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The changing face of the Metis nation

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THE CHANGING FACE OF THE METIS NATION

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Ellen Ann Gibbs, 2000©

DEDICATED TO MY BELOVED SISTER, MARI



ABSTRACT:

This paper purposes to answer some questions pertaining to perceptions of Métis identity (individual and collective, subjective and objective) as the Canadian public's conceptualizations of the Métis have been changed during the 80s and 90s by the works of Canadians historians and by popular media. These changes have been stimulated by the politics of Métis participation in:

- ◆ *The Constitution Act, 1982;*
- ◆ *The First Ministers' Conferences [FM'Cs], 1983-1987;*
- ◆ *The Charlottetown Accord, 1992*

Questions asked are (1) who are the modern-day Métis; (2) how do the Métis define themselves, conceptually and legally; (3) how does the Canadian public, in general, define the Métis?

The results of the *Lethbridge Area Métis Survey* (Chapter Three) are valid for the local area but it is possible that they may be generalized.

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THE CHANGING FACE OF THE MÉTIS NATION

“We are governed not by armies and police but by ideas.”

Mona Caird, 1892

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian public’s conceptualizations of the Métis have been changed during the 80s and 90s by the works of Canadian historians and by popular media.

These changes have been stimulated by the politics of Métis participation in:

- *The Constitution Act, 1982;*
- *The First Ministers’ Conferences [FM’Cs], 1983-1987;*
- *The Charlottetown Accord, 1992*

In the world of perceived reality the Métis represent very much a work in progress. As a people they occupy a cultural space and historical fluidity of immense complexity and contradictions, both emotionally and intellectually, in the minds of Canadians. Depending on circumstances, and how their world has been articulated by non-Native persons, they have been viewed as either an “indolent race possessing a sub-normal mentality” (Ewing Commission 1939), or as a resilient and resourceful Indigenous People capable of surviving altered but largely intact. The truth must surely lie between these polar-opposite images, but where? (Why, indeed, is the spectrum defined in these terms?) Within a past of murky interpretations it is difficult to reconstruct a people’s public image or self-image. Today, many of the fundamental injustices of Imperial rule in Canada are being critically examined with tangible ramifications for the Métis, but within that

equation how does a contemporary Canadian or Métis person define a Métis own horizons of perceived identity? The Métis, as an aboriginal peoples, know in their hearts who they are, but a quantitative-orientated society, such as present-day Canada, has great difficulty in defining qualitative, subjective and collective, concepts.

These attitudes of concern for measurement as opposed to merit are now proving problematic, especially in the two decades since “existing aboriginal and treaty rights” were entrenched in the *Constitutional Act, 1982*. The “flip-flopping” of the Government on the question of entrenchment of aboriginal rights galvanized the scattered Métis into a largely united political front which was determined not to be ignored during the repatriation process. Such activity has led to a new “questioning” of identity and public awareness of the Métis among Canadians. Questions of Métis identity, in turn, filter down to the public at large and affect the conceptualization of specific events with regard to the Métis, and are capable of having a phenomenal effect on the public’s perception of, and response to, Métis concerns.

In this paper, I intend to explore how policy makers, historians, journalists, and the public-at-large have changed since 1982 with respect to (1) who are the modern-day Métis; (2) how do the Métis define themselves, conceptually and legally; (3) how does the Canadian public, in general, define the Métis?

It should be noted that the data used in this research is very heavily focused on Alberta and British Columbia, and may or may not be representative of all

Métis. In many parts of Eastern Canada, for example, Metisness barely exists as a concept, or has very recent currency, and Métis activism reads very differently from that of Western Canada—in a post-modernism discourse to current thinking there is a tendency to “reification,” where terms like métis/Metis are coined for convenience and considered as concrete. However, the study of Lethbridge area Métis does raise questions about what is the Métis worldview, and while the results are valid for this region they may also be applicable to a more general area.

I should like to state that I am not challenging the sincerity or legitimacy of Métis identities but, for the purposes of this paper, I am questioning whether the Métis are one large group or many different types of groups joined by a common consciousness while divided by complexities and contradictions.

Throughout the text I intend to follow certain rules of definitions, and use terms pertaining to Métis, as set out by Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown in The New People: Being and Becoming Metis in North America. On occasion, where necessary for clarification, I will try to elucidate whether the term used is ordinarily explained as self-identified, or organized, or externally identified (which, in some cases, can be the same or different).

I hope that my research will help clarify:

- 1. What positive or negative effects are being wrought by Canadian historians on the Métis' story, and their place in Canadian history?**
- 2. Who do the Métis feel they are, affected as they must be by public opinion and perceptions?**

NOTE: Since the original *Indian Act 1876*, the legal definition of an Indian has been continually revised. In short, “Indian” refers to a person who, pursuant to the *Indian Act*, is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian (Frideres 1998, 25).

For the purposes of this paper the use of “Indian” is to denote legal definitions only.

Also, for the purposes of this paper, “Native” is used to denote a person of a First Nation while “Aboriginal” is used to denote persons either of a First Nation or Métis Nation (people of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry). Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* identifies Métis as one of three Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Indian, Inuit and Métis), but the term itself is not defined.

The term “Indian” includes legal or status Indians and non-status Indians.

“Country-born” are recognized as those individuals of Aboriginal and English fur-trader ancestry; the term is not usually used today.

“métis” written in lower-case and accented with an acute “é” is generally accepted to represent those individuals of mixed Aboriginal and French fur-trader ancestry and is usually used by descendants of the Red River métis.

“metis” is generally used by those individuals who self-identify.

“Metis” with a capitalized “M” and no accent on the “e” is generally accepted to denote all individuals of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry as recognized by the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and is also seen to embrace all those who self-identify as Metis.

Various Metis associations/organizations may choose to use either term according to their preferences and traditions but, in general, a capitalized “M” is used while the acute accent on the “e” is ignored.

I have chosen, as a matter of courtesy, to refer to individuals of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry as “Métis;” a not uncommon usage of the term in modern times.

CHAPTER ONE

THE INTERPLAY OF MISCONCEPTIONS AND STRUGGLES FOR SELF-IDENTITY

Our first impression of anything comes, in my opinion, more from its colour than from its shape. The colour of something is probably not a very important feature of it but we have been taught to react to colours. In a similar way, if we choose to think only of the “colour” of the Métis place in Canadian history, it is easy to understand why we are failing to see its “shape.” And by failing to see their “shape,” are we failing to see the Métis as the punctuation of the Canadian psyche?

For the Métis of Canada the continuing impact of British Imperial colonization has had a consistently of purpose: a concerted, deliberate and long-term assault on Métis values. Nowhere has the effect been felt more strongly than in the spheres of public and private perception of what most “becomes” a Métis. The perception that the Métis of Canada appeared overnight as a consequence of the Riel “Rebellion” is merely a figment. In truth, it would be impossible to pinpoint a specific moment or event of ethnogenesis. People of mixed heritage had existed in what is now Canada from at least the mid-1600s. The birth of the Métis came about as a result of gradual human interaction between fur-traders and Native women. Ironically, Métis emerged out of that contact between the races which the Hudson’s Bay Company had striven so hard, and for so long, to prevent.

Ethnocentrically Western measurements of social reality, in general,

employ concepts of private land ownership and national sovereignty which, in turn, imply the existence of exact (physical) borders and that of precise (personal) identifications. The Métis dilemma has always been one of concept versus concrete experience.

The Métis appear to operate in the realms of mystery because how they are defined as a people or group is generally unclear and usually dependent on a given situation, time and place. Their status is not fully endorsed by either the dominant society or by First Nations, but there can be no doubt that they have roots in both populations.. They represent a “merger of nations, a people born of an intercontinental union—born to be what they perceive as the founding members of a new nation” (Friesen 1996, x).

One of the most powerful forces in keeping prejudices alive is language—words and how they are used. Words “shape” thought and thought shapes action. Words can be used in propaganda and to spread opinions or beliefs. Words can intimidate or frighten, or be violent in themselves. More than anything else, word reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate racism. The government of Canada has long discriminated against the various Native groups and by extension against their close relatives, the Métis. Métis are excluded by “Section 91 (subsection 24) of the British North America (BNA) Act [which] assigned to the federal government responsibility for ‘Indians and lands reserved for Indians.’” (Francis et al 2000, 1). The use of words in numbered treaties—“Indian” not “Aboriginal”—actually caused the Métis to be ignored rather than acknowledged and to slip to a

lower class status than Indian; again victims of acts of omission and neglect. According to Frideres (1998, 37) “[a]s late as 1969, the Indian Claims Commissioner...argued for the Aboriginal rights of Métis,... [as] various actions of the federal government such as script allocation in western Canada and the Adhesions to Treaty No. 3 have granted special status to the Métis, both morally and legally.” And so the “colour” of the place of the Metis in Canadian history continues to dominate the “shape.”

History is particularly vulnerable to a basic bias that exists in all experiences, and it is that the victors write history. In the words of the psychiatrist Carl Jung, the embryonic Métis “were a question mark to the rest of the world ” and because they were prevented from communicating their own answer, they have been dependent on the world’s answer (Redbird 1980, 6). The celebrated Canadian historian, Donald Creighton, who depicted Louis Riel as a national nuisance and denounced the claims of the Métis as dubious as best, has remarked about truth that “[i]t ought to go without saying, of course, that the historian’s truth is only partial truth: real truth is laid up in the mind of God” (Friesen 1996, xv).

The Métis of Canada have always been expected to fit into the changing world order as best they can while existing in conditions of imposed internal exile. They have been prisoners of conditions beyond their control, and of ever-changing external conceptualizations or “frames”. Frames can be understood as those

persistent “patterns of interpretation, presentation, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol-makers routinely organize discourse” (Gitlin 1980, 7). The selection of an “angle” or “storyline” which transforms an occurrence into a “fact” is a frame. Frames put things in context, but they may lack “objectivity,” communicating particular and political assumptions about causal relationships. One might argue that there is no objective reality but rather that all reality is constructed. For example, when the Secretary of State of Canada published a series of books, in the 1980s, relating to the diversity of cultures in Canada’s human kaleidoscope, the Métis were ignored. *Ergo*, do the Métis of Canada (as recognized by the *Constitution Act, 1982*), truly exist as a nation, cultural group or political entity?

Modern historians such as Flanagan and Sprague, focus on the question of whether or not a Métis ethnogenesis occurred, and whether there was a viable and visible Métis entity, at the Red River and Assiniboine basins in the mid-1800s. Flanagan (1979, 7) argues that since the Métis were not in “existence” at the time of first contact nor by the time of the *Royal Proclamation of 1763* they cannot claim to be aboriginal people, and therefore cannot make any valid claims, political or moral on modern Canadian society. Sprague (1988) appears to support Creighton’s doubts about the existence of historical “truth,” and admits in Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885, that historians may not have been objective in interpreting the story of the Métis but they may now, in modern times, ironically, be labouring unduly under a form of political correctness. Sprague contends that

modern historians may be “reflecting their times” instead of shedding light on historical events. W.L Morton, a noted Canadian historian was widely acknowledged as personally believing that the Métis were cheated by the Canadian Government while Marcel Giraud in his classic work The Métis in the Canadian West portrayed the Métis as a people incapable of responding to their own best interests. Giraud, apparently denounced Métis land claims on the grounds that “they had been defeated in battle; and *that* was that” (Friesen 1996, 9). Friesen (ibid.) observes that “most analytical works on the Métis on the last decade have adopted an either-or-stance—those [historians] who believe that the Métis have been short-changed in the past and those who either believe that the Métis were not cheated or they have misrepresented their case.” Friesen (ibid.10) further states:

At first glance it appears that those who have something to gain by denying Metis claims, have done so. Historians Gerhard Ens and Thomas Flanagan would appear to fall into this category of writers since they were retained by the Canadian Department of Justice in 1986 to defend Canada from Metis claims. Mailhot and Sprague, on the other hand, argue on the side for the Metis, although Flanagan contends that the Manitoba Metis Federation gained Spragues’s cooperation, for whatever reason, and influenced his stance to incline favourably towards their case. Sprague’s perspective is shared by Purich...although it does not appear that the latter’s position had any strings attached.

Whatever may be the “truth,” everyone’s position seems political, variable and vacillating, depending upon time and place.

Did an ethnogenesis occur at the Red River and Assiniboine Valleys? The Métis (term as used here confined to off-spring of French and English fur-traders

and Cree “wives”) recorded “no history of their own,” due largely to the fact that they were mostly illiterate (Giraud 1986, xi). This does not mean that the Métis were ignorant; Gabriel Dumont was fluent in six languages, although he could barely sign his own name. Rather, they recorded their crucial collective events in an aboriginal oral tradition. Bernd C. Peyer (1997, 18) writes that “one of the ways in which Euro-American...chauvinism asserts itself [against aboriginal culture] is by the creation of artificial barriers between its own... productions and those of a ‘primitive’ society placing one on a higher...plane than the other.”

In 1734, the French explorer, La Verendrye, built Fort Rouge where the Red River meets the Assiniboine. He had been commissioned by the King of France to find the “Western Sea” (Purich 1988, 19). As a means to an end, LaVerendrye and his entourage of forty to fifty native-born men became involved in fur-trading with the local Cree (Macdonald 1974, 110). Within the year, the first fruit of the two races at the Red River and Assiniboine Valleys was born. Other French traders also settled in the Red River valley, among them, Louis Primeau, an illiterate freeman who was a master of several Indian languages. Primeau allegedly happily contributed to the well-documented establishment of a mixed-blood population in the valley. (Purich 1988,19). Had not a genesis occurred?

An archival history of the Métis as a people began to reveal itself in scanty *données* (dispatches) from the period of the early French explorers. “Missionary archives, fur-trade records, and ... the narratives of travellers and official data,

create a complex of observations that presents the Métis record in considerable relief' (Giraud 1986, xii).

In 1768, James Isham's flattering descriptions of the first "mixed-blood" ("country-born") children were added to by HBC chief factor Andrew Graham, who stated that "mixed-blood" children formed an important human element, reinforcing a sense of "family" for the fur-traders, around the various posts (ibid.322). The Hudson's Bay Company Archives have shown Graham as a key figure on the company's inland expansion of the late 18th century (Williams 1969, 362). He had joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1749. His main claim to fame rests on a remarkable series of manuscripts or "Observations," which he began in 1767. Begun "perhaps as an elaboration and a continuation of the notes kept by Isham in the 1740s, they contain narratives of life at posts on the bay...." (Ibid. 362). Graham's family life was complicated. He married Scotswoman Patricia Sherer in Edinburgh in 1770 but had two mixed-blood children in Hudson Bay, both of whom joined him in Scotland after his retirement in 1775 (ibid.363). According to Graham (1768), "[a]lthough relations between native 'ladies' and the Company's employees are forbidden, a numerous progeny exists in every fort." In a later entry of his "Observations" (1771) Graham described "Halfbreed children" as:

straight limbed, light curly hair, fine blue eyes, and light comely eyebrows. In the whole, they are handsome and some of them beauties. They exceed the true-born Indians in activeness. The men being more expert in shooting on the wing and the women more cleanly. They are pretty numerous...."

Brought up to follow the “concepts and habits” of white society, these Métis children “suffered a disequilibrium, which removed any possibility of their complete absorption into Native society” (Giroud 1986, 326).

