

All of My Blood is Red:
Contemporary Métis Visual Culture and Identity

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Abstract

This thesis explores notions of contemporary Métis identity through the lens of visual culture, as articulated in the works of three visual artists of Métis ancestry. I discuss the complexities of being Métis with reference to specific art works by Christi Belcourt, David Garneau and Rosalie Favell. In addition to a visual culture analysis of these three Métis artists, I supplement my discussion of Métis identity with a selection of autoethnographic explorations of my identity as a Métis woman through out this thesis. The self-reflexive aspect of this work documents the ways in which my understanding of myself as a Métis woman have been deepened and reworked in the process of conducting this research, while also offering an expanded conception of contemporary Métis culture. I present this work as an important point of departure for giving a greater presence to contemporary Métis visual culture across Canada.

Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to all of those wonderful and inspiring people in my life who have played such an integral part in this journey, whether or not they are aware of their impact. Thank you with all of my heart Ray and Taira, Chantel, Kelsey and Zack and my grandparents. Thank you to all of those who I have only recently met and who helped me along the way, Margot, Maria, David, Rosalie, Christi, Tony and too many others to name here. Finally, I want to acknowledge those who have awoken and those yet to wake, may we meet soon.

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Chapter 1

For the Purpose of Contributing

“We are still here. Métis people know that fact as a result of their own knowledge of their identities, family histories, and communities. It is no longer sufficient to allow non-Aboriginal academics to define who we are and where it is we are going. The old worn categories and academic debate on who are the Métis people must be challenged and transformed by the Métis voices themselves—Canada’s forgotten people.”

(Lischke & McNab, 2007, p. 1)

The overall purpose of this thesis is to explore the expression and understanding of Métis¹ identity as articulated by three contemporary artists of Métis ancestry: Christi Belcourt, David Garneau and Rosalie Favell. The first chapter includes an introduction to the topic and a discussion of my reasons for pursuing this research, as well a discussion of the methodology. Chapter two includes a brief historical survey of the development of the political and cultural identities of Métis as Aboriginal peoples of Canada and the theoretical grounding for this research.

Following these initial chapters, I will consider the work of each artist in a separate

¹ What’s in a name? I use the capitalized and accented form of “Métis” through out this thesis to refer to myself, the three Métis artists I interviewed, and in discussion on being Métis, on Métis history and so on. I have done this partially as a linguistic convention since the word “Métis,” with the accent, originates in the French language and simply means mixed (Dorion & Prefontaine, 2001, p. 22). Many authors point out that the different ways of spelling “Métis” have come to mean very different things in the literature on this varied people. Métis historian Fred J. Shore notes how he uses the term “Métis” to refer to the “historical Nation while ‘Metis’ usually refers to the contemporary Nation thus denoting a temporal difference between the different period of the Métis Nation (Shore, 2001, p. 71). A further difficulty has developed in identifying some groups as “Métis” and others as “Metis” or “metis.” In a chapter on *The Sault Bordelands: Métis and Colonial Intervention*, Karl S. Hele points out how the “monopolization of the term” Métis for the “political priorities of one group is itself a form of internal colonialism” (Hele, 2007, p. 165). The historical Nation of Métis to which Fred J. Shore is referring and which Karl S. Hele is accusing of monopolizing the term for political priorities is the Red River Nation. Canada’s primary Métis organization, the Métis National Council (MNC) made the contentious move in 2002 to restrict membership to the Métis Nation “solely to individuals who could claim descent from the historic Red River community,” thereby excluding large numbers of people who identify as Métis, but not from this specific historical and geographical locale (Lawrence, 2004, p. 85). While it is necessary to distinguish Western Métis from other Métis groups, using the non-capitalized and/or non-accented form of “Métis” only serves to delegitimize other historic mixed-blood communities that have formed their own sense of identity as such (Hele, 2007, p. 181). In an attempt to acknowledge the varied, and often-independent Métis communities through out Canada, my use of the terms “Métis,” “Métis people” and “Métis peoples” is meant to refer to diverse groups of “Métis peoples” in an inclusive manner. In cases where I wish to acknowledge specific groups of Métis peoples, I will specify to whom I am referring.

chapter in order to provide ample space to explore select pieces by these important figures in contemporary Métis visual culture. Finally, I end with a discussion of the preceding chapters and concluding remarks regarding the process of undertaking this academic work and its personal implications for myself as a Métis woman.

