complex intricacies of band membership, and the position of non-status Indians, Métis, and/or half-breed identity, and was reluctant to spend any more time clarifying where she might efficiently categorize him within government boundaries. She dismissed Scofield with an offer of arranging a bus ticket to take him back to “Kitwancool or whatever it’s called.” (*Thunder*, 156) Scofield’s internalization of the racism surrounding him makes his “coming out” publicly as a half-breed as difficult and painful as the conflict with his “internalized homophobia” and an overt acknowledgment of his sexuality. (196)

Barely subsisting on odd jobs and the proceeds from selling his beadwork, Scofield applied to attend a community college to complete his high school education with assistance from Welfare who agreed to help him if he attended full time. After failing his entrance exam for the second time, he was introduced to Alana Daystar, a Cree-Saulteaux college guidance counsellor to whom he revealed his fears of losing welfare assistance if he could not gain entry into the college. Alana told him that she would inform welfare services that he has written the exam, and that next time he takes it he would do better. Scofield was comforted by her “gentle assurance that was like a mother’s embrace. [...] I felt a great peace in my heart, and knew it was the

Creator's plan for me to meet her." (158) He writes that they "talked for hours and I was able to tell her everything", however, he continued to drink, and feared that he was "becoming more and more like Uncle Tim, even Mom. I had sold everything of value, including the beautiful outfit I'd dreamed of wearing. I had given away my pride – my medicine – and everything that I held sacred." (160) After a lengthy interlude between their meetings, Scofield "desperately needed to talk to her" about these fears of self-destruction through alcohol abuse, and never finding the "right path" (162). His course while seeking a belonging in a hoped for redemptive process of reconciliation with his identity had, so far, been comprised of wounding switchbacks and dead ends. The poet found a cathartic release in Alana's sharing of her experiences that, she told him, had similarities to that of his family. She spoke of being taken at the age of five, from the grandparents who raised her, to a residential school where she was beaten when she spoke the only language she knew, Cree and Saulteaux. When she returned to the reserve, her grandparents were dead, she had forgotten her language, and "I couldn't even remember my grandparents or the things they taught me." (162) She tells of spending "a long time trying to find myself, moving from one place to the next. I tried to get rid of the pain by drinking, but it always came back. I felt dead inside and nothing mattered, not even my life." (162) Alana gave Scofield a braid of sweetgrass<sup>65</sup>; a significant gift that was a call out to him to reconnect with Cree medicines and healing traditions particular to Cree and Métis homelands, and is a prelude to her gift to him of an excursion to Batoche and Duck Lake.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The sweetgrass plant, which grows in the northern regions of North America, is dried and used for "smudging": purifying ceremonies practised by many First Nations and Native American people, particularly those from the prairies.

<sup>66</sup> On March 26, 1885, Duck Lake, was chosen by the Métis under the leadership of Riel as a rendezvous point to negotiate the surrender of Superintendent Crozier of the North-West Mounted Police who was planning a seizure of the strategic supply point. Under the impression that 500 police

Stopping first at Duke Lake, Scofield was irritated at Alana's secretiveness about their destination. When he questioned her, she told him that it was a surprise, and when they arrived at Batoche, noticing the sign reading "Back to Batoche Days", he was suddenly transported back to the history books he was exposed to at school, "talking about crazy Riel and the useless half-breeds"<sup>67</sup> (164). He was angry and asked her why she had not told him where they were going and she replied that she knew he would not have agreed to the trip, which he acknowledged. "'Greg, *pekewe*,' she said. 'It's time you came home.'" (164) Scofield remembers thinking that if she had really wanted to help him, she would have taken him to "a powwow or Sun Dance" because Batoche "was the last place in the world I would ever consider home." (164) On the first night Scofield left Alana sleeping in their tent while he explored the festival and observed the people that he felt were "strangers to me. They weren't like Indians or white people. [...] I thought of Aunty and wished she was with me. Suddenly I needed her guidance and approval. If these were my people, I needed her to say so." (164) Scofield needed the approbation of Aunty because she had been his primary link to Cree/Métis language, customs, and a sense of community that he had become better prepared to recognize and accept through his injurious explorations during his search for home and belonging. When he and Alana watched the competitions between fiddlers who played "reels, jigs and waltzes [that] had been handed down over the generations" and who were dressed in "ribbon shirts and brightly coloured sashes and wore moccasins, dress shoes, or cowboy boots" and other regalia that are a synthesis of Native and European garments, Scofield became

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were on their way to arrest Riel, a battle ensued when both parties, who had sent personnel to raid the supply store, confronted each other; within 15 minutes 5 Métis and 12 of Crozier's men were killed with 11 others injured. Riel prevented his men from pursuing the defeated column to Fort Carleton, thereby averting further bloodshed of the NWMP. The Battle of Batoche was lost to General Middleton on May 12<sup>th</sup> and led to Riel's surrender.