Ignorance and the power of the larger society to articulate and also to simplify, turning the unfamiliar into the commonplace, has long dictated the characterization of the Métis as possessing only recognizably Native physiognomy. Such an assumption is erroneous and should be viewed as stereotyping; of all prevailing misconceptions it may be the most injurious, and forms the most delicate issue facing the Métis Nation today. Genetics account for the prevalence of blue-eyed, fair-haired Métis offspring. Perhaps more than any other Aboriginal people, Métis of fair “colouring” face a dilemma between choosing to “pass” as white, thus increasing their acceptance in the larger society; or preserving their aboriginal identity in the face of racial prejudices. According to Peyer (1997, 17) it “will usually not take long for individuals whose ambitions are...frustrated to recognize the limitations imposed on them by the colonizer and react accordingly, either by succumbing to the status quo and attempting to become...invisible (passing) or by reevaluating their own ...identity.” The majority of “dark-skinned” Métis are also truly disadvantaged because they are perceived by the public at large as being Native but are not necessarily accepted by the First Nations. The truth, as the Métis see it, is far removed from either classification.

Even in today’s more enlightened times the middle-class readership/audience and the cultural significance of the historian/journalist have

made the multimedia agencies of legitimation for the dissemination of “facts.” The media are perpetrators of stereotypical images generally—be it “Indian Princess” or national “hero”—but particularly when it comes to the accepted “face” of the Métis Nation. Indigenous Peoples everywhere are being forced to define themselves in strange and new ways to conform to dominant societies’ beliefs about them. That definition process is often taken over by the mass media and academia, and indigenous people find themselves externally labeled. This has been the case for the Métis; a people rejected by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal societies. This labeling exaggerates cultural and social differences and fosters racial discrimination. When racial hatred is fueled by a popular press, “objectivity” and common sense may be discarded by an impressionable public, as was the case following the sentencing of Riel:

Execution of the sentence was to be postponed several times...religious and race hatred swept across Canada like a withering wind, angry speeches in Parliament split parties and wrecked lifelong friendships, Ontario newspapers spoke openly of secession or armed subjection of the clamorous French. The Prime Minister, angrily stamping his foot, made his position clear in an Ottawa interview. “He shall hang,” said Sir John, “though every dog in Quebec bark in his favor!” (Kinsey Howard 1970, 457).

The triumph of the mass media in the recent decades can be seen in the affluent society they have helped to create and perpetuate. But the Métis have little or no share in that affluent society, and have little influence in deciding how the media, or its masters, depict them. Paul Ruthford (1978, vii) has written in The Making of the Canadian Media that:

The media made [Canada] liberal, even if capitalistic; cosmopolitan, even if *dominated by foreign ideas*; and relatively united in our thoughts and action, even if united only as an impersonal mass audience. [*italics mine*]

Unfortunately, it is this same domination which has led, in many cases, to faulty perceptions and faulty conceptualizations of Métis by the general public.

The criteria for recognition as Métis do not differ significantly from those of other Aboriginal groups. Membership is by ascription, be it legal, constitutional or self-promoted, although this rule has exceptions. There may be certain differences of membership requirements between individual Metis communities and that of section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, which states that:

35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.

Recognition of existing aboriginal and treaty rights.

(2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

Definition of "aboriginal peoples of Canada"

(Finlay and Sprague 1993, 616)

By analogy to Jack Campisi's (1991, 4) definition of a North American "tribe" in The Mashpee Indians, the Métis qualify as a Aboriginal People because they:

consist[s] of individuals who trace at least some of their ancestry to aboriginal populations and who recognize each other and are recognized by outsiders as [Métis]. They share a belief in a common

ancestry, that is, membership in a group identified in the historical past...[I]n at least one way, however...[Métis] differ from other ethnic groups in the Western Hemisphere...[a]ll other ethnic groups have a homeland, an extracontinental base from which the emigres derived, a people and place to which they can look for cultural roots...[I]n part because of this difference in origins, native groups share a different concept of territory...[t]hey are recognized by virtue of their being an indigenous people.

(It should be noted that Jack Campisi offered the above definition while employed by the Mashpee Indians).

To suggest that all Métis people are part of a single “tribe” would be inaccurate, as the Métis are descended from many “tribes” scattered nationwide, but there are descendants of “tribes” who identify themselves solely as Métis. The question of identity depends primarily on self-definition and definition by others. I believe that when the Métis are perceived as an ethnic group it is logical to inquire what factors help to maintain such an identity. Regarding the formation of an ethnic community, Driedger (1978, 9-22) has suggested that there are six components of identification of an ethnic group: ecological territory, ethnic culture, ethnic institutions, historic symbols, ideology and charismatic leadership.

With regard to the development of a distinctive Métis culture, there can be no question but that it was reflected both in Métis speech and dress. As the mixed-blood population evolved, large numbers of the Métis in eastern Canada assimilated into either European or Indian cultures (Glenbow Museum 1985, 4)—thought this assertion might be questioned by most Acadians. In Western Canada, however, “the Métis emerged as a separate and distinct people who saw

themselves as having a unique identity” which they displayed by the European-influenced ornamentation of their clothes: for the men, a type of “uniform” consisting of a “blue *capote*, and a beaded pipe bag hung from a bright red sash,” while the women generally “chose dark dresses accented by a bright silk handkerchief or a tartan shawl”(ibid. 8). A distinctive culture was also reflected by their adaptation of a language which was essentially a dialect of Cree with a smattering of several other languages. “Michif” was spoken by Métis in the Turtle Mountain Reservation of South Dakota (Harrison 1985, 12). Special attention is given to “Michif” in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples where it is noted as a prime example of “cultural distinctiveness” blending as it does “components of French and Aboriginal languages in a novel way.” A recent study of the language by a Dutch linguist says this about Cree-French Michif:

It is a mixed language drawing its nouns from a European language and its verbs from an Amerindian language...No such mixture of two languages has been reported from any [other] part of the world...Michif challenges all theoretical models of language. It is a language with two completely different components with separate sound systems, morphological endings and syntactic rules....The impetus for its emergence was the fact that the bilingual Métis were no longer accepted as Indians or French and they formulated their own...identity, which was mixed....(Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1991, sec.2.1).

Joe Sawchuk (1978, 39) states the “[t]he [modern] Metis [as defined by the *Constitution Act, 1982*] exhibit no distinctive language, dress, arts, crafts or easily recognizable physical type.”

The “shape” of the word “Métis” is itself shrouded in presumptions and assumptions. When modern Métis write of themselves as a people they use the word “Metis” with a capital M and no acute accent, as this form of the word is seen to embrace all people of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry. The origin of the word “Métis” is debatable. It is reasonably certain that the term “Métis” did not come from the indigenous communities or people to whom it was initially applied. As Harrison (1985, 12) explains:

Another term for the Metis is derived from the Ojibwa word *wissakodewinmi*, which means “half-burnt woodmen,” describing their lighter complexion in comparison to that of full-blooded Indians. The French picked up the translation and often used the term *bois brûlé*, or “burnt-wood” for these people. They were also called by various other names, including Country-born, Black Scots, Métis anglaise, Breeds and Half-breeds. The term “Half-breed” generally became the most frequently used, though in the mid-twentieth century it became unpopular among some mixed-blood people who adamantly insisted “we’re not helf [sic] men, we’re full men.” Others regarded it as an acceptable word.

“Métis” was defined as “half-breed” in the 9th Edition of Encyclopedia Britannica (1883) and in Funks Standard Dictionary (1895). Today, “Métis” is still rendered as “half-breed” by the definitive bilingual Dictionnaire Canadien/Canadian Dictionary (1962), prepared by the Lexicographic Research Centre of the Université de Montreal, and not as “mixed.” Geoff Burtonshaw, Metis Researcher (personal interview, 26 August 1998) believes that “Métis” is a misnomer, and that the correct term for persons who are of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry is “Michif” or “Michif People.” Few, if any, Métis identify themselves today as “Michif People” or speak “Michif”—not to assume

that only Michif-speaking defines Metisness—simply because it has proven more expedient for them to take on the protective coloration of the oppressors' languages.

In 1811, the Hudson's Bay Company granted an enormous slice of Rupert's Land at the convergence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers to the Earl of Selkirk for the sum of ten shillings. Selkirk was not a philanthropist as is generally assumed. His ulterior motive was to conduct a "Highland clearance" from his Scottish estate so that he might replace his work-weary and debt-ridden tenants with profitable sheep. The land in question was surveyed in 1813 by Peter Fidler who divided it into thirty-six lots on the west bank of the Red River, running north from Point Douglas (Martin 1898, 108-9). It was later ceded to Selkirk by the Saulteaux and Cree Indians in 1816, although they, themselves, were recent arrivals to the Red River valley (Flanagan 1991,14), so that he might better buttress his claim to ownership. Settlement by European immigrants began in earnest in the winter of 1814-1815, although many left shortly after arrival to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The spring of 1815 found Cuthbert Grant, today recognized as the first Métis leader, busily galvanizing more and more Métis (the first offspring of earlier traders) to assert their rights against the Governor of Assiniboia, Miles Macdonell, whom they felt was exceeding his official mandate.

On June 25, 1815, Peter Fidler, who was himself both the father of a large Métis family and a Hudson's Bay employee, was forced to sign a treaty with the Métis of the Red River Indian Territory. Cuthbert Grant, Bostonais Pangman,

William Shaw and Bonhomme Montour signed as “The four chiefs of the Half-breeds” thereby receiving official recognition that the Métis were a sovereign aboriginal nation (MacGregor 1966, 199). Shortly thereafter, Grant and “his triumphant Métis hoisted, for the first time recorded, a flag of the New Nation; “it is red with a figure 8 placed horizontally in the middle of it...”(ibid. 97). In 1816, Peter Fidler described the flag as blue with a figure 8 on it (Sealey 1975, 25). One year later, on a bloody day in June following the Battle of Seven Oaks, the birth of that nation was celebrated with an anthem called “Falcon’s Song.” The anthem was unique in that it was perhaps the only anthem in Canadian history which was transmitted exclusively in the oral tradition.

With regard to ideology, historical symbols, and charismatic leadership the embryonic Métis met all of the criteria for ethnicity as defined by the dominant society, with the powerful exceptions of *not* being émigrés and of *not having* an “extracontinental base from which they derived” (Campisi 1991, 4).

What about the argument for ethnicity that the Métis existed in a “ecological territory”? According to J. Arthur Lower (1991, 64) “[t]he Métis, the mixed-race descendants of native women and French or Scottish fur traders, lived mainly in an area of several thousand square kilometres surrounding the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers.” The Métis, as a whole, were inextricably linked with the buffalo hunt and are generally believed by First Nations Peoples, and the larger society, to have caused, to a great extent, the demise of the buffalo. “Facts” relating to the disappearance of the buffalo are unclear. Friesen (1996, 34)

writes that:

Estimates of numbers are hard to come by. Some estimate that at least sixty million buffalo roamed the Canadian prairies from 1780-1810. Later records indicate, for example, that even as late as 1873, a single herd of buffalo of immense numbers was sighted in the Cypress Hills area along what is now the Alberta-Saskatchewan border ...only ten years later, there were only one thousand buffalo left....

These great creatures, believed by many Aboriginal Peoples to have sprung from the Earth's crust, proved to be innocent victims of human greed. Geoff Burtonshaw, Metis researcher, states that within fifteen years (1868-1883) the great herds of the Plains were no more; hides were stripped, to make leather belts to run the machinery of an industrial east, while the carcasses of the beasts were left to rot; cattle, introduced by ranchers, drunk copious amounts of the available water and ate valuable verdant grasses (personal interview, 15 September 1998). Across the "Medicine Line" the U.S military organized massive slaughters of the bison in order to feed and cloth its standing army. Burtonshaw stresses that the unimaginable and wasteful slaughter of the herds by the U.S army was a principal cause for the demise of the buffalo; there were only twenty buffalo left to roam Yellowstone National Park in 1902 (ibid.10 August 1999). In addition, the opening up of the railway lines, particularly in the U.S.A., aided in the rapid demise of the buffalo. Everyone, it seemed, suddenly wanted to kill buffalo—for hides, for sport or merely for the novelty of it. In fact, thousands of animals were slaughtered for their tongues alone, a delicacy for the hunters (Friesen 1996, 50). The new repeating rifles also made the hunt much more successful as one hunter

could take dozens of animals on a single mission (Stanley 1963, 233).

In 1870, the numbers of French and non-French Métis residing in the Red River Valley was about the same at 5,000 each (ibid) making a total of 10,000 persons. The immigrant Anglo-Saxons of the Red River “noted that the Métis love of open spaces and for the freedom of hunting prevented them from becoming ‘sensible and steady farmers’”(Friesen 1996, 32). One of the highlights of Red River Métis life was the annual buffalo hunt which provided the community with the bulk of its subsistence (ibid). With a plentiful bounty of food and hides laid up for the winter season, the men could take plenty of time for leisure, including storytelling, music, philosophy and the development of the arts (Sealey and Lussier 1975, 23). There can be no doubt that buffalo hunts contributed to an ethnogenesis but bearing in mind that no more than one-third of the Métis assembled for the Fall Buffalo hunt at any time then two-thirds of the nation must have been engaged in other activities (Redbird 1980, 5). “English and Scottish Métis, generally of Anglican or Presbyterian faith, were more willing to adapt to agriculture or business. They formed a stable group in Red River, supporting British institutions and linked to other settlers”(Glenbow Museum 1985, 6). So, contrary to widely-accepted “facts”, the Métis alone could not have caused, to any great extent, the demise of the buffalo nor could a sense of nationhood have been based solely on the Buffalo hunt—tying the Métis to a particular “ecological territory.” Rather the buffalo “industry” supported in part a nationwide emergence of a “new” people with a new identity. In the

words of Sealey, “These Métis are the true Natives of Canada. Indians and Europeans were immigrants—only the millennia separated their penetration into the New World.” “The meeting of the two races produced a mixture which was not from another land, but whose sole roots were in the New World” (Friesen and Lusty 1980, vii). Highly controversial evidence suggests that the Métis may be the only truly indigenous people of North America.

Other popular but equally untrue assumptions about the Métis have developed into “urban legends.” The effect of these untruths has been the continual manufacture of Métis villains and heroes, and of alarms and plots. In the early Nineteenth Century the Métis at Red River were perfectly situated to serve as pawns in a game of political chess. Some modern historians see the Métis as “white” pieces in the game (favouring their European fur-trading partners), based on out-of-context quotations from the Selkirk Transcript or Hudson’s Bay Archives which seem to suggest that the “Metis were manipulated by the Northwest Company Officials into opposing Selkirk’s settlement” (Redbird 1980, 5). Canada: The New Nation an Ontario grade school textbook illustrates racial superiority propaganda. In describing the Métis of Assiniboia (the “half-breeds”), for the enlightenment of future generations of Canadians, the author writes that “[t]hey half-heartedly worked their little farms...[t]hey hunted buffalo...[t]hey could neither read nor write...[t]hey knew little about politics or government...” [and] “[l]ike children they turned to the man [Riel] whom they could trust” (Deyell 1959, 110-111). This is typical of the

perpetuation of extremes of faulty perceptions to Métis politics, culture and institutions, which are still seen by many Canadians as true representations of the Métis Nation.

The North West Company bourgeoisie “invented” the concept of the Métis as a political ally for self-serving purposes. The Métis were trail-blazers who led not only the traders but explorers and missionaries westward and inland while serving as an economic, social and emotional bridge between the fur-traders and the local Aboriginal Peoples (Purich 1988, 5).

Several generations of Canadian academia, by concentrating their research only on the prairie provinces, have created the mistaken impression that the “real” Métis originated in the Red River Valley. In fact, many Métis communities pre-date the settlement at Red River/Assiniboine.

The most insidious assumption promoted by George F. G. Stanley’s The Birth of Western Canada (1936), and still widely repeated is that the Métis of the Red River were involved in a papal conspiracy to establish a Franco-Catholic empire in the new world (Redbird 1980, 5). Such misconceptions have been devastating to the cause of the Métis. In truth the Métis developed their individual sense of nationhood from the reality of their own social and political development.