In addition to cultural work and analysis of these three Métis artists, I will supplement my discussion of Métis identity with a selection of autoethnographic explorations of my identity as a Métis woman through out this thesis. The reflexive aspect of this work will explore the ways in which my self-understanding has been deepened and reworked throughout the creation of this thesis. In this way, I hope to illustrate the complexities of being Métis. I will not attempt to provide a reductive definition of Métis for to do so would be in imitation of the Indian Act of 1876 which easily collapses the fifty plus Indigenous Nations that exist within the borders of Canada into “Indians” (Sawchuk, 1998, pp. 13-14). I will, however, provide a brief explanation of the development of the “Métis Nation” and the contested discourse shaping Métis identities. Through this research, then, I hope to create a dialogue regarding Métis identities, which reflects my understanding of the intersection of art, autoethnography and debates within the larger Métis community.

This thesis will contribute to the growing academic work on Métis peoples through an analysis of Métis from a Métis point of view. This approach does not imply that there is one, singular, Métis perspective, it simply aims to challenge the

overwhelming lack of recognition within the Canadian psyche of a Native² people who, as Racette notes, wear “their mixed-race identity as a symbol of pride” in spite of the “deeply-rooted European aversions towards miscegenation” (2001b, p. 47). Métis peoples have played a pivotal role in the short period of European settlement in North America but the role of Métis people has shifted throughout this history. Early on, the mixed-blood children of European fathers, who were brought to Canada for various European commercial exploits, and Aboriginal mothers who were skilled at survival in the harsh physical environment, served as intermediaries and translators between Native and European populations (Barkwell, Hourie, & Swain, 2001). Métis people are also historically recognized for the commercialization of the buffalo hunt in the West, and for their resistance to imperial encroachment by the fledgling Canadian government in the Red River Rebellion of 1870 and the Battle of Batoche in 1885 (Barkwell et al., 2001; Miller, 1989, p. 131).

Many non-Native historians, anthropologists and others have written about Métis people, although, as Brown notes, academic writing on the subject of the Métis was “sporadic before 1980” (J. S. H. Brown, 1993, p. 21). Traditional historical accounts of the Métis were often motivated by “primarily racist” fears of miscegenation in which authors such as Francis Parkman and Lionel Groulx posited that the mixing of Aboriginal and European peoples “brought Europeans to the same

² Unless other wise specified, I use the terms “Native,” “indigenous,” “Aboriginal,” and “Indian” interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to Canada’s original inhabitants of Indian, Inuit and Métis ancestry in an effort to reflect “the diversity of terms that different Native people in Canada now use to refer to themselves” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 21).

level of 'savagery' as Native Americans" (Dorion & Prefontaine, 2001, p. 17). Others, such as Thomas Flanagan, have written extensively in an attempt to discredit any claims to Aboriginal title that Métis peoples have.³ Writing about the Métis by non-Native authors has often been self-serving, as Farrell Racette notes, "Riel and the Métis have become the ground on which historians play out every Canadian dichotomy: French/English, Catholic/Protestant, East/West, and First Nations/European" (Racette, 2001b, p. 47). Amidst this prolific writing by non-Native authors, little had been written by Métis people until the 1970s when Métis activists Howard Adams and Maria Campbell published their books entitled *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View* (1975) and *Halfbreed* (1973).

Second, not unlike the lack of Métis-specific literature there has been little written about Métis contemporary art. This is partly a result of the long-standing division between "Art" created by Western artists according to the Western aesthetic sensibilities of non-utilitarian objects created as an individual artist's expression of pure intellect versus "Primitive" (i.e. Native) culture's technologically simple, "tool-like" objects made by community members (R. B. Phillips, 2002, p. 46). Western control over definitions of art have traditionally described Native "art" as ethnographic curiosity rather than as "fine art" in the European sense of the word (YoungMan, 1998, p. 31). However, in the past few decades many artists and arts writers, cultural critics, curators, and ethnographers have begun to contest and rework the narrowly constructed halls of "Art" proper, including a host of Native

³ See for example Flanagan, Thomas. (1983). The Case Against Métis Aboriginal Rights. *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques*, 9(3), 314-325.

people such as Gerald McMaster, Jeff Thomas, Catherine Mattes, and Shelly Niro, to name only a few. Yet, Métis artists have, up until this point, been historically under represented, even within these efforts at decolonization in the art world.

This is not to say that they have been non-existent. There are a small but growing number of contemporary Métis artists. Mattes notes the important contributions of Edward Poitras, Bob Boyer, Rick Rivet and Sherry Farrell Racette, four notable Métis artists whose work was part of the contemporary Canadian art scene in the 1980s (Catherine Mattes, 2001, p. 189). Problems with a lack of visibility for Métis artists are wide ranging. Some have suggested that this has been due to the dismal living conditions of many Métis peoples who lived in marginal communities where they eked out a physical existence rather than focusing on artistic production and cultural survival (Sealey, 1975 in Catherine Mattes, 2001, p. 189). Métis peoples were also not recognized as forming part of the Native population of Canada until the repatriation of the Canadian constitution in 1982. Indeed, there has often been a lack of clarity regarding the definition of Métis and First Nations artists, which has further reinforced the invisibility of contemporary Métis art (Garneau, n.d.). Consequently those Métis who were involved in contemporary art production with Aboriginal themes in the latter half of the 20th century were often identified as Native rather than Métis. Further, there has also been a lack of understanding of the Métis-specific content in the work of Métis visual artists. Garneau notes that “most artworld Métis artists make Aboriginal art rather than Métis art” (Garneau, n.d.). This is not to suggest that Métis artists could only be