<sup>67</sup> *Back to Batoche Days* has been an annual celebration since the mid to late 1880s, of Métis history, culture, languages, music, and art.

interested, in “spite of my indifference.” (164-165) He writes that he was “intrigued by the people. Some of them were dark and looked distinctly Native while others were fair, with light hair and eyes. [...] It was evident they were Native, at least to me, but they could easily be mistaken for white. [...] I thought about Aunty, Mom, too, and I could see them sitting in the bleachers, tapping their toes and clapping their hands.” (165) Scofield was able to see his face and that of Aunty Georgina’s and his mother’s reflected in this large gathering of Métis people, and this began to counter and release him from the weight of his family history of marginalization and shame. However, it was the historical objects representing Métis life, the grave site of Métis soldiers who died in the 1885 Resistance, and most significantly, the theatre presentation of the history of the Métis struggle with the Canadian government and Riel’s execution for treason, presented from the Métis perspective, that bring Scofield home. He writes, “By the end of the show, tears were streaming down my face. [...] I looked around the theatre and saw *my* people. I knew I had come home at last.”

(Emphasis original.166) In the *Common Pot*, Lisa Brooks defines the Abenaki (North American Algonquin speaking people of the North East) word *awikhigan* as a tool for image making, writing and communicating images or ideas, person to person, tribe to tribe, over geographical space and time that facilitates the maintaining of ties to traditional lands and survivance under pressure from colonialism. “*Awikhigawôgan*”, Brooks explains, is “another critical concept in the Abenaki language: [meaning] the activity of writing. [...] *awikhigawôgan* operates within particular, tangible spaces.”

(Emphasis original. *Common Pot*, xxii) To clarify, Brooks writes, “what I am talking about here is not an abstraction, a theorizing about a conceptual category called ‘land’ or ‘nature,’ but a physical, actual, material relationship to ‘an ecosystem present in a definable place’ that has been cultivated throughout my short life, and for much

longer by those relations who came before me” (*Common Pot*, xxiv).<sup>68</sup> Brooks quotes the anthropologist Keith Basso where he defines “place-world”, “instances of place-making consist in an adventitious fleshing out of historical material that culminates in a posited state of affairs, a particular universe of objects and events – in short, a *place-world* – wherein portions of the past are brought into being.” (Emphasis original. xxiii) According to Basso, “Building and sharing place-worlds [...] is not only a means of reviving former times but also of *revising* them, a means of exploring not merely how things might have been but also how, just possibly, they might have been different from what others have supposed.” (Emphasis original. *Wisdom Sits*, 6). Scofield’s comprehension of coming home required a communal experience of the history of place and space in order for him to *recognize* it as home; it also necessitated mediation between the dominant culture of Canada’s version of the historical significance of place and the Métis experience. In this environment, the poet was able to recognize the significance of the Métis historical and traditional relationship with their lands in the Prairie Provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba before, during and after the government of Canada’s encroachment west. The Métis marking and honouring of the locus of conflict and resistance to historical and contemporary Canadian nation building strengthen land, kinship, and community ties in order for a continuance that encompasses past, present and future generations of Métis people. “Never again would I search for a place of belonging. This place, Batoche, would always be ‘home,’ my home.” (*Thunder*, 166-167)

Finding his home and sense of belonging, Scofield enrolled in the Native Human Justice Program at the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and moved to Prince Albert, the