Was there a viable and visible Métis entity at the Red River and Assiniboine valleys? Despite a mistaken impression that “real” Métis originated here, and an other impression that they did not, perhaps it can be said that a

distinct group of Métis did originate here. Emile Peltier (1974, 73-111) refers to the devastation of the Métis local industries in the Red River/Assiniboine valleys by the encroaching settlers. The list is impressive: maple sugar, lime, salt and wild rice industries. Detailed descriptions of the usurped industries are also available in the journal of Alexander Henry the younger, who was a fur-trader in the Red River valley (ibid. 77). Economies and cultures are intrinsically allied, and all lifeworks are fragile balancing acts as one group of people seeks a proportionally greater share of resources at the expense of the other.

Bureaucrats followed settlers, forcing a Métis diaspora in order to escape the pressures of a merciless “civilization” (Stanley 1936, 378). Their social structure, embryonic nation-building, their lives and their spirits were crushed but not destroyed. The misconception of the Métis solely as buffalo-hunters, was a crucial justification for their dispossession, as it equated them with all the other “savages.” In such a manner have faulty perceptions contributed to a dismissal of the Métis Nation as a punctuation in the Canadian psyche depending on “placement” to alter that sense of perception.

In recent years, many Métis organizations have focused their struggle for recognition on specific historical events as a source of their identity. Eurocentric concepts inherited by the dominant Canadian society dictate that the Métis define themselves in a formal and legalized manner; a concept alien to a people who view European settlers in Canada as intruders. (French and British fur-traders are generally not viewed by the Métis as “settlers” in a colonizing sense

but rather as part of a romantic adventurous past).

The Manitoba Act was given constitutional status by the *Constitutional Act (British North America Act), 1871*, and by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The origins of the Act arose from the dictates of Riel's provisional government of Assiniboia, with the arguments delivered in the person of Abbé N. J. Ritchot. Riel advised Ritchot to “[d]emand that the country be divided into two so that the custom of *two* [italics mine] populations living separately may be maintained for the protection of our most endangered rights” (Flanagan 1991, 31). This directive indicates that Riel and the Métis did not consider themselves as European but rather as Aboriginal. However, Flanagan (ibid. 34) argues that even “Ritchot himself admitted [to Macdonald] that [t]he Half-breed title, on the score of the Indian blood, is not quite certain. But in order to make a final and satisfactory solution, it was deemed best to regard it as certain.” Macdonald and Cartier had told Ritchot that this was the only way they could get a half-breed land grant through Parliament (ibid). Taken out of context this remark has long fueled misconceptions of an event central to modern Métis land claims: that Ritchot did not believe the claim. And that the federal government initiated, solely for the benefit of the Métis, a “scrip” system of land grants “whereby the bearers of such certificates...could trade for land money or shares on presentation of said certificates”(Friesen 1996, 54). These “scrips” were first awarded to the Métis after 1885. In certain “scrip” issues in Manitoba, however, “some Métis were specifically given money scrip which could not be

redeemed for land”(Métis Association of Alberta,1981). But what of the scrip granted to the French-Canadian and European settlers in the Red River and Assiniboine valleys in years 1813-1876 and to their children? What aboriginal title did these recipients relinquish in exchange for their land claims? What criteria were followed in the granting of scrip to those same children, who, according to the *Manitoba Act* (1870)–s.31--were not legally entitled to any such claims?

Contrary to general perception a system of “scrip” existed long before the Métis “question.” In December 1870, Donald A. Smith, a budding Manitoba politician, called for a land grant not only to the Métis but “to the others who have equally borne the burdens of the past, and have equally contributed to bring (sic) the country into the civilized state in which it is at this moment”(Flanagan 1991, 105). This rationalization for an “additional grant overlooked that the Métis grant was supposed to be ‘towards the extinguishment of the Indian title,’ which could scarcely apply to white settlers, no matter how original they were; but logic has little to do with politics” (ibid.105). Flanagan is perhaps the strongest proponent of the idea that the Métis were well served with regard to the issuing of “scrips” and argues that the Métis saw the selling of “scrip” as a quick way to get cash. Obtaining scrip entailed appearing before a commission to establish Indian heritage, “a process frightening and humiliating to Métis, many of whom could not speak English or understand the complex paperwork”[and] “[i]ntent on establishing the Métis on homesteads, the

government had overlooked the fact that land allotments were barely large enough for profitable farming, and without assistance, few [Métis] could afford to invest in equipment” (Glenbow Museum 1985, 14). According to Friesen (1996, 68) “the shadier side of the story has to do with the fact that large quantities of scrip certificates fell into the hands of land speculators who anticipated high land prices...especially near possible railway routes.” Purich’s (1988, 25) position is that “There can...be no question that outright fraud was committed against the Métis. All that remains unknown is the extent of the fraud.” Today, the same reasoning seems to prevail in most notions concerning the Métis: that they are no more aboriginal than European “pioneers.”

In 1981, an International Non-Governmental Organizations Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the Land was held at the United Nations office in Geneva, Switzerland. Delegates proposed the term “Fourth World” to describe the situations in which Indigenous Peoples generally find themselves today (Goehring 1993, 5). A United Nations expert has proposed a working definition of Indigenous Peoples that has been used by United Nations bodies since 1982:

378. Indigenous populations may, therefore, be defined as follows for the purposes of international action that may be taken affecting their future existence:

379. Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the

societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.

380. This historical continuity may consist of the continuation, for an extended period reaching into the present, of one or more of the following factors:

- (a) Occupation of ancestral lands, or at least of part of them;**
- (b) Common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands;**
- (c) Culture in general, or in specific manifestations (such as religion, living under a tribal system, membership of an indigenous community, dress, means of livelihood, life-style, etc.);**
- (d) Language (whether used as the only language, as mother-tongue, as the habitual means of communication at home or in the family, or as the main, preferred, habitual, general or normal language);**
- (e) Residence in certain parts of the country, or in certain regions of the world;**
- (f) Other relevant factors.**

381. On an individual basis, an indigenous person is one who belongs to these indigenous populations through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one of its members (acceptance by the group).

382. This preserves for these communities the sovereign right and power to decide who belongs to them, without external interference.

E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/7 Add.4 paras 379-382.

This definition serves to clearly show that according to the United Nations the Métis are an indigenous people and are recognized as such internationally. The Métis themselves may see this as an “imposed” definition but it does place a certain political burden on the Canadian government with regard to Métis political concerns.

With the introduction of European traders, and an accelerated exchange of peoples, a new people with a new identity emerged from complex ancestries and blurred bloodlines. A most ubiquitous misconception in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies today is that Métis must have French/Aboriginal ancestry, and be directly linked to the settlement at Red River. This is a recent phenomenon fueled by patriarchs of the dominant society which is growing fearful of Métis political will, and masked as both progress and modernity, is creating massive inner-turmoil for the Métis, collectively and individually (Sawchuk 1978, 66). A small number of Métis are also guilty of perpetuating this Red River hierarchal myth but it seems to stem solely from status-seekers. After all, the greatest and most beloved Métis hero of all time only visited the Red River valley once; his name was Gabriel Dumont. So what “becomes” a

Métis most?

John Friesen (1996, 6) offers an impressive “catalogue of criteria” in The Riel/Real Story to substantiate the claims of the Métis for historical validity and cultural uniqueness:

- ▶ a long-established mention in Canadian historical records, albeit much of it negative or controversial (Daniels, 1979; Verall and Keeshing-Tobias, 1987);
- ▶ a significant body of literature pertaining to their heritages and culture (Friesen & Lusty, 1980; Verrall and Keeshig-Tobias, 1987);
- ▶ formation of distinct communities in western Canada (Gordon, 1964, 70; Friesen, 1985; Purich, 1988,28);
- ▶ recognition of unique community life by provincial government (Dobbin, 1981);
- ▶ development of a unique cultural pattern including a belief system, social structure, symbolic elements, arts and skills and festivals, i.e. the annual buffalo hunt (Sealey and Lussier, 1975,23; Redbird, 1980; Friesen, 1983,1-2);
- ▶ formation of a governing charter (Charlebois, 1975);
- ▶ political persistence in flying three flags (Friesen& Lusty, 1980);
- ▶ definite cultural contributions to the Canadian way of life including the introduction of European technology to the prairies (Smith, 1985,58);
- ▶ regarded as unique and different with a separate and distinct identity by incoming Europeans (Smith, 1985,50; Mailhot and Sprague, 1985);
- ▶ the target of negative perceptions and actions by neighboring cultural groups which by their behavior confirm the reality of the Métis lifestyle. This behavior also served to forge defensive aspects of a Métis identity (Woodcock, 1976; Sprenger, 1978, 118; Freisen, G., 1984) and,
- ▶ a continuing positive self-image (Peters, et al., 1991).

Friesen concludes his argument by stating that “the degree to which the basic criteria have been met by the Métis people cannot easily be disregarded. Still, the struggle for recognition as an equal partner in the deliberations regarding Canada’s future remain an ongoing challenge for the Métis people.” While

attempting to justify the claims of the Métis, Friesen suggests that recognition comes when certain criteria—set by the dominant society—are met.

Europeans have always been interested in conquering and possessing land and “correcting” its imperfections, while the Métis, true to their Aboriginal roots, saw the universe as perfection and sought to improve their own imperfections; they were also capable of seeing both views, and of uniting both concepts; their very existence being living proof. Incoming settlers were not so tolerant, and they saw Métis life as so alien as to appear barbaric to them (Stanley 1936, 7).

In 1885, Louis Riel, legendary Métis leader, in an effort to prevent further European settlement from claiming what he saw as Métis lands, staked the peace of the country and the fate of his people on a gamble that held no chance of success. In The Strange Empire of Louis Riel, Joseph Kinsley Howard states that “[t]here can be little question that the circumstances of Louis Riel’s trial were immoral.” According to Kinsley Howard (1970, 428):

[The] statute under which Riel was tried was Britain’s four-hundred-year old Treason Act, adopted during the reign of Edward III. “When a man do levy war against our Lord the King in his realm,” the act said [he] “shall be held to be guilty of the crime of high treason” [and] “...not regarding the duty of his allegiance, nor having the fear of God in his heart, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil as a false traitor against our said Lady the Queen.”

“Whether the trial itself was also illegal has been debated ever since it was held ...Riel, having acquired United States citizenship, was not a subject of the

Queen and could not be guilty of violating his 'natural allegiance...'" (Ibid.)

The misconception of this specific event filtered in to the public mind and may be the original of many myths which has grown into undisputable "facts."

More than a hundred years later, other Métis leaders have taken Riel's place. "Beyond any political issue is a culture that is undeniably part of Canada's mosaic,"...(The Glenbow Museum 1985, as explained in an exhibition catalogue). "As Canadians continue to search for an identity, it is inevitable that the contribution of the Metis will be fully recognized" (Ibid. 3). But that time has not yet come, and the impacts of the past are still very much in evident today.

The Métis exist as a misunderstood entity because of the inaccuracies perpetuated by certain historians and the mass media. Some of the more devastating misconceptions are that the Métis are responsible for the demise of the buffalo, that scrip was issued only to the Métis, and that there was not a viable and visible Métis entity at the Red River and Assiniboine valleys, or elsewhere, in the Nineteenth Century. Dominant society also fosters misconceptions about Métis origins and identity: that they are not an aboriginal people. In truth, the Métis represent a merger of nations and may be the only truly Indigenous People of North America.

For a battered minority like the Métis, the present reality of a global interchange of people and ideas of self-identity can strip the concepts of identity

to the very bones and lay a whole nation, in a literal sense, naked; danger may not necessarily lie in the perceived truth of a story but rather in the consequences.

CHAPTER TWO

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE METIS

Misconceptions about the Métis and who they are as a people have “coloured” not only their world but also the world of their fellow-Canadians. But in the 80s and 90s the place of the Métis in Canada has been articulated into the public arena by the participation of the Métis in national historical events and while the “facts” obviously do not change, their interpretation may. Also, since 1982, the use of politically correct language appears to be changing the face of Métis historiography—while, in many cases, simultaneously hardening attitudes against the Métis—but the underlying reality remains that “no minority [in Canada] can access any rights, even legislated rights, without majority approval”(Friesen, 1996, 106). In fact, the majority rules.

Determined not to be ignored during the repatriation process of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the Métis galvanized themselves and created a new public awareness of their existence and of their political demands particularly during the *First Ministers’ Conferences, 1983-1987*, and the *Charlottetown Accord, 1992*. At that time, Canadians found themselves awakened to an awareness that Métis participation in politics would produce substantive changes in attitudes of treatment for all Aboriginal Peoples. For if the place of the Métis in Canada were to be formulated as one of the nation’s founding members—Indigenous peoples have ancestors who were colonizers as well as colonized—

then they would have to be recognized as being not only pioneers of multiculturalism but also as the only charter group in Canada with a history of national political independence before joining Confederation, and as a national and indigenous people, largely outside the mainstream of society (Daniels 1979, 51).

When the Trudeau-led Canadian government issued a statement on Indian Policy, 1969 ('The 1969 White Paper') outlining that "its policies must lead to the full, free and non-discriminatory participation of the Indian people in Canadian society [but that] [s]uch a goal requires a break with the past"(Boldt 1994, 297), it was developing a national mind-set towards the Métis as an Aboriginal entity, suggesting that the Métis had become simply relics of the past. And not only harmless relics [as] the issue, according to Boldt (ibid.) is:

[W]hether a growing element of its population will become full participants contributing in a positive way to the general well-being or whether, conversely, the present social and economic gap will lead to their ever increasing frustration and isolation, a threat to the general well-being of society.

Therefore, it is ironic that in 1997 Pierre Elliott Trudeau in a speech to the Association of Métis and non-status Indians of Saskatchewan, addressed the audience with the words:

To say they are a small number of dissidents is not sufficient. We know that the few become the many. If they are men like Gandhi, or in my country, like Louis Riel, they live on.

Neither declaration would instill confidence or trust in Canadians with regard to the Métis. After all, what right-minded group would intentionally live as a “people apart from and behind other Canadians...wishing not to become full citizens of the communities and provinces in which they live and [not enjoying]... the quality and benefits that such participation offers”(Excerpt–‘The 1969 White Paper’). Today, the Métis strengthening sense of solidarity and identity is slowly bringing various factions together; however, the prevailing public image is that the Métis are stepping-out of their assigned position in society and challenging the status quo. And to what extent has the public perception of modern Metis become one of a formidable political entity capable of stirring the pot of animosity to boiling point?

In his work, Donald J. Purich (1988, 161) credits Howard Adams, a flamboyant Berkeley-educated Métis and the first Métis to obtain a Ph.D, with orchestrating the change in Native leadership style that became evident in the early 1970s; that style included extensive use of the media to shake the general public’s assumption that the Métis problems had been solved in 1885. In 1969, Adams “told the federal Task Force on Poverty that the ‘Metis are developing a political consciousness of their wretched plight–the white supremacy [of] Canadian society. We have to realize that we are at the bottom and have little or nothing to lose.’ These comments made national news.” But Purich (ibid.158) also notes that:

In 1885, the Metis had taken up arms in a quest for justice, and the government had responded with military force. Nearly one hundred years later, on April 16, 1984, the 350 Metis of Camperville, Manitoba...declared themselves an independent nation. They flew their own flag and declared absolute jurisdiction over education, justice, policing and over all game animals in a territory covering some five hundred square kilometres. This time the Canadian government sent no army; it simply ignored the Metis of Camperville. And after a day or two so did the media.