recognized as such if they produce recognizably Métis work. Rather, this highlights a broader lack of understanding regarding the existence of Métis peoples. Hence the representation of Métis-specific art is historically “disabled” in complex ways, by the invisibility of Métis peoples at large.

A third, somewhat personal reason for producing this research is my own curiosity regarding what it means to be Métis and how that can be expressed and understood through visual art. I first became interested in the identity forming potential of visual art in the work of Anishnaabe artist Carl Beam. Beam’s attention to the dual world of his mixed-ancestry drew my attention to the complexities of aboriginality and what it means to claim Native ancestry in a contemporary Canadian context. Many of his works included autobiographical elements such as mug-shot style pictures of the artist and other stylistic elements that incorporated themes of nature and tradition, as well as technology. Thus, it was through Beam’s work that I first began to understand how an artist could identify as an Anishnaabe man while also addressing his European heritage. In so doing, the work itself demonstrated the potential of visual art to acknowledge the complex issues of aboriginality in a post-colonial context.

Yet, despite the similarities in the thematically mixed, Aboriginal-European content of Beam’s art, and my own Métis heritage, I realize that there is a difference between our mixed ancestries. This is because my family has long been identified as “half-breeds,” historic Métis from the Red River colonies of colonial Manitoba. I even have the official government documentation in the form of ancestral applications for

half-breed scrip on which government officials identify my ancestors as “half-breeds.” Thus, while both Carl Beam and my Métis family are mixed-race Aboriginal peoples, there have been modes of classification, which have led to the identification by the Canadian government of my family as “half-breed,” now “Métis,” while Beam remains an “Indian.” These contemporary classifications have real-life implications for the people who exist within these identity categories in the present day. My interest in conducting this research is, then, to explore the implications of being identified/identifying as Métis through critical and autoethnographic reflections on the work of selected contemporary Métis visual artists.

In the Absence of Presence or, why am I here?

Approximately four years ago, my friend gave me a copy of Maria Campbell’s famous novel chronicling her experiences as a Métis, a book entitled *Halfbreed*. When I was flipping through the book I was shocked to notice that Maria came from Park Valley, Saskatchewan. This is where my family is from too! Park Valley is such a tiny place that my Uncle’s birth certificate simply has a long string of numbers denoting the latitude and longitude of the place rather than the actual name which the residents gave to it. I came back to this book and my possible connection to Maria Campbell in the second semester of graduate studies when I began to feel the need to look more deeply into my Aboriginal family history. I decided to see if I could somehow contact Maria to investigate the possibility that she, at the very least, had heard of my family. I wrote an email to an acquaintance explaining who I was and that I would like her to put me in contact with Maria who I knew to be her

mentor. It wasn't until I took this step that I realized what I had originally interpreted as apathy and disinterest on my part were actually fear, worry and caution. What if Maria didn't know my family? What if she said I was making it up? My concerns produced significant anxiety, but I decided to forge ahead anyway in my attempt to contact Maria Campbell.

Voila, not two days after I sent my email to the acquaintance, Maria responded. She knew my family, she had visited their house, and she can tell me stories about them. She said they were very kind. She said they are also a very old Michif family from the Red River. I am shocked, I am awed, I am excited and so I send the email to my family, to my dad. Maria knows who we are....who I am. She is an outside "authority" on the subject, a nationally, no, **internationally** recognized author on Aboriginal women's issues and she is recognizing *me*. The power of this experience, of this recognition shakes me to my very core. It is everything I have been looking for as long as I can remember. The ghosts of my Métis family have haunted me since I was a child, as if they were begging me to remember them. This sort of cultural haunting, writes Kathleen Brogan, is an "attempt to remap an often fragmented and inevitably charged memory to its new coordinates by conjuring ghosts who pass from the past into the present" (1998, p. 130). I always felt very connected to the awareness of the Aboriginal members of my family, even though the awareness was often vague and often denied by people both inside and outside of my family.