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<sup>68</sup> Brooks quotes Vine Deloria Jr. who in *God is Red* maintains that stories serve as narrative maps and that “Indian tribes combine history and geography so that they have a ‘sacred geography,’ that is to say, every location within their original homeland has a multitude of stories that recount the migrations, revelations, and particularly historical incidents that cumulatively produced the tribe in its current condition.” (*God is Red*, 121)

former home of his grandparents. “More and more I felt a connection with my grandfather, remembering the numerous stories Mom had told me about him. I would walk the same streets and visit the same cafés, only I would hold my head high, proud of the blood thundering through my veins.”<sup>69</sup> (167) But it was his acceptance into the creative writing program at the University of Victoria, in spite of having to turn it down, that assured him that he had a “voice to speak with”, that he “had what it took to be a writer.” (171) Scofield recalls having had “a certain hope that the pain of my childhood would find a voice, a way to heal itself” a prospect of “healing my relationship with my Mom.” (180-181) Throughout his memoir Scofield refers to the possibility of recovery and healing from his childhood traumas that remain the legacy of colonialist Canadian governments’ disenfranchisement of land and dignity of contemporaneous Native people and of the preceding generations. He writes of a childhood when he sought both the safety of silence and raged at his lack of agency, “Why did I have a voice when no one ever heard me?” (35) Scofield’s voice is released despite a ragged trajectory in his search for locating a healing recovery and reconnection with his and his ancestor’s “sacred geography”, and its expression is accelerated by the re-establishment of his old, and establishment of new, kinship ties. Scofield says that his earliest, unpublished poems were a “healing exercise, an expression of my feelings, thoughts, and understandings. [...] In hindsight, I can see they were quite didactic, ranting about the injustices *done* to First Nations people.” (Emphasis original.182) Initially, he gives no credence to writing about his perceptions of living as a Métis, feeling that they disqualified him as a “true Indian writer”. But with a resolve to “speak with a voice that was truly reflective of not only

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<sup>69</sup> Scofield paraphrases the French Canadian historian, referred to at length in Chapter One, A. H. Trémaudan’s term who, in 1927 wrote a call out to the Métis generations who came after Riel’s execution in 1885 to have pride in their ancestry and past, “The knowledge of these facts will enable them to hold their heads high and say, ‘This is our land.’” (Trémaudan, xvi)

my heritage, but my experience” and eschewing the artificiality of writing an “Indian poem for the sake of being Native”, Scofield concentrates on the autobiographic for his collection. (182-183) Moreover, a request from CBC radio in Vancouver to act as a consultant on a play written by a non-Native woman “about a Métis boy and his search for family” that “didn’t reflect the Native experience accurately” resulted in Scofield comprehensively re-writing the piece for the broadcasters. (177) He says this experience taught him the importance of the role of Native writers to tell “our own stories. Just as the history books had been written from a white perspective, so had most of the movies and books about Native people.” (178) Scofield identifies the juncture of finding his home and reconnecting with the stories of Aunty Georgina and his mother – whom he says “immediately embraced being Métis” (181) after he shared with her his experiences at Batoche – as the time when he began studying and writing poetry “seriously” (178). Unfortunately, the sole publishing house that was interested in publishing his poems demonstrated a heavy handed editorial approach, and after a year of rewrites the project disintegrated with insults being exchanged by both parties. In his frustration and outrage over what, for all intents and purposes, was a censorious act on the part of the publishers who advised him that he should “stick to writing short Indian stories” (183), Scofield destroyed his manuscript. However, recollecting the history of painful experiences that led to his suicide attempts, he vows that he will not be defeated or betray his past or his heritage with a return to silence, “I had something to say and I was bloody well going to say it!” (184) In an interview with Tanis MacDonald, Scofield said that finding a spiritual home within, resides with the ability of being able to “claim the bones. Those of your own body, your ancestors, your experiences, the historical landscape that you’ve come out of, even the urban landscape that you’ve come out of. It’s about honouring your spiritual home, to sing



those bones into a place within the universe that is magical, that is healing, that is profound.” (“Sitting”, 296)

Emma LaRocque observes that a relatively recent focus on an Indigenous:

...aesthetic of healing is, in part, an effort to translate Native ideas or world views to a ‘language’ accessible to most today. It is an effort to bridge conceptual gaps. I would though make some cautionary remarks. As constructive as ‘healing aesthetics’ may sound, we must be careful not to squeeze the life out of Native literature by making it serve, yet again, another utilitarian function. Poets, playwrights, and novelists, among others, must also write for the love of words. Healing is fast becoming the new cultural marker by which we define or judge Aboriginal Literature. (*Other*, 168)