What had changed in one hundred years? But more importantly, why, in 1984, did the media so quickly lose interest in a Métis' cause? What had happened to the Canadian psyche within a space of two decades?

The Métis today are facing critical times in which the conceptualizations of Métis-specific events are capable, if not certain, of having a phenomenal effect on the public's perception of, and response to, Métis concerns; mere tolerance does not open windows of opportunities. The Métis originated from a symbiotic relationship that existed between Aboriginals and European immigrants. That symbiotic relationship is now in tatters, and the Métis are suffering discrimination and racism from both the larger Canadian society and the First Nations; in Quebec, Métis are not recognized.

The very structure of Canadian society, be it social, economical or political, is the greatest obstacle to Métis participation in Canadian life; prejudice and discrimination forcing them to operate from a peripheral position in society. From such a position many Métis surrender to apathy and dispiritedness.

According to Frideres (1998, 36) the current estimates of the number of

Métis range from less than 500 000 to more than 1 000 000, depending upon the source. The lack of accurate information resulted, in 1941, in the deletion of "Métis" from the census. By 1980 the Report of the *Native Citizen Directorate of the Secretary of State* showed the following figures:

- Métis and non-status Indian (core population)—300 000 to 435 000
- Métis and non-status Indian (self-identifying population)—400 000 to 600 000
- Métis and non-status Indian (noncore and nonself-identifying population)—1 to 2.5 million (1998, 35).

But Fridesco also states (*ibid.*) that when the 1981 census once again included Métis as "a category of ...identification...the results were startling, since less than 100 000 peoples identified themselves as Métis."

And Friesen (1996, 77) contends that:

The presence of the Metis has slipped into the annals of Canadian Historical record almost inadvertently. They were listed separately as a people by the Canadian census in 1941 and again in 1981, but the Dominion Bureau of Statistics has consistently failed to cite separate population statistics such as births, marriages or deaths for them in Territories.

The 1981 Canadian census reported that there were people in every province who call themselves "Métis" but their historical origins vary (Peters, et al., 1991, 71). Traditionally, in government record-keeping the Métis have been included in other categories, such as "Native Indians, Eskimos, Whites," etc. (Friesen, 1996,77). As an official once explained it, "it depends on their residence, e.g. Indian Reserve, urban area, rural or a bush community that is predominantly

Eskimo or Indian”(Slobodin 1963, 9). What negative public opinion might have caused hundreds of thousands of Métis to voluntarily “disappear” within a period of one year--1980-1981? How great must that negativity have been to have effected such a drastic change in counting? Did the Métis decide it was more prudent to “disappear” from their individual communities for personal reasons, or were they forced to do so by public discrimination? The greater mystery is that during 1981 the Métis appeared, as never before, to have galvanized into a strong political entity capable of challenging and influencing the Canadian government’s direction during the repatriation of the *Constitution Act*.

In the late 1970s and throughout the 80s the Métis fought for recognition within the *Constitution Act, 1982*, of “certain rights: to be considered a distinct aboriginal society, to have a constitutionally protected land base and to be self-governing” (Purich 1988, 1). When “existing aboriginal and treaty rights” were entrenched in the *Constitutional Act, 1982*, and the term “Métis” was included, but not defined—as a reference to one of three Aboriginal Peoples in Canada—a quantitative-orientated Canadian society had, and still retains, great difficulty in defining “Métis” in a qualitative manner. This attitude is now proving to be problematic and is affecting the conceptualization of specific happenings with regard to the Métis. Quantitative measurements for the dominant society depend on exact physical borders while Métis “measurements” have always been based on historical concepts versus geographical or legal definitions. But what are the

“existing aboriginal and treaty rights” of the Métis? Nobody knows—exactly. Contrary to a prevailing belief, Métis do not have federal recognition of a “right” to tax exemption, free dental care or post-secondary education as these are not “rights” but rather “benefits” under the *Indian Act* and available only to Status Indians. But, ironically, these “benefits” are available to those Métis who are registered under the *Indian Act*. As Frideres (1998, 23) explains:

As the treaties were being established in the late 1800s, mixed ancestry people often “took treaty” and became Indians under the *Indian Act*... [as] British and Canadian law did not distinguish Métis from Indians as representing two different people...mixed races were forced to assimilate into White society or become Indian...[w]ith the subsequent establishment of a roll, i.e., a list of all status (legal) Indians, it became possible to track and identify who was and was not Indians...[but] it is important to remember that those struck from the roll were not necessarily considered Métis, although a large number began to define themselves by that term.

On the other hand, section 12 (1) (b) of the *Indian Act*, denied Indian status to Indian women who married non-Indians. Those women who found themselves “ousted” under these conditions usually identified as Métis. It fell to the U.N. Human Rights Commission to correct this moral injustice. In 1985, the Canadian government was impelled to amend the act (Bill C-31) and to repeal section 12 (1) (b) (Boldt 1994, 13).

A “card-carrying” Métis—one who has community conformation of Métis identity—who lives in an area where modern land claims, which include Métis claims, are being settled by agreement is entitled to whatever rights and benefits

flow from that agreement (Dunn FAQ 15 June, 1999, 9).

I am relying on Martin F. Dunn's Online work as he has long been considered an expert on Métis matters by members of academia and the Métis. He presented an invited paper (January 1989) "Métis Identity—A Source of Rights" at a conference on Métis Identity and Definition at Trent University, and has been a "life-long friend and confidant, whose organization and research skills were unstintingly shared during the last crucial months [of preparing the manuscript We Are Metis]"(Redbird 1980, Acknowledgements). Dunn expresses ideas that are popular among the Métis. His www. sites (see References) are widely consulted by the Métis and those who have questions pertaining to all aspects of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal ancestry. The value of Dunn's sites, "Frequently Asked Questions," "Other Métis Sites," "Welcome to The Other Métis" "Are You Métis?" etc. may be judged by the number of "hits" they receive--some 70,000 monthly (one person may account for dozens of "hits")--which is an indication of the influence his work has on public perceptions. Future historians--cyberspace is still in its infancy-- may well consider the impact of such Internet activity as affecting as well as reflecting Métis consciousness. I feel that Dunn's research and informed opinions are relevant to the topic of this paper.

Canadian law courts "have determined that Métis do have aboriginal and treaty rights, but they have also indicated what those precise rights might...vary with the time, place and historical circumstance of a particular Métis individual

or collectivity involved (Dunn June 15 1999, 8-9).

Not all Métis are entitled to “aboriginal and treaty rights.” A casual conversation will reveal that Canadians do not clearly understand these apparently contradictory points which are based on legal definitions. Attention to this conceptualization--of what constitutes “Métis”--is conspicuously absent in the works of modern-day historians and is also generally ignored by the popular media. As Dunn(ibid. 9) explains:

Aboriginal rights are collective rights specific to use and occupancy of specific areas of land and, as such, are only accessible to Métis descendants of those who are clearly eligible for such rights on such lands. Treaty rights (including since 1983, rights derived from modern land claims agreements) are only available to descendants of those covered by the original Treaty or agreement. Those who have no demonstrable connections to the specific land covered by that specific Treaty or agreement are no eligible for the specific Aboriginal and Treaty rights involved.

In truth, the Achilles heel not only for the larger Canadian society but also for many First Nations Peoples is not the question of the existence of the Métis but rather the pursuit of land claims by the groups of now legally recognized Métis. Currently, the Métis colonies of Alberta are collectively suing the federal government for non-payment of royalties on natural resources extracted from land claimed by Métis colonies.

In 1933, the Alberta government authorized an investigation into the quality of life of the Métis within the province. That investigation became known as the Ewing Commission (1936), and recommended that a “small

agricultural community experiment be initiated as a model for others to follow. The commission also stressed that the Métis should be afforded a measure of independence in developing such a community”(Friesen 1996, 73). In 1938, it was announced by the Alberta government that 70 townships of land would be set aside as permanent Métis settlements or “colonies.” The Métis occupy these “colonies” were not to be considered wards of the state nor were they to pay lease fees for the land. But little attempt was made to train the Métis in agriculture; all supervisory positions were held by whites while the Métis could only aspire to the position of casual labourer. According to Friesen (ibid. 74) the “Metis colonies were born out of common misery and poverty of the Great Depression [and]... were supposed to represent a provincial response to the federal Indian reserves, but as Chalmers notes, they were more nearly an echo.” Little is known by the general public either of the existence or history of these settlements. In 1972 a Task Force recommended that the Métis be given a form of self-government while simultaneously suggesting that “the boundaries [borders] of the settlements be removed so they [the Métis] could ultimately become part of the general provincial community”(ibid. 76). In June, 1989, the residence of Alberta’s eight Métis settlements approved a government agreement giving the Métis a measure of self-government and 310 million dollars in land compensation which was to be used for economic development (Palmer 1990, 366). Today, the Métis of Alberta continue to pursue land claims in these areas. The outcome of these claims is anxiously awaited as the settlement of land

claims and other related matters bear “directly upon non-Aboriginals in the area where the claims are being dealt with. Indirectly, land claim decisions have an impact upon [First Nations], businesses, and potential land uses” (Frideres 1998, 18).

For the general public there is only one major way of establishing collective identity: using objective criteria. In an objective approach, a number of attributes as well as legal definitions are established that mark the boundaries (borders) of identity (ibid. 19). Frideres writes:

These attributes establish indicators that are ‘visible’ to all observers. Then each individual under question is matched with these attributes. Thus, if skin pigmentation, hair texture, bone structure, language, and eye colour is used, one would assess each individual in terms of these attributes to determine whether or not he or she would fall into the category of “Aboriginal” (similarly, “Native,” or “Indian,” “Inuit,” “Métis”).

It was not until 1850 that the first statutory definition of who was an Indian was enacted. Since the original *Indian Act, 1876*, the legal definition of an Indian has been continually revised. In short, “Indian” refers to a person who, pursuant to the *Indian Act*, is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian (ibid. 25).

Friesen (1991, 14) agrees that:

The distinctions inherent in the Indian Act are of great importance [legally] today and are responsible for the creation of several subcategories of Native peoples....[among whom are the Métis]. The combination of the implications of the Treat[ies] and the Indian Act have created Treaty-Status Indians, non-Treaty Status Indians and Non-Status Indians. Some of the later group also claim the heritage of

the Metis Nation and reject the nomenclature of being non-Status.

Thus the bones of Canadian modern-day contention and confusion surrounding Métis legal identity were laid in the nineteenth century. Bearing in mind that many Métis are blue-eyed and fair-haired it is little wonder that identity confusion reigns supreme.

Nothing concerning Métis issues is simple. The Métis universe is a fascinating kaleidoscope of conditions and events that defy simplicity. There is no formal, official or legal national definition of Métis (Dunn 15 June 1999, 4). Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1882*, while recognizing Métis as one of three Aboriginal Peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis) does not define the term. What is certain, however, is that there is a long history of Canadian constitutional provisions relating to the aboriginal rights of Indian Peoples. Menno Boldt (1994, 301) in *Surviving As Indians*, states that:

As early as the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), under which France relinquished Acadia and Newfoundland to England, Indians were guaranteed the right to trade with French and British colonists "without any molestation or hindrance." Similarly, the Articles of Capitulation of Montreal (1760), the Royal Proclamation (1763), the Quebec Act (1774), the Constitution Act (1791), and the Royal Proclamation (1817) guaranteed the aboriginal right of Indians to live undisturbed in their lands.

The Constitutional Act (1867), also known as the British North American (BNA) Act, which gave the Parliament of Canada jurisdiction over 'Indians, and lands reserved by Indians' (section 91[24]), and the Indian Act (1876) also acknowledged the aboriginal rights of Indians in Canada. The BNA and Indian acts were followed by a series of other legislative acts.... Moreover, the courts of Canada have consistently given judicial affirmation to the aboriginal rights of Indians.

Canadian recognition of Indian aboriginal rights was reaffirmed in the Constitution Act, 1982.

Boldt, carefully reconnects the existence and validity of Aboriginal rights within the Canadian context, and by extension the aboriginal rights of the Métis. But the burning question remaining for the general public is what defines a Métis? There have been many attempts to define the term Métis which would apply to all Métis, under all circumstances and at all times, but never has one definition been fully successful. When the *First Ministers' Conferences on Aboriginal Matters* were held between 1983 and 1987 the governments and representatives of five national Aboriginal organizations agreed that "a Métis is a person of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry who self-identifies as a Métis person and who is recognized as a Métis person by a Métis community"(Dunn 1999, 3). Such a loosely-defined definition could hardly be expected to meet with overall approval from all Canadians. That difficulty of definition is further compounded when one tries to expand the question to cover the Métis as a collective entity. It is a question of such difficulty that it cannot be answered satisfactorily by even the Métis themselves. Peoples of aboriginal mixed-blood have existed since the 1600s and may be found all over the Americas. In Canada they exist from coast, to coast, to coast. Historically, they may have been familiar by other names but it is the descendants of those peoples who are today recognized as Métis within section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* (ibid., 3).

Virtually every province and territory has at least one Métis organization which issues Métis' membership cards. Such a card is issued without mandate and various organizations may have differing criteria for membership. For example, the Metis Nation of Alberta defines the criteria necessary for membership within their Locals (Articles 3; 3.1 and Articles 4; 4.5 MNA Bylaws) as including proof that an individual:

- (a) is a descendent of those Metis who received or were entitled to receive land grants and/or Scrip under the provisions of the Manitoba Act, 1870, or the Dominion Lands Acts as enacted from time to time;
- and**
- (b) a person of Aboriginal descent who is accepted by the Local Community as a Metis person.

A Métis [of Alberta] must provide historical proof (government, church or community records) of his or her status as Métis. To add further to the confusion of Métis identity, the majority of even status Indians are today mixed-blood and most of them are not defined as Métis while some Métis were included in treaties but still identify only as Métis. The Métis also accept that:

Determination of Metis identity (and indeed Aboriginal identity) is not merely a question of genetics. A Metis person certainly has both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry, but ancestral links may also be non-generic. They sometimes involve marriages or adoptions, family links that are as deeply cherished as blood connections. Ancestry is only one component of Metis identity. Cultural factors are significant; a people exist because of a common culture. When someone thinks of themselves as Metis, it is because they think of themselves as Metis...(Royal Commission 1.2).

The two most influential national representative organizations of the Métis today are the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP)—formerly the Native Council of Canada (NCC) which was formed in 1971, and the Metis National Council (MNC) which split-off from the NCC in 1983. Each of these organizations is funded by the federal government and each is mandated by their registered charters to represent their respective Métis constituencies (Dunn 15 June 1999,10).

Since the late 60s and early 70s when federal funds were awarded to associations consisting of both non-status Indians and Métis membership there has been a misconception abroad that Métis are, in fact, non-status Indians. The well-recorded amendment of Bill C-31 (1985) and the repeal of section 12 (1) (b)—the Canadian government being embarrassed by the Human Rights Commission of the U.N to acknowledge discrimination against certain factions of Aboriginal people—which permitted more than 100,000 people, many of whom who had previously identified themselves as Métis, to again “become” status Indians under the *Indian Act*, was a nation and worldwide media event which had a particular significance for the Métis in that much of the attending publicity did not favour their cause: the dominant society being resentful of perceived “freeloaders.” Boldt (1994, 293) states that when “the government framed Bill C-31, it estimated that, including descendants, approximately 72,000 individuals would be eligible for reinstatement and that anywhere from 10 to 20 per cent (i.e., 7,000 to 14,000) would seek reinstatement.” The final figures far

exceeded the estimates and created an atmosphere of concern in the country.

Dunn (15 June 1999, 6) has suggested that since the differences between “Métis and Indian are not strictly genealogical, and legal distinctions are notoriously arbitrary and/or ambiguous, [the Canadian public should]...turn to [examine] the unique situation of each individual or collectivity to whom the terms are being applied.” But how practical would that reality be? Clearly, self-identifying appears to be only one pragmatic indicator of who is a Métis, as is validation by the collectivity concerned (at least until such indicators of identity are questioned by the larger society). And such questions arise easily when the Métis are seen, rightly or wrongly, as “slipping” in and out of a chosen identity in accordance with the prevailing political climate.

An ostensible purpose of the *First Ministers' Conferences* (1983, 1984, 1985 and 1987) was to define “existing aboriginal and treaty rights” as entrenched in section 35 (1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, in fulfillment of a promise made by the federal and provincial governments of Canada to Aboriginal Peoples that they “would be invited to participate in discussion on amendments to the constitution on matters which related directly to them”(Boldt 1994, 287). Briefly the agendas for the conferences ran as follows:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1983 | Define “existing aboriginal and treaty rights”
(Constitutional Amendment Proclamation); |
| 1984 | Constitutional recognition of the aboriginal peoples’ right
to self-government with delegated powers—no resolution; |

1985 “Contingent” rights of self-government—contingent upon tripartite negotiations (federal, provincial and aboriginal)—no resolution;

1987 (Meech Lake Accord—stalemate)

—Quebec as distinct society

—Indian “rights” to be defined before entrenchment in the Constitution Act.

For Boldt (ibid. 228) the “issue under discussion (the inherent rights of aboriginal people to self-government) brought out the fundamental differences that exists between the two sides ...the aboriginal representatives and the Canadian governments” [and] as each came to “the FMCs with their prerehearsed scripts... they started with a huge gap and moved further apart.” At the close of the March 1984 FMC it became glaringly obvious to the country that the Métis had their own political agenda and were willing to stand apart from First Nation Peoples if it should prove to be politically advantageous. Or was there an awareness of an historical precedent and reality: one of the reasons for Riel’s eventual defeat stemmed from the lack of support by “astute chiefs like Sitting Bull, Big Bear and Crowfoot” (Flanagan 1979,109). Whatever the reason, such a show of independence focused an unflattering spotlight on the Métis Nation. They were once again seen by the dominant society as donning a mask of ambivalence towards their aboriginal ancestry, unencumbered by loyalty and expectations.

On 30 April 1987, Canada's First Ministers met at Meech Lake, Quebec, to consider proposals purposed to bring Quebec into full participation Canada's constitutional family (Boldt 1994, 289). This final FMC ended in stalemate as no mutually acceptable compromise could be found. There were eight areas of proposed constitutional amendments among which was the *Amending Formula* which required unanimous consent for changes to national institutions. The Métis hoped for a form of self-government but were opposed by the other Aboriginal Peoples because the Meech Lake Accord acknowledged none of their rights, interests, needs, or aspirations. The general perception is that alone the Métis can never achieve self-government simply because they are not shielded from outside influences to the same extent as are First Nations and Inuit; therefore, any threads of political or community cohesiveness are constantly being gnawed away. Also being determined to be recognized in their own right has placed the Métis in a worse position than other Native Peoples because there is a perception among the larger society that in distancing themselves from the First Nations and Inuit the Métis are denying their aboriginal roots. The only certainty which exists in any Métis "question" is the certainty of ambivalence on both sides of the "question." Some 60 to 70 percent of Canada's First Nations still live on reserves. Here they function as a homogeneous community with the right to practise their culture and have a place where they can speak their language (Purich 1988, 202). Are the Métis, on the other hand, without a land base and with little hope of achieving self-

government, being viewed generally as just another dissenting ethnic group which is best ignored?

Fears of “nations within a nation” strike at the heart of any government when dealing with land rights and the possibility of a plurination state.

Indigenous protest in Canada is gathering momentum. Land hunger is acute. Lisa Smith, who specializes in the study of race relations, in an article “The Aftermath” (1992, 105) suggests that:

Where the group forms an identifiable and homogeneous community, this brings claims to a specific territory, with associated political rights. Where settlement has become dispersed and the population mixed, the situation is more complex, and raises issues not of claims to a definable physical territory, but to land rights and to a distinctive legal-political voice. In both cases, power of decision-making require linkage to broader national institutions, which must in turn relinquish a homogenous and monopolistic view of state control. In any country where a substantial minority or majority of the population is indigenous, or where the indigenous population is situated in key areas of natural resources, recognition of these rights would fundamentally alter the course of legitimate development....

Leroy Little Bear (1999, 1) writing on the “Relationship of Aboriginal Peoples to the Land and The Aboriginal Perspective on Aboriginal Title” is in agreement when he states that “concepts of land ownership and use cannot be separated from the worldview and philosophy of any society.” Métis, as an Aboriginal People, contribute to this philosophy.

The Royal Proclamation (1763), also know as the “Charter of Indian Rights” did not deal with Indians lands in the West as they were seen as

being outside the area considered by the proclamation. Friesen (1991, 100) in clarification says:

[t]he English legal system (which also applied to the Colonies), stated that the citizens of a newly acquired dominion do not lose their property or civil rights....With the numbered treaties the Crown obtained land from Aboriginal people in return for specific compensation and rights. The Indian [Métis] people who did not sign a treaty did not relinquish the Aboriginal rights to their lands.

For the Métis, aboriginal rights include the right to a land base but for the general public, such demands seem preposterous especially as the image of the Métis as a people still remains blurred.

The Métis, as an aboriginal people, were connected to nature and the land and its natural resources in ways in which it is difficult for a western society to comprehend. The concept of ownership of land in "Fee Simple Absolute" is as vital for "legal" identity to Europeans as it is an anathema to Aboriginal Peoples. Both physically and metaphysically, the Métis drew their identity from the land while existing well within the parameters of the natural environment as they knew and understood it. But hard times and rough lessons well-learned have taught the Métis, in particular, that political power may lie in land ownership and that without a land base they may be cast adrift as a nation. For any nation the realities of economic conquest are as palpable and tangible as that of any military war waged and won. Brian Goehring (1993, 22) states in Indigenous Peoples of the World that:

When Europeans arrived, they carried with them a set of very

different ethics concerning relationships to the land...One of the fundamental concepts of this system is the right to individual ownership of lands, resources, and the means of production...Ownership is confirmed by a document known as a title.

In order of a title to be recognized it must have some basis in law, and this requires the creation of a sophisticated system dedicated to the enforcement of this law. Much of the structure of legal systems of European origin relates to the evolved ethics of private ownership.

To that end the contemporary Manitoba Metis Federation has “staked out a land claim at the historic river forks in Winnipeg, including the core of downtown Winnipeg” (Friesen 1996, 109). The possibility of such large-scale land ownership for the Métis, especially valuable urban real estate, strikes fear into the hearts of all Canadians, be they part of the larger society or that of the First Nations. But what is overlooked in the panic and rush to judgment is the legal restriction which is built into the “national-unity” accord, now known as the *Charlottetown Accord (1992)*. The *Charlottetown Accord* produced only four additional provisions to the “July 7 Accord,” only one of which might have proven to be of consequence to the Métis. That original provision states that “self-government agreements are to be set out in future treaties, or amendments to existing treaties, *including land claims....* [italics mine]. How would such a provision apply to the Métis who do not hold numbered treaties in common with the Canadian government? But even if aboriginal self-government were immediately accepted by all levels of government, there would still be a long period of development. Governments do not spring up overnight. Any negotiated settlement would have to be a compromise based on political will and that good

will would have to emanate from the grass roots of the Canadian nation. Under such circumstances, both sides might think that they are giving up more than they should, but it is mutual compromise that is the essence of any agreement. The reality is that the issue of self-government will not go away by ignoring it, nor will the Métis. Canadians often ask: What does self-government mean? The answer, according to Purich, is that "it is an evolutionary process whereby, through trial and error, native communities will take greater responsibility for matters effecting their own communities" (Purich 1988, 202). Canadians must recognize that there is not a single definition of self-government which will be acceptable to all Native communities in Canada. And what of the fourth "add-on" provision of the Charlottetown Accord which further states that:

The new provision to include Métis in section 91 (24) is not to result in a reduction of existing expenditures on Indians and Inuit or alter the fiduciary and treaty obligations of the federal government for aboriginal peoples (Boldt 1994, 105).

Both statements clearly leave no doubt that the Métis would have had an arduous battle ahead had the accord been ratified. As it happened the *Charlottetown Accord* failed in a national referendum and was rejected even in Indian communities. But the public perception is that the Métis Nation as a political entity is growing immensely powerful and that perception is a root cause of fear and alienation among Canadians. Perhaps, there is deep in the Canadian psyche a lingering and unspoken notion that a people once capable of "rebellion" are still capable of "rebellion" and that all that delays the inevitable is the lack of a

modern-day “David”? The reality is that the Métis rightly have high political expectations and that those expectations are constantly curtailed by the practices of the Canadian government. The government rationalizes this fear on the grounds that certain acknowledgments of aboriginal “powers” would threaten the integrity of the Canadian state. At the *Charlottetown Accord*, Quebec “insisted upon limiting [aboriginal] authority and laws by requiring that they must be consistent with Canadian laws essential to the ‘preservation of peace, order, and good government in Canada.’” (Boldt 1994, 105). Such sensings of realities percolate slowly but surely down to the general public and are capable of numbing a national response to the continuing estrangement of one of Canada’s founding members.

Years before, Louis Riel had acknowledged the up-coming storms of conflict awaiting the Métis and had tried to inspire “his” people with that sense of pride necessary for the building of nationhood. Kinsey Howard (1952, 46) reports Riel speech:

It is true that our savage origin is humble, but it is meet that we honour our mothers as well as our fathers. Why should we concern ourselves about what degree of mixture we possess of European or Indian blood? If we have ever so little of either gratitude or filial love, should we not be proud to say, “We are Metis!?”

History and the needs of society march on. Unfortunately, for the Métis, historiography chooses to dwell on the more contrived and unflattering traits of Riel as rebel while choosing to ignore Riel as pacifist, and such perceptions are, by extension, applied to the modern Métis. Siggins (1994, 448) gives a

well-researched image of Riel as:

[a] man who was truly a humanitarian, who gave up prestige and wealth to fight for the underdog, who led a life of dedicate revolution even though his instincts, conservative and devout as he was, might not naturally have led him in that direction...[B]ut what makes Louis Riel so intriguing is that he managed to straddle two cultures, Native and white, and came as close as anyone to envisioning a sympathetic and equitable relationship between the two....

When Riel's story is understood outside the constraints of political ideology then

there may be hope for a more positive reaction to the Métis and... " that

Canadians may someday achieve this vision remains Louis Riel's legacy" (ibid.).

Although, in the case of the Métis, racial or colour bars never became codified

as in the case of former slave societies, nevertheless, the issue of race became,

and exists today, as a means of classifying a population hierarchically and

economically. According to Sawchuk (1978, 35) "it is safe to say that ...[the

Métis] are the poorest people in the country ...[and] it is not too difficult to trace

the contemporary situation to the historical circumstances that originally

separated the Metis from their land and means of livelihood a century ago."

Today, the larger Canadian society cannot readily accept this fact because such

an acceptance would force it, at the very least, to become involved in the search

for a solution to the Métis "question." The prevailing answer has been

assimilation. The reasoning behind assimilation is the mistaken notion that

merely by "educating" the [Métis], government, i.e. the general public, "could

expect [them] to automatically drift into the mainstream of society and disappear

forever as an ethnic entity” (Redbird 1980, 29).

Duke Redbird (ibid. 53- 4) believes that he speaks for the Métis when he says that:

The Canadian public is beginning to realize that there is an important distinction between assimilation and integration, and the supposition that native people are, or ever will be, assimilated onto Canadian life is totally unrealistic...[t]oday there are more people of native ancestry than ever before...[w]e, as Metis, can represent the best possible example of what everyone in North America can eventually become.

For such a conceptualization to reach maturity there has to be a clearly defined and accurate image of the Métis available to the general public. But according to Redbird, from the Métis point of view, current conceptions of Métis history are totally—albeit inadvertently—misrepresented by most academic historians.

Contrary to the implications and assumptions of most writing on the Métis, the Métis see themselves through their oral traditions and myths as:

- (1) A race apart from both white and Indians and the only race indigenous to Canada;
- (2) Having established a viable—if conceptually invisible to white perception—civilization at least a century before confederation;
- (3) A founding nation equal to the French and English in the development and growth of Confederation;
- (4) A people shamelessly exploited, initially by a minority of political and land-grabbing carpetbaggers, and presently by the majority of Canadians through their indifference to the very real plight of the Métis people;
- (5) An ethnic and racial component with great potential for future development and contribution to Canadian life—if the opportunity to unfold that potential is returned to them via aboriginal rights and land claims;
- (6) A people capable of building and designing their own future on their own terms within the context of the recognition of

their reality so long denied them and as presently focused in the northwest and far north of Canada (Redbird 1980, 55).

And as Sawchuk (1978, 34) has noted:

The term Metis has quite different connotations today than it had in the early 1800s....[t]oday it...commonly refers to anyone with mixed Indian and white ancestry and includes people of widely different backgrounds...ranging in a continuous spectrum from completely white to completely Indian.”

The Indian and the Métis share virtually the same value system with regard to land and the importance of ancestry. Yet “this does not imply that the Metis regard themselves as one with the Indian” (ibid. 41). Métis are quick to point out that since they never had a “Department of Métis Affairs” to take “care of them but have been forced to make their own way in the world, they have a moral edge over the Indians. Many feel they have received a much worse deal than the Indians, and that their particularly disadvantaged position distinguishes them from both white and Indian society” (ibid. 42).

A section of the public’s perception is that the Métis seem unable to forge a sense of solidarity and identity but that is not strictly true. What is not considered is the truly astonishing strength of genealogical relationships among Métis communities albeit that they are separated by time and place. Geoff Burtonshaw, Métis researcher, states that Father Lacombe’s genealogical records (vaults of the Glenbow Museum), relating to Métis individuals in the Edmonton area only, number over one thousand (personal interview, 20 May 2000). The tremendous differences that far out-weigh the commonalities existing between

the various Métis communities do not appear to lessen family ties but rather appear to strengthen that sense of solidarity and identity. The Métis may well be a manifestation of the idiom "blood is thicker than water." Strangely, First Nations Peoples are not expected to conform to one rigid image of "Nativeness" but that is not held as true for the Métis. The Métis, of course, have a commonality of Aboriginal ancestry but they do not have a clearly defined image of that source of identity, and therefore, lack a compliance ideology on which to build a collective identity.

The question of collective Métis identity needs to be clarified so that the Métis are perceived by the public not only as a political entity but also as a unique Aboriginal society searching for, and entitled to, a place in Canadian life. Curiosity has a way of telling us what we need to know. If we, as members of the larger Canadian society, challenge society's assumptions about the Métis then we must challenge our own assumptions too, but we need a certain curiosity to see that the Métis suffer from living "outside" society. On the other hand, ironically, the Métis are today discovering their true selves and their own criteria of truth with the odd realization of suddenly seeing their world in "colour," the reverse of many people who feel their surroundings fading to grey.

CHAPTER THREE

PRIVATE PERCEPTIONS: A LOCAL SURVEY

Métis self-identification presumably reflects the way Métis are treated by others, and the way Métis interpret others' behaviour and attitudes. Human beings can change their "perceptions of reality as they interact with each other, can experience more than one reality at a time, can reinterpret the past to fit in with their needs, and can even hold what appears to be contradictory perceptions"(Teevan and Hewitt 1995, 158). As no previous research had been carried out on Métis self-perceptions we felt that a Lethbridge area Métis survey would provide answers to some of our questions (Barsh, Gibbs and Turner, in press).