LaRocque’s argument is a caution directed at both writers and readers of Native literature; the developing trope of a “healing aesthetic” for the writer might be a barren endeavour when detached from an imaginative and interpretive communication of experience. The warning to the reader is to be conscious of a possible indolence and a desensitized diminishment of the complexities of centuries of the intergenerational and individual traumas of Native people, by applying limiting definitions on, and judgements of, Native literature. Scofield’s reimagining of his childhood experiences of the drunken violence of his stepfather Don toward his mother, in his poem entitled “Talking Because I Have To” (*The Gathering*, 42), is a powerful exemplar of LaRocque’s definition of a constructive application of the “aesthetic of healing”. In the first stanza, Scofield’s writes of his helplessness as a child:

When first I saw rye whisky  
get the worst of him  
he was smashing everyone in sight.  
Hearing my mother scream, I ran downstairs.  
My kiddy voice was no match.  
She just lay there, convulsing under his  
boots. (42. Lines, 1-7)

The second stanza reveals a lapse of clarity of what next transpired, except for:

“puffed up lips I remember. [...] / Someone / yells, ‘Go to the neighbours, call the

cops.’ / And it ends there” (42. Lines, 9-12). In the final stanza, the poet is being advised to set aside his painful memories, “Even now, they say, ‘Greg, forget it.’ / Going on is made easier because they won’t / talk. I talk because I have to.” (42. Lines, 14-16) The “going on” without talking or hearing makes it “easier” for the advisors in the poem, and by implication, for the reader, if such painful memories were to be left in the past. For the poet, it is as specious a request to bury his personal experience of violence in the home as it is to obliterate the root of its cause; that is, the historical and contemporary trauma generated by Euro-Canadian colonial dominance. Scofield writes that soon after the publication of his first collection of poems he realized “the limitations of being a ‘young, angry, gay Métis poet’”, and initially resented the attention that he received from media coverage and much of the public whose main focus was on “*the poor Métis boy who had turned his horrible life into a success story.*” (Emphasis original. *Thunder*, 194) However, he was grateful to be able to tell his and his relation’s stories and to have found “the voice with which to speak”; as Maria Campbell said, “Stories are the Métis homeland. We can hear the voices of the old people in the story [...] A story is good medicine.” (Orth, “Stories are the Métis Homeland”, 11)

## CONCLUSION

The literary works of Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, and Gregory Scofield featured in this thesis explicate the effects of land loss on Métis identity that are the result of historical and contemporary pressures from past and present Canadian political and judicial policies. Campbell's influential text, *Halfbreed*, offers a Métis perspective on colonization of the Prairie Provinces, and a counter narrative to Euro-Canadian historical accounts of the Dominion of Canada's encroachment on Native lands and culture. Campbell's narrative autobiographically tracks the effects of governmental political and social strategies following the Riel Resistances, and considers Métis identity, community, and culture in light of them. Campbell's was one of the first published Native voices to disrupt the dominance of colonizer stories in the Euro-Canadian discourse, and as such, inspired subsequent Métis generations (represented by Culleton Mosionier and Scofield) to express their stories and claim their right to self-representation. My aim, in the Introductory Chapter and Chapter One, has been to examine disparate interpretations of the Riel Resistances of 1869-70 and 1885 in order to arrive at a broader understanding of the perennial debates surrounding Riel's reputation as the 'Father of Confederation' or 'rebellious traitor'. My thesis has shown how the strategies of the newly formed Dominion of Canada created laws and negotiated bad faith treaties in order to implement assimilation of Canada's Native people and expand the boundaries of the Dominion. This thesis is a concise exposition of literary resistance to government machinations, and considers the impact of Canadian nation building on Native identity, the legal recognition of Métis cultural identity, and ancestral lands. The texts of Campbell, Culleton Mosionier, and Scofield share a narrative structure that interweaves the history of the Métis people with individual and communal

experiences of intergenerational trauma and shame that is rooted in the defeat of the Riel led Métis resistance to encroachment of the Northwest. My analysis of the texts of the three authors is historically contextualized in order to establish a method of reading that facilitates an understanding of the legacy of Euro-Canadian systems of power that continues to impose supremacist ideologies through its education system and social discourse. My goal has been, through close textual analysis, to understand more fully the experiences of three generations of Métis authors whose resilient voices speak against the continuing damage of colonization. This thesis has shown how Campbell, Culleton Mosionier, and Scofield voice a spiritual, literary, and political call for the maintenance of links to their ancestors, and connection to their homelands. As Louis Riel predicted, it is the artists who will give the Métis “their spirits back.”

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