A survey questionnaire was formulated on the basis of qualitative interviews that would enable the local Métis to speak for themselves. In the interviews it became apparent that many Métis experience inner feelings of incompleteness, emptiness and self-doubt, and that these feelings were shared by Métis who expressed themselves either in Métis or White culturally opposing ways. Our overriding impression was of the Métis having faith in their own unique, intrinsic worth as a people apart, while choosing not to gloss over the difficulties of asserting their Métis identities within the existing social order. While the Métis cherish their past they are also accepting the realities of the present.

Objective identity is easily defined, if also as easily contested, according

to established indicators. Frideres (1998, 19) notes that “[i]n the objective approach, a number of attributes are established that identify the boundaries of identity. These attributes establish indicators that are “visible” to all observers. Then each individual under question is matched with these attributes...to determine whether or not he or she would fall into a [particular] category.” But Métis self-identification lies in a subjective conceptualization of “self” as Métis. If you define yourself as Métis and you “feel” Métis, then, under the subjective approach, you *are* Métis. Frideres (ibid.) states that “[w]e can attempt to measure this self-conceptualization in some form, but all it tells us is the degree to which an individual feels Aboriginal. It does not identify the defining attributes nor the relative importance of each of these attributes.” Because an objective perspective has usually been used by the government and a subjective perspective by the various organized groups of the Métis community there have been, and continues to be, considerable conflicts as to who is a “Métis.” A precise definition of who is Métis does not exist and so the conflict will remain unsolved for the foreseeable future.

The need to “distinguish” is a Euro-Canadian concept and foreign to aboriginal peoples. Ironically, the very process of definition as a means to simplify complex relationships, leads, in many cases, to separation and division; as in the case of the Métis who are expected to meet certain criteria set by the larger society. The Métis perceive, understand, and value themselves from a continuum of past, present, and future. When such a holistic viewpoint is torn

asunder the results for the whole nation can be challenging.

Inter-group relationships in Canada in this century have been shaped by the historical processes of colonialism, conquest, and migration--processes that continued to have an influence for generations. Groups such as the [Métis] involuntarily became part of a plural society and remain economically and politically marginal to that society (Agócs 1979, 1-18). "In the absence of precise legal categories, and in a Canadian national culture that continues to be ambivalent about aboriginality, it is not surprising that Métis identity is multifarious, volatile and personal, sometimes even covert "(Barsh, Gibbs and Turner). In other words, "the identity of the individual [Métis] lies in his/her conceptualization of self (Frideres 1998, 19).

Identity is a complex issue, especially in Canada. The question "Who are you?" for any Métis person is often answered in the context of racism and discrimination. According to Howard Adams (1975, preface) "[t]o the whites of Canada, "Metis" means a light coloured Indian"; ignored is the fact that there are major historical and cultural differences between the Métis and other aboriginal peoples although there are certainly many parallels. Friesen (1996, 16) explains that:

[There is] the generic definition of Metis which means that all Native people who are not "registered" or Status Indians via the Indian Act are Metis. It is estimated that there are at least a million such Canadians, but many of them certainly do not think of themselves as being Metis and they do not live a lifestyle which in any way represents the Metis philosophy or value system.... Status was originally assigned on a happenstance basis, that is, to those Indians

who “stood in line” to be registered obtained Status.

Legal identity also seems to be irrelevant in the face of racial discrimination when the Métis fall prey to stereotypes (ibid). Some Canadians hold negative stereotypes of Native groups, especially in the prairie provinces. In the long term, “racism results in a serious and permanent distortion of the [Métis] ...self-image” (Frideres 1998, 155). However, one research group suggests that negative stereotyping of the Métis is not the norm, and overall, the Canadian public is sympathetic toward, though poorly informed about the [Métis] (Ponting 1986, 42-45); Langford and Ponting 1992, 141). Many Métis face the dilemma of choosing between preserving their Métis identity or losing that identification in order to succeed more easily in the larger society.

Howard Adams, speaking personally of the power of the media to create a negative role model, is quoted in We Are Metis (Redbird 1980, 49) as saying that :

Native people cannot avoid seeing the cultural images and symbols of white supremacy because they are everywhere in society, especially in movies, television, comic books, and textbooks. As these native children grow up, these white supremacist images become more alive, but natives are powerless to do anything about them,. Consequently, the children internalize inferior images as part of their true selves, often with strong feelings of shame. As a result, I attempted to disassociate myself from everything and everyone that appeared [Metis]. I wanted to be a successful white man in mainstream society.

Beatrice Culleton’s novel In Search of April Raintree (1983, 49) eloquently outlines the internal conflict of two Métis sisters as they struggle to

come to terms with their identities as either White or Aboriginal. Culleton, who is herself a Métis, became a ward of the Children's Aid Society of Winnipeg at the age of three and was reared in foster homes. Both of her sisters committed suicide (Culleton 1983, 228). In her novel, Culleton (ibid.49) depicts April, the main character, as light-skinned and working desperately to keep her identity secret while her dark-skinned sister is proud of her Métis heritage. April states:

I wasn't really thinking about anything when I noticed my arms and hands. They were tanned a deep, golden brown. A lot of pure white people tanned just like this. Poor Cheryl. She would never be able to disguise her brown skin as just a tan. People would always know that she was part Indian...Anyways, I could pass for a pure white person... If I had to, I could even change the spelling of my name. Raintree looked like one of those Indian names but if I changed it to Raintry, that could pass for Irish...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.

Culleton's book is a work of fiction although to me it certainly seems based in some Métis realities of discrimination. Margaret Laurence writes that:

One cannot read this moving account of two Metis sisters without feeling their terrible anguish, bewilderment and anger as they try in their different ways to live in a society that frequently rejects and abuses them, as it has rejected and abused their parents and ancestors...(Culleton 1983, review).

Redbird (1980, 50) on the other hand, is more optimistic on the issue of Métis consciousness:

There is an extant, strong, identity base that the Metis [individually and collectively] can build upon—the legacy of Louis Riel. However, the western Metis image and cultural characteristics that now serve as a bridge to connect the [Metis] on a national scale, must not rely solely on the historic context. It must now develop an awareness of values in a modern context, and of the Metis' contribution—not only

in Canadian history—but also in present day Canada.

Culleton, as a writer of fiction, and Redbird, as a writer of fact, highlight two major concerns of the Métis: positive self-concept and public recognition, not only as an Aboriginal People but also for their contribution to Canadian history. The over-riding reality is that Government definitions for determining who is or who is not a Métis are unsatisfactory for those Métis are who self-identifying. However, the Métis own tendency to discriminate among themselves along status lines (Red River ancestry or other) readily weakens their position in the larger society.

In much “of the early writing concerning the Métis, the people were treated simply as a colorful deviation... [t]he best of both worlds was open to the first generation of [Métis]... “[t]he early Metis were both bilingual and bi-cultural and for the most part, because of sufficient isolation, were not pressured to identify with either culture”(Redbird 1980, 3). Unfortunately, the “human experience involved is all but lost. This oversight has filtered down to the present scholarship on the origins of the Metis” (ibid.). Redbird is referring to the actual humanity of the early Métis whom today are generally seen as simply colourful relics. There is still little recognition by the dominant society that Métis identity is not static but dynamic, and that there is always a philosophical element in the question of any identity. W.B Yeats, world renowned poet (1978, 15) believed that the process of self-identification unearths “ghosts” --that one may not recognize or choose to recognize certain

elements of the past.

A 1993 census estimated that there are nearly one thousand Métis in Lethbridge, southern Alberta, although they are barely “visible” as a distinct community within the city (Local 2003). Our 1998 survey found that self-identified Métis in the Lethbridge area (Table 2) generally choose to remain somewhat invisible unless they consider themselves visually identifiable as Native people. Invisibility may be a function of identity ambivalence, as well as the expectation of discrimination.

To obtain qualitative information as a backdrop for interpreting survey results, we interviewed knowledgeable local Métis, such as past and present officers of Local 2003, and elders who have served in the Métis Nation of Alberta Senate. We shared and discussed our data with several Métis political and professional leaders in the city as an aid to interpreting its implications.

The following excerpts and Tables which discuss the results of the Lethbridge area Métis survey are an abridgment of “The Metis of Lethbridge: A Microcosm of Identity Politics”³ It is possible that the results of the survey will be able to be generalized to other Métis, at least in Alberta.

Local 2003 is one of 59 chapters constituting the Métis Nation of Alberta. Its 80 voting members either live in the city of Lethbridge, or in nearby smaller towns in southern Alberta. According to a house-by-house survey conducted by Local 2003, there are nearly one thousand Métis in the area, of whom 39 percent reside in the city itself (Local 2003, 1993)⁴. Although Métis

would thereby comprise 31 percent of *all* self-identified Native^s people in Lethbridge, there are no significant neighbourhood concentrations of Métis, and only one-fifth of the Métis adults identified by the survey are members of the Local⁶. The survey also found that 58 percent of the unemployed Métis identified themselves as labourers, 35 percent of them reported earning \$20,000 or less, and mean personal income was roughly \$15,000. Half of the respondents (47 percent) reported receiving some form of government assistance.

We hypothesized that *visibility* would effect the extent to which Lethbridge area Métis chose to assert their identity in the public as well as private spheres. Métis who considered themselves *visible*, we predicted, would experience more discrimination but have little choice about self-identifying. Métis who considered themselves *invisible*, we reasoned, would associate assertiveness with visibility, and exposure to discrimination. They would be more likely to avoid embarrassment by keeping their aboriginality to themselves.

Similarly, we hypothesized that Métis who conceive of being Métis as having *material benefits* would be more likely to identify as Métis publicly, and to be more politically active in the Local.

To obtain relatively detailed and comparable self-reflective data on Métis identity under conditions of complete anonymity, we designed a 28-question questionnaire, and pre-tested it for comprehension and specificity on University of Lethbridge students. The cover sheet explained that “Native and non-Native students at the University of Lethbridge [are] interested in finding out more

about the Métis people who live here in Lethbridge: where you come from, what's important to you, how well you feel that your interests and needs are being met.”

A random sample of the entire city was not practical, as we would have had to mail a minimum of 15,000 survey forms to recruit 100 Métis respondents. We chose instead a targeted sampling strategy, aimed at reaching as many self-identified Métis as possible. Survey forms were mailed directly to members of Local 2003. To reach less active Métis, we also recruited participation through low-profile, anonymous pick-up boxes in high-use, ethnically neutral public places and businesses, as well as the offices of the Métis Local and other Native organizations. To draw attention to the pick-up boxes, modest posters were placed at public buildings and businesses around the city, and we arranged for a “human interest” story describing the study in the *Lethbridge Herald*. A twenty-dollar reward was offered for every tenth response.

We also publicized telephone numbers, postal, and email addresses for obtaining information about the study and requesting survey forms, and we organized and publicized an informal information-sharing night on the Métis at the downtown public library. Each survey form bore a special code which enabled us to determine where and how the anonymous respondent had obtained it.

Based on the total Métis population of the area as reported by Local 2003, approximately 10 percent (N=52) of Métis adults responded to our survey.

Half of the respondents were members of Local 2003, hence the response rate of members was three times greater than non-members. We had anticipated that members of the Local would be more strongly self-identified and assertive as Métis and therefore more likely to respond to the survey. We had not expected such low levels of interest, among members or non-members, however, in view of the extensive publicity we had arranged for the survey.⁷

A significant demographic characteristic of the sample is its age structure. For Lethbridge as a whole, according to the 1996 national census, the ratio of persons aged 20-39 to persons aged 40-59 was 4.1, indicating a relatively youthful population. In our sample this ratio is 0.8, a strong bias in favour of older adults. Respondents in sample tended to be older. The strength of this bias is underscored by the fact that the Métis population of Canada as a whole, appears to be much *younger* than the non-Aboriginal population (Normand 1996, 12; Local 2003 1993). The norm appears to be that Métis have larger and younger families.

Within our sample, variables estimating respondents' interest in, and assertion of their Métis cultural identity were *not* significantly correlated with respondents' age.⁸ In other words, age apparently was a factor in the decision to respond to the survey, but not a factor in the way the respondents described themselves. An explanation for this phenomenon may be found in answers to our question, "How old were you when you began to think of yourself of Métis?" Half of the sample (52 percent) only began to self-identify as adults, and a large

number (25 percent) began to self-identify only after the age 40.

Cultural roots and ties

The cultural roots of our respondents are varied and overlapping, as indicated by Table 1. Just over half of the respondents have roots at Red River and have Cree and French ancestors. Most of the others trace their Aboriginal roots to Métis communities that arose elsewhere in the Prairies, largely but not entirely of Cree, French and Scottish ancestries.⁹

TABLE 1
**REPORTED ORIGINS AND ANCESTRY OF LETHBRIDGE-AREA
 METIS**
 (Percent of respondents who reported each origin)

<i>Ancestral area</i>		<i>Aboriginal roots</i>		<i>Immigrant roots</i>	
Red River	58	Cree	52	French	42
Saskatchewan	23	Ojibway	17	Scottish	29
Alberta	17	Other	10	Anglo-Irish	17

We found a strong pattern of maternal communication of Aboriginal culture. Of those respondents who reported learning about their Métis heritage from parents, grandparents, and other relatives (88 percent), 46 percent learned about themselves *exclusively* from female relatives, 26 percent learned from both male *and* female relatives, and 19 percent had relied exclusively on *male* relatives. Books, genealogical studies and Métis organizations had been secondary sources of information for one-third of the respondents. The centrality of women in transmitting Métis identity had been inferred from historical studies

(Brown 1983).

Barely one-sixth of our respondents reported having ever lived in a Métis community or Indian Reserve (15 percent), or “keeping in touch with relatives” in a Métis community or Reserve (21 percent). Half of the respondents (56 percent) reported that their current contacts with Métis people are mostly limited to members of their own families. Few respondents report involving their own children in Métis political or cultural activities, as described in more detail below.

Conception of “Métis”

Diverse in their origins and experiences, respondents predictably did not agree in the elements of a definition of Métis (Table 2). The respondents were given a list of seven categories of persons, and told to check every one that they felt should be acknowledged as Métis.

TABLE 2
LETHBRIDGE METIS CONCEPTIONS OF WHO IS “METIS”

(Percent of respondents who included each category of persons)	
Direct descendant of Red River	70
Grew up in a distinctly Métis community	48
Speaks <i>Michif</i> or is culturally Métis in some way	46
Native, but is not a status (registered) Indian	54
Indian, but did not grow up in an Indian Reserve	20
Self-identifies, and is accepted by other Métis	66

Although Red River roots and self-identification were each chosen by a

majority of the respondents, no more than *half* of the respondents could agree on *any pair* of criteria. Only 48 percent could agree that Métis include everyone who has Red River roots *or* self-identifies, for example. Only 48 percent could agree that Métis include everyone who had Red River Roots, *or* is either culturally Métis or grew up within a Métis community. It therefore appears that historical Red River ties, and contemporary cultural orientation versus Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry only, are conceptually distinct among our respondents, and form the bases of two competing ideas about what it means to be Métis.

Visibility and its consequences

Although 42 percent of respondents reported that their appearances or behaviour identifies them as Métis or Native, 85 percent felt that other people nonetheless “seem to treat me the same as everyone else” and 74 percent felt that non-Indians have treated them the same after learning that they are Métis. Only 20 percent reported being treated *worse* by non-Indians who learned of their Métis identity; a result, perhaps, of expectations. We found no statistically significant correlation between self-assessed visibility and self-reported experiences of discrimination. Nor was visibility a predictor of public assertiveness of Métis identity, as discussed more fully below.

Nearly half of our respondents (44 percent) did not identify any “advantages” to being Métis; two-thirds of them (65 percent) did not report any “disadvantages.” Among those who *did* identify advantages, most (62 percent)

referred exclusively to intangible benefits such as personal identity and cultural pride, rather than the enjoyment of any special legal rights or economic benefits. The disadvantages of being Métis, according to those few respondents who identified any, involved discrimination by both Indians and non-Indians.

Expressions of identity

A majority of respondents (74 percent) agreed with the statement, “My Métis heritage makes very little difference in my everyday life,”¹⁰ while only 15 percent agreed with the statement, “My Métis heritage is absolutely central to my life.” Respondents’ self-assessed *visibility* was a statistically significant predictor of agreement with the second of these two statements (Pearson’s $\chi^2=10.751$, $p<.001$) as we predicted. Visibility should logically have predicted disagreement with the first statement as well but fell just short of the threshold for statistical significance ($\chi^2 =3.743$, $p=.053$).

Respondents were relatively cautious about revealing their Métis heritage outside their circle of families and friends, or in contexts where there could be adverse consequences; for example, to co-workers (55 percent), at job interviews (25 percent), at public meetings (22 percent), or when introduced socially to non-Indians (24 percent). A large proportion (38 percent) of respondents does not self-identify as Métis in any of these social contexts. Public assertiveness of Métis identity was not a statistically significant, or correlate, of self-reported visibility, however.

Most of our respondents have children (81 percent), and of those

respondents with children, most have told their children that they are Métis (74 percent), and most have encouraged them to be proud of their Métis heritage (55 percent). Only 31 percent of respondents reported taking their children to Métis political meetings or cultural events, however, which suggests that the family is the context for maintaining awareness of identity.

One-third (33 percent) told their children to expect *problems* as a result of being Métis. This is intriguing since only 19 percent of our respondents identified discrimination as a “disadvantage” of being Métis, and 88 percent reported that being Métis did not affect the way they were treated by others. Parents are more anxious about racism as it potentially affects their children, than they are prepared to admit its impact on themselves.

Identity and political activity

Half (54 percent) of the respondents who are members of the Local described themselves as “actively involved.” Very few respondents (14 percent) have been members of the Lethbridge Local, or any other Métis organization, for more than five years, however. Local membership was not correlated with respondents’ self-perceived visibility, but weakly correlated with their agreement with the statement, “My Métis heritage is absolutely central to my life” ($\chi^2 = 3.835$, $p = .050$), and disagreement with the statement, “My Métis heritage makes very little difference in my everyday life” ($\chi^2 = 5.838$, $p = .016$)¹¹. Métis who view their Métis identity as relatively unimportant are unlikely to become active in any Métis organization. This much seems intuitively obvious.

Membership in the Local was also weakly correlated with agreement with the statement, "I know a lot of local Métis people and see them often" ($\chi^2=4.713$, $p=.030$). This suggests that the Local is a principal source of social contacts among Lethbridge-area Métis.

The relationship between membership in the Local and contact with other Métis is corroborated by respondents' estimates of the *number* of other Métis in the area that they "know personally." Responses ranged from zero to several hundreds, but there was a significant correlation between knowing more than 25 other Métis and membership in Local 2003 ($\chi^2=9.094$, $p=.003$).

Economic status and concerns

Significantly, our respondents were relatively recent arrivals in the Lethbridge area. Nearly half of them (46 percent) had been in the area for fewer than ten years; average duration of local residence was 12 years (range 1-40 years). Respondents' reasons for relocating were varied, led by employment (37 percent), family ties including marriage to a local resident (33 percent), and attending college or university (16 percent). We predicted that length of residence in the Lethbridge area would provide more opportunities for Métis to perceive discrimination. Contrary to our prediction, length of residence was *not* a reliable predictor of respondents' perception of discrimination, or expressions of Métis identity.

Despite the fact that employment and advanced education accounted for a majority of respondents' relocation to the Lethbridge area, only one-third of

them (33 percent) are currently self-employed, salaried, or earning more than 15 dollars per hour¹². Another third (31 percent) are employed part-time or at wages *less than* 15 dollars per hour. The remainder (36 percent) are unemployed, retired, or attending a college or a university. These economic conditions are roughly average for the population of Lethbridge as a whole, but somewhat better than average for Métis nationwide (Norman 1996, 38-51), which may explain why employment did *not* lead our respondents' list of "issues for the Métis people living in Lethbridge" (Table 3).

Table 3
LOCAL ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY LETHBRIDGE ARE METIS
 (Percent of respondents classifying each issue as "crucial")

Employment	40	Cultural events	34
Housing	44	Public recognition	42
Discrimination	44	Getting organized	51

Respondents' priorities were *not* a function of socio-economic status, however, nor of their self-perceived visibility or membership in Local 2003, although a larger sample might reveal some associations. In the light of our finding that Local 2003 is the principal source of social interaction among Lethbridge area Métis, respondents' strong interest in getting local Métis better organized is especially significant.

As noted above, Local 2003 estimated the area Métis population at just

under a thousand. However, 47 percent of our respondents believe that there are *more* than a thousand Métis in the area, and *non-members* of Local 2003 were significantly *more* likely to err in this directions ($\chi^2=5.743$, $p=.017$). This could be interpreted to mean that membership in the Local constitutes a “reality check” since it is the principal means by which Lethbridge-area Métis meet one another.

Implications

Nicks and Morgan (1987, 175) contend that the Métis who had settled on southern Alberta had already lost their Métis cultural identity by the 1950s, as a result of intermarriage. Sawchuk (1978), Waldram (1985) and Peterson (1985) all attribute current assertions of Métis identity to their recognition as Aboriginal people in the Constitution Act, 1982, and to their potential eligibility for land claims and material benefits. Kennedy (1997) further suggests that Métis are self-identifying simply because discrimination has abated. Most of the respondents to our survey were ambivalent about their aboriginality. On the whole, they reported feeling pride in their roots privately, but exercising restraint in public expression and assertion of Aboriginal, Indian, or Métis identity. They generally anticipate a negative reaction from others (including Indians) and, to some extent, adverse social and economic consequences of being visible. Of course, they may differ little from self-identified Indians with regard to the expectation of discrimination and intolerance. The Métis in our study tend to believe that they can evade visual detection, however. It may also be significant that Métis were belittled by Indians and Europeans alike, since their origin,

arguably resulting in a greater sensitivity to prejudice and greater expectation of rejection.

NOTES

3. Barsh, Russel L and E. Ann Gibbs and Tara Turner (1999, 4-11)

4. The survey actually enumerated 699 Metis, but adjusted this upwards to 974 based on the proportion of households in the area which had not been interviewed. We have used the higher figure.

5. "Native" is used here to denote all Aboriginal Peoples surveyed

6. According to the Local 2003 survey, the tiny hamlet of Diamond City just north of Lethbridge (total population 102) was 10 percent Metis. In other neighbourhoods, towns and hamlets, Metis were less than 2 percent of total population.

7. According to Local 2003, however, new membership and attendance at meetings have grown significantly in the wake of our survey due to the surrounding publicity. It would be interesting to resurvey the Metis community to ascertain this study's effect on assertion of identity.

8. Of course, this finding could be an error resulting simply from the small size of the sample and the weakness of any age-related effect.

9. Since most of the respondents reported multiple roots, the percentages in Table 1 should not be combined. "Other" aboriginal origins are Dene, Iroquois and Blackfoot. "Other" immigrant roots are Italian, African, Japanese, and Maori.

10. There was some overlap between agreement with this statement and agreement with the statement, "My Metis roots affect me more than my other roots," with which 28 percent of respondents agreed.

11. As noted earlier, respondents' agreement with these two statements was weakly correlated with self-reported visibility. A larger sample might therefore confirm our prediction: visibility—>importance of Metis identity—>active membership in Metis organizations.

12. According to the 1995 national census, the average personal income of Lethbridge residents as a whole was equivalent to a full-time wage of twelve dollars per hour. While we collected more detailed data on respondents' current economic status, the sample was too small to make the presentation or analysis of such data meaningful.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPROPRIATION

Considering the generally negative perceptions of the Métis that are widespread in society today it is startling to find that there is a newly-developed fashion to “play” Indian and, in particular, to “play” Métis. Imitation is often said to be the sincerest form of flattery known to humankind, while racism is seen as our greatest evil. Why then would anyone purposely combine these two opposing images to create a self-imposed prison of lines and limits in a search for the optimal self? Surprisingly, the players, from varied backgrounds, seem to find a kind of strength and clarity emanating from their choice; as if in the sparseness and simplicity of make-believe Métis life there is a better self, reduced to the essentials by temporary hardships and the elements. For many players who recognize themselves as Métis—the “other” Métis—but who do not belong to any national or local Métis organization it is a respite from the dominant society’s lifestyle. For others it is something different: a chance to be—within their own time frame, at their own choosing, and without donning the cloak of racial inferiority—part of the romance of the Métis. So much in vogue are these Métis “wannabees” that people are reported to be selling Métis “cards” on street corners and even on beaches in Florida! (Dunn FAQ 1999, 10).

Imaginative analysis of alternative worlds to the accepted is universal among mankind. The appropriation of any culture raises questions about identity

issues. According to Philip J. Deloria in Playing Indian (1998, 21):

We construct identity by finding ourselves in relation to an array of people and objects who are not ourselves. Every person and thing is Other to us. We situate some Others quietly closely to the Selves we are calling into being; others, we place so far away so as to make them utterly inhuman...Our familiar sense of constructed social divisions—race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, religion, region, nationality—helps us categorize, clarify, establish, and empower these relations. In situating ourselves, we define our identities as individuals and as members of various groups.

One of the more noticeable results of the Lethbridge area Métis survey was the very real split between “Red River” and other—of differing origins—Métis (Chapter Three, Table 2). There are dissenting voices within these Métis groups as to the definition of who is, and who is not, a Métis. The Red River was home to only about 10,000 Métis, so accepting this as the point of eligibility would result in a very small number of Métis (Lussier 1979-1980). Whether or not non-Status Indians should be identified as Métis depends on their self-identification as Métis and whether they relate to a Métis culture. There are also “Other” Métis not represented by the better known Canadian prairie Métis organizations or by their national organization, the Metis National Council, who self-identify as Métis. There are probably millions of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry in Canada who could assert their Métis identity. Dunn (ibid.1) reports that:

Most are individuals of Aboriginal ancestry [who are] looking for information that will help them make sense of that fact of their lives. Many are researchers—academic, political, government and

media—who are looking for background materials. And some are from other Métis organizations who are wondering what [mainstream and “recognized” Métis] are up to...The most unexpected [“Others”]—in terms of numbers—[are] American mixed blood people who are descended from Canadian Métis who moved to the U.S. in the thousands over the last two hundred years. They look with admiration and not a little envy at their Canadian cousins who, from the American point of view, seem to have achieved so much in terms of recognition as an Aboriginal people. They are also looking for support and advise as to how they can achieve that recognition from their own state and federal governments.

In the 1970s when prairie Métis were struggling for national recognition they joined with other Métis in organizations across the nation believing that there would be strength in numbers. Later, some of the leadership of these same Métis organizations decided arbitrarily to exclude certain Métis individuals. These excluded individuals, in time, formed the nucleus of the “Other” Métis (ibid. 2). The entire procedure is reminiscent of how unregistered Indians were excluded from Indian organization by Status Indian groups.

In recent Canadian history, the place of the “Other” Métis is generally confused by an inaccurate conceptualization of the *Charlottetown Agreement* process that is usually attributed to the Métis Nation; Canadian historians and media have done little to rectify this matter. Dunn states (ibid):

The “Other” Métis played a significant role in the 1992 Charlottetown Agreement process. The Metis National Council (MNC) delegation was proposing a Metis Nation Accord which included a restrictive definition of Métis. The Native Council of Canada [NCC] delegation opposed the Accord unless a non-derogation clause was included. The MNC produced a clause which prevented the Accord from affecting the rights of other Aboriginal people. The NCC insisted that the phrase be extended

to say “including other Métis.” The MNC delegate adamantly refused, and the Accord subsequently did not achieve the government votes (the federal Government and seven Provincial governments) necessary to become part of the Charlottetown Agreement.

In Canada, many of these “Other” Métis operate as an entity under the auspices of the Red River West Métis. Richard Larson,¹ Co-ordinator for the Red River West Metis Cultural Association, and a member of the Fraser/Brazeau Metis Clan, offers the following reasoning for the separation between the Métis general and the “Other” Métis:

It is a hard question to answer, in my opinion it is mostly about power and money, not who you are from. I often get someone come up and ask, “Who is entitled to be Metis?” I always look to the past. There were Metis in America nine months after the first European landed. The term Metis was even on old Acadian maps in the early 1700s. Some say Red River ancestry, I always ask about a Metis who was born in the prairies in what is now Alberta, who was only known to visit the Red River once in his lifetime, His name was Gabriel Dumont. The use of blood quantum isn’t even used by the Canadian government, check out how they have decided who is a Status Indian. Over the years there have come into existence several provincial and federal Metis organizations, with different methods of determining who is Metis. What it comes to, if you support a power seeking group who are trying to keep in power and cash in to the federal and provincial monies, then you are Metis, or at least in their opinion. It just happens that a lot of the rest of us have opinions too, mine is based on tradition and history.

Although the only criterion for acceptance in the “Other” Métis seems to be self-identification as a Métis, the validity of that criterion has been recognized in the Royal Commission 1996, section 1.2 which states that “[w]hen someone thinks of themselves as Metis, it is because they think of themselves as Metis...”

But Redbird (1980, 49) believes that the ethnic status of Métis today is in danger of becoming a non-culture as it can be a catch all for both Métis and non-Status Indians who do not fit into any Aboriginal category. However, group identity does not always need to be equated with culture as a social group can thrive in the absence of cultural traits.

Many of the "Other" Métis live and seek economic survival within the structure of the larger Canadian Society. Many choose to "pass" as White but there can be no question but that they consider themselves Métis and never as appropriators of Métis culture and traditions. By meeting openly at selected venues and at scheduled times or in family clan/groups many of these "Other" Métis renew and strengthen their commitment to a Métis identity, or culture, albeit on an intermittent basis. That is not to say that choosing alternating identities means that problems relating to private perceptions lessen; if anything they may become more complex. There is always a danger that in fully rejecting White society the "players" may find themselves rejected, in turn, by Aboriginal communities.

On July 9-11, 1999, the Second Annual Red River West Metis Rendezvous Cultural Festival was held at Bright Angel Park (a ballpark), Cowichan Station, B.C., far away from any traditional buffalo hunting grounds. I was invited to attend. The primary goal of the event was to promote awareness of the rich culture of the Métis people; the event was open to people of all cultures. In fact, the event was a tourist attraction and catered to the demands of the

modern tourist. An emphasis was placed on keeping the Rendezvous free of drugs, alcohol and politics, and that it be a display case for Métis music, dance, food, customs and genealogy. The whole event appeared to me to be a synthesis of the best of non-Aboriginal commercial and Aboriginal traditional cultures: there were campsites and R. V parking on the grounds; motels and B&Bs nearby; and Teddy Challifoux sang Johnny Cash's songs in Cree!

Larson² best summarizes the scene as follows:

By Friday noon we had a small tent and teepee village which continued to grow until we had 10 teepees, 5 Baker tents, 3 wedge tents and 6 wall tents...

What we ended up with was a Rendezvous camp right out of 1865 which extended over about 1.5 acres, the many people who stayed in the camp were dressed in an assortment of historical clothing as well many of the visitors came in beautiful buckskin and beadwork costumes. It was a sight which brought tears to many of our elders eyes, a step back in time. We had traders and vendors selling buckskin, beaded coats, vests, gloves, moccasins, possibles bags, medicine bags, tanned leather (Chrome tanned and old style, smoked, brain tanned) leather, hides from everything from buffalo to ermine, feathers, horns, tomahawks, knives, bows and arrows, Bannock, fried bread, buffalo burgers, old style clothes as trappers shirts and pants, capottes, old style hats, belt buckles, clothing pins, H .B.C. blankets, obsidian for knapping, and many other traditional goods used in the old days of the Buffalo hunt.

We also had a section for those who wished to keep to today's traditional fare, as hot dogs etc. and Red River West tee shirts.

There were many highlights, the best from our point of view was the genealogy tent, where Gail Morin and Geoff Burtonshaw were kept busy the whole time they were there with Metis people researching their family history...People were there to meet cousins, friends, research their family, and enjoy themselves in an old style gathering...Friday night smudging, when a Cree gentleman from Cold Lake Alta, gave us a Cree honor song...Bruce Dumont teaching the Red River Jig...Bernie Morins Fry bread....Flag bearers, elders, drummers in traditional

clothing...the first appearance of the Metis Military Group "The Gabriel Dumont Scouts."

The sporting events were well attended, slow pitch, knife and tomahawk throwing and archery shoot...Awards for best dressed buffalo hunter, best camp, and several displays of beading, tomahawk throwing, information on historical black powder guns (No shooting as this is a provincial park), several seminars on historical skills and crafts, childrens' activities, and a general exchange of ideas and information.

Of particular interest is Larson's mention of the Black Powder Buckskinner group which he "considered equally [with] Métis genealogy to be responsible [for] the success" of [the Rendezvous]. He also stresses that the event "was planned and administrated by Métis people who came together in the spirit of preserving and celebrating the history and family values of the Métis people." Friesen (1996, 15), believes that as "history unfolds and its interpreters unveil the influences by which their opinions have been shaped, newer, time-adjusted definitions emerge. This has been the case with the Métis people who today have a good grasp on the outline of their contemporary place in society, but the delineation of that identity [self-perception] has shifted over time." The Red River West Metis would seem to fit Friesen's paradigm perfectly. The "Other" Métis appear to select certain elements of Euro-Canadian behaviour for imitation while strengthening the ritual patina of Métis traditional life through presentation and display. They do not feel the need for outside agencies to tell them who belongs to their community.

Rainier Spencer (Penn 1997, 17) in "Race and Mixed Race: A Personal Tour" observes that "[m]ixed race...can be experienced in a variety of ways. It can be ignored, glorified, denied...reified" [and that] "[q]uestioning a concept

[racism] so embedded and so naturalized always involves the breaking up of foundations and the toppling of superstructures that appear unassailable”(ibid.28). The example of the Black Powder Buckskinners illustrates some of the ambiguities of this process of change. The Black Powder Buckskinners defy easy categorization. They are White people who, for recreation, “play”at being Métis. As Larson³ describes them:

[The] Black Powder Buckskinner group are a group of people of many cultures who like to get away from the stress and bustle of today and live as our ancestors did in the fur trade days. They are using and preserving the crafts and skills of our trapping, hunting, trading past, and have preserved them well. To attend a Buckskinner Rendezvous is like stepping back in time to visit our ancestors. Long may they continue with their gatherings and Rendezvous...They come [to Metis gatherings] at their own expense and [pay] their own way.

At first glance, the Buckskinners might appear to be just another example of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is a “borrowing” of another culture’s ritual, myths, dress, poetry, dance etc., without adequate understanding of that culture, or without permission, and usually without much understanding, from that culture to (mis)represent their works. Examples that readily come to mind of appropriation of material culture include “Native American beadwork” and “soapstone Inuit carvings” produced in Asian factories. Generally, such appropriations are recognized as commercial in nature, created for the unwitting tourist, and dismissed as poor imitations. In the case of the Buckskinners, however, commercial exploitation does not appear to be the central motive.

When members of Canadian society appropriate a “mixed-blood” identity in order to play at being Métis, it raises questions about negotiating borders, real and imagined. Deloria (1998, 129) says that historically ...“the more direct kind ofplay addressed anxieties focused on a perceived lack of personal identity... [P]lay helped preserve a sense of frontier toughness, communal warmth, and connection to the continent often figured around the idea of the authentic. Ironically, some “play” Métis are emulating those very ideals which their European ancestors previously sought to destroy. Black Powder Buckskinners may be seeing a fusion of “Indianness” as a personal solution to modern anxieties and worries.

In Canada, where the iron fist of conformity is hidden in the velvet glove of policies appropriation seems to be acceptable. Today, there appears to be a resurgence of playing Métis. For Whites it comes at little cost. One can choose the time and place to be “Métis.” Being “Métis” for a week-end may fulfill one’s immediate need for adventure. Many Métis do not have that option, however; they may have to face the world each day as a person who looks aboriginal, and may suffer discrimination and racism as a result. Métis, who are light-skinned may choose to “pass” as White, avoiding to the very real consequences of discrimination, such as loss of friends and unemployment.

Appropriation of Aboriginal culture is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the seriousness of commitment by so many groups. For example, The Northwest Brigade Club, Calgary, canvasses new members for financial support

by producing a quarterly publication *Northwest Journal*, a small format magazine in the style of a periodical from the 1790s. A brochure produced in 1999 encourages the public to “[j]oin the Northwest Brigade and start exploring the past today!” There is a further explanation that:

With a name that harks to a bygone age, the Northwest Brigade brings together those with an interest in exploring life during the period of the Canadian fur trade from 1774 to 1821 through living history.

Living history events breath life into the past. They make it tangible, fire the imagination and help the participants understand the value of our history and our historical places. They foster a sense of kinship with the people of the past.

Northwest Brigade Club members participate in club and public events where people can meet in period costume, participate in period activities in historical settings, and discover what life was like long ago...

Have you ever started a fire with flint and steel? Woven a colorful voyageur sash without a loom? Charted your position in a strange land with sextant and a goose quill pen? If you'd like to learn these skills and more, then join the Northwest Brigade and re-discover life in the days of Thomson and Mackenzie today!

“Playing” Métis do not appear to be confined to any particular region.

According to the *Lethbridge Morning News* (August 3, 1999, 4) Fort Whoop-up held a “[s]uper re-enactment festival weekend, Aug. 7 & 8th. Featuring:

9th Voltigeurs, Midland Battalion, Rocky Mountain Rangers, Riders of the Plains and Fort Whoop-up Black Powder Club.”

On the other hand, “play Métis” may bring certain benefits. In recent years a variety of Indian and Métis organizations have organized to make a stronger case for Aboriginal rights. Some Métis have chosen to concentrate on

specific historical events as a basis for determining Aboriginal rights, and by implication, Métis identity (Friesen 1996, 17). It may be that “play” Métis contribute to the public understanding of those specific historical events, and may, indeed, prove to be a positive factor in the lives of the Métis. There is an aspect of showbusiness connected with “play” Métis that may, in time, break down racial barriers.

The imaginary Indian [or Métis] has been, and continues to be—as Daniel Francis (1992, 133) argues in his book—just about anything the non-Native culture has wanted it to be. The contradictory stories non-Natives tell about Aboriginal peoples are really stories about themselves, and the uncertainties that make up their cultural heritage. One of the most famous appropriators of Native culture was the “Métis” known as Grey Owl. He was, he said:

[P]art apache, born in Mexico to a Jacarilla woman. His father was George MacNeil, a Scot and a former Indian scout in the American Southwest. His parents went to Britain as members of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, and returned to the United States. The family moved gradually north and Grey Owl grew up as an Apache on the Plains. When he was not yet a teenager he briefly joined the Wild West Show himself as a knife-thrower, then struck out for the silver mines of northern Ontario. There he remained, living as a trapper and guide, until, encouraged by his Iroquois wife, Anahareo, he adopted a conservationist ethic and devoted himself to preserving the wilderness.

In the autumn of 1937 Grey Owl began a grueling lecture tour of Britain, including a command performance for the British Royal Family at Buckingham Palace (ibid.). The tour took its toll; he grew exhausted from the pace and died

on 13 April, 1938. "Within a week of his death, the newspapers had the whole story. The half-Apache Grey Owl was in reality Archie Belaney, an Englishman born and raised...[a] solitary boy...[h]e was extremely interested in North American Indians, and read as much as he could about them "(ibid.136). In 1906, Belaney, who had moved to Canada, "went Native." Sick of the constant butchery of animals Belaney turned to writing as a way of getting his message of conservation to the public. "He realized that his descriptions of life in the backwoods would be taken more seriously if they seemed to be written from a Native perspective"(ibid.137). In 1930, he began using the name "Grey Owl." Francis (ibid., 137) states that:

Grey Owl's most recent biographer, Donald Smith (1990), has pointed out that aboriginal people who met him knew that Grey Owl was not a native. His eyes were too blue, his skin too pale, and his attempts at drumming and dancing too comical. But they didn't care. He was strongly sympathetic to their cultures and to their political struggle and they needed all the allies they could find, especially high-profile ones who had the ear of important government officials.

Whites believed that Grey Owl was "Métis" because he acted and looked like the stereotypical Indian. Even his drinking problem was perceived as confirmation of his Native identity. "I am sorry to hear that Grey Owl has been indulging too freely in liquor," wrote a senior official in the Parks Branch on one occasion. "As a matter of fact, with so much Indian blood in his veins I suppose it is inevitable that from time to time he will break out in this connection."(ibid.). As Francis observes "[t]here is something wonderfully ironic about the stereotype of the

drunken Indian being used to explain away the conduct of an English gentleman (ibid.). Jill Sawyer (2000, 38) writes in *Where* magazine on the work of Professor Donald Smith Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance (1999), who has meticulously reconstructed the life of Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance. His life provides a “fascinating glimpse into early 20th-century celebrity culture and the puzzle of racial identity...He was an impostor, a con artist, and one of the most charming men Calgary had ever known”(ibid.). In the early 1930s, Long Lance had become the toast of New York society. He claimed to be Métis. Sawyer (ibid.) describes Long Lance as:

Handsome and charismatic,..[he] had little trouble making people believe what he wanted them to believe. Fuelled by film and advertising, the archetype of the “noble savage” was readily accepted and celebrated in 20s America, and Long Lance’s made-up persona fit neatly into that myth and made him famous...he created...himself...as 100 percent Cherokee...[and that]...became his “true” story... In 1919, Long Lance got a job as a reporter with the *Calgary Herald*. During his three years as a reporter, Long Lance made increasingly frequent trips to the Reserves around Calgary where the Blackfoot, Sarcee and Blood peoples lived, meeting elders and soaking up their histories and stories...His growing fame owed itself not only to the fact that he was perceived as [Metis]...but also that he had “made it” in the white world.

Grey Owl sought authenticity and a new identity as a mixed-blood, and three factors helped him to achieve his goal (1) public perceptions, (2) self-identification, and (3) his acceptance as Native by Native communities. The same factors helped Long Lance in New York to present himself as a member of the Blackfoot and promote his recent “autobiography.” These factors are still

deciding indicators in Métis communities.

According to Deloria (1998, 14), “playing” at being Aboriginal is a continuation of two older European traditions, transplanted to the continent of North America: carnival (dressing-up and blackening the face) and misrule (creating havoc). Deloria’s point is that Indian-players were rebelling against mainstream White authority and conformity. “While misrule had an aggressive quality about it, Carnival represented a second life, a different consciousness that transcended the everyday” (ibid. 15). Today, in a similar way, those who choose to “play” Métis are confronting the Canadian public’s perception of conformity. Black Powder Buckskinner groups may well be reinventing a past by appropriating Métis lifestyle but the historical origins lie even deeper. “Playing” Métis may over time impact a different consciousness which may transform the larger structures of Canadian society.

Our reality is a joint production of player and audience. We make progress by a constant spiraling back and forth between public and private perceptions, between the personal and the political, the self and the circumstance. Identity, even if by appropriation, plays as much a part in the destiny of nations as it does in the lives of individuals. Thus the tiny tasks of make-believe “Métis” may lead to a larger purpose. As Dr. Maurji Lauristin, a tough-minded Estonian political leader explained on *60 Minutes* (Estonia), “[t]he strength of small people isn’t in guns, it is in the intellect, it is in culture and traditions and in self-belief.” For the Metis, ironically, it may be in the appropriation of their culture.

NOTES

1. Personal communication 27 June, 1999

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. 16 July, 1999

CONCLUSION

Images have consequences in the real world. Perceptions and the “issue[s] of Métis identity, however, seems, like quick silver, to multiply in complexity the more [they are] touched (Dunn 1994, Papers 2). Public policies have been formulated based on confusing images of Métis as prefigured stereotypes.

The Métis are a unique people in Canadian society. But what defines Métis? It appears that without “definition” the Métis occupy a area of immense complexity and contradictions, both historically and intellectually, in the minds of Canadians. The Métis have argued for many years that, as a special people, they are entitled to Aboriginal rights (Frideres 1998, 36). At the federal level, they have only recently received formal, legal and constitutional recognition beyond that established in the *Manitoba Act* of 1870. The Métis argue that, under this *Act*, they were recognized as a separate people with certain rights (ibid. 37). Also, they argue that their rights are a special case of Aboriginal rights, that they stem from the *self-perception* of the Métis people as an indigenous national minority (Daniels, 1981), and are derived from their Aboriginal ancestry and title—both of which constitute the national identity of the Métis (Frideres 1998, 38). But the long term results of emergent properties may have nothing to do with the original rules. According to Boldt (1994, 84):

Canada’s rationale for choosing ‘individual rights’ over ‘peoples’ rights’ ...rests partly on the premise that the concept of ‘peoples’ rights’ deviates fundamentally from the Western-liberal principle underlying Canadian democracy that there must be no inequalities among citizens based on racial or ethnic status...Trudeau, viewed Indians as a disadvantaged racial minority, and he attributed this disadvantage to their special status...although the Métis do not have special status, they

are no less the victims of racism...Métis are victims of racial discrimination because, historically, the Canadian government has defined ... Métis in terms of racial, rather than cultural, criteria.

The results of our survey show, however, that many Métis, because they are able to pass as White, do not perceive that they are victims of racial discrimination.

Whatever the reasons for differences in perception among the Métis –and they are many--all seem to agree that they are not willing to simply assimilate into White society and disappear, along with their claims.

In the process of writing this thesis questions have arisen relating to the Métis that cannot be answered fully:

1. Who are the Métis?
2. Who are the Métis perceived to be?

Martin F. Dunn (1994, Papers 2) describes the Métis in the following way:

Métis have been referred to as a living bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures...[a]t one meeting, the Métis Commissioner, Paul Chartrand, pointed out that bridges have to expect to be walked on by both sides. In another context, Métis could also be described as living treaties between Indian and non-Aboriginal cultures. Both of these images help to explain why Métis is so hard to define. Like mercury, the concept of Métis identity is at once fluid and elusive...[t]here is no question that the issue is an emotional minefield and is too often over-heated when the issues of identity, membership, citizenship, nationality, and beneficiary are carelessly mixed together. This issue is further complicated when the factors of identity and factors related to definition are confused with each other.

The perception of who is, or who is not, a Métis—be it self-perception or public perception— seems to vary with time, place and circumstances. What is certain is that there is no one exclusive Métis people in Canada. Today Métis appears to have a

well-accepted general meaning, reflecting the social aspect of Métis identity and a reality that cannot be denied (Frideres 1998, 38). We may have to wait until a paradigm change is pervasive enough to transform the centres of Métis self-identification to public perception and full acceptance of the changing face of the Métis Nation.

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