The absence of recognition of my Métis family created a genuine sense of loss for me at an early age as I felt so deeply connected to the ‘phantom’ presence of “Métis” that was firmly established in my childhood imagination. I was an observant youth who quietly, and sometimes unconsciously, collected any and all mention of Aboriginality, while also noting the puzzling absences, in my family. In grade one my class did a play with an Indian princess in a canoe. I thought this role should be mine because I was the only Indian I knew of in the class, but they chose the girl from India because she “looked” more “real” than me because she did not look white, as I do. Her decision to disregard the possibility of me playing the “Indian Princess,” and choosing instead an exoticized stereotype of Indianness, would serve to remind me, at age six, that my “mixed-blood Indigeneity [was] meaningless” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 135). This type of experience served as a constant reminder, a type of colonial “discipline” which reinforced the myth of the vanishing Indian, and the idea that the “Indianness” of my family had been “irrevocably lost” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 135). Consequently Maria Campbell’s recognition of my family as Métis is a startling challenge to the monotonous and everyday rhetoric which said that I wasn’t Indian-enough to be counted as a “real” Indian. This is everything because it is outside confirmation, for once, of a very important part of me. But it is also just a beginning, one of many, which allows me to move forward and explore the complexities of being an “Indian” in contemporary Canada.

Since this profound experience, I have spent the past year mulling over the idea of being “part” Native, Métis specifically, and, thus, asking my Métis family for

any histories, any clues about what that means for us. Answers were not typically forthcoming. Some of the older generation of my Métis relatives seemed to attach a certain shame to identifying as Métis. As my great-Aunty once told me while eating home made pea soup at her kitchen table, “being Métis is not a good thing.” Another reason for the lack of readily available answers to my questions is likely the fact that what people “do” in day-to-day living might not be celebrated as a culturally-specific activity that is “different from” the white mainstream. This points to a more subtle sense of Métisness, which is more often emphasized by the presence of an “otherness” in activities and ways of life that do not fit the white status-quo, and, paradoxically, an absence in the recognition of this “otherness.” Brogan notes how these actions are passed on through generations as either “‘officially’ broadcast or secretly transmitted” memories, which provide a cultural continuity linking “the generations in history and mak[ing] particular social orders legitimate” (1998, p. 130). Thus, when my great-Uncle loudly proclaimed that, “your dad is part Native and so are you, and if those Métis Association people say otherwise, just tell them to call me!” it seems important to note that this statement was made, only after several hours of looking at pictures and talking about “the family.” There was no acknowledgement that we were talking about our Métis family until I directly questioned my great-Uncle. Indeed, I never knew what I was going to get when I asked my family about being Métis, what it meant to them, and what it could mean for me.

Silence surrounding the presence of Aboriginal ancestors in my family is a common theme. It seems that my grandfather buried his Métis identity in silence and shame, and left his grandchildren, my generation, with only vague hints of some sort of “otherness,” which most of my family treats as though it is best left alone. The impact of this disconnection from being Métis has affected my father in surprising ways. In a conversation with my father on the phone one evening, he began reminiscing about going to a relative’s house in Northern Alberta, where the night would be spent fiddling with some of the older men jigging in time with the music. I was shocked, why hadn’t he mentioned this before when I had asked him about being Métis? He simply hadn’t thought of it. His father had not been open with him about being Métis, and so, a trip to this relative’s house replete with a night of dance and music was of no special significance for my father.

Perhaps one of the most profound instances of the absent presence of Aboriginality is best illustrated in the seemingly unconscious manner in which my father can absent himself from our Métis lineage. This happened in the summer of 2008 when I was applying for a National Aboriginal Achievement Fund (NAAF) scholarship. NAAF required that I prove my Métis heritage by supplying evidence of my membership to the Métis Nation of Ontario, the province in which I resided at the time. This required a lot of original research into halfbreed scrip and other historical documentation. My father graciously helped me by going to the Glenbow Museum Archives in Calgary, which had all of the required information on file. Under my direction, my father gathered the scrip documentation and

marriage/birth certificates required to make a paper trail from me, back to several relatives who had received the scrip, therefore legitimating me as a descendent of halfbreeds, or Métis in contemporary usage. The only piece of missing information was my father's birth certificate, which linked me to the preceding generations of Métis. When I told my father that he had forgotten to include his birth certificate with all the information, he asked incredulously, "why do you need that?" "Because," I said, "you're the missing link in this genealogy." He thought for a second before replying, "I guess I am." My father mailed a copy of his birth certificate to me the next day.

The seeming loss of memory regarding the connections between me and my father and his father's ancestors as being descended from some of the Aboriginal peoples of this land is no accident. There is a direct connection between the colonial settling of Canada and the erasure of a conscious connection to our Aboriginal history. A key aspect of the project of white nation-building is the internalization of the external frontiers of National space (Bergland, 2000, p. 4) and the desirable bodies which are constructed as the norm in that National space. Goffman defines the norm as the "ideals and...standards against which almost everyone falls short at some stage in his life" (1986, p. 128). His example of the norm, which acknowledges only "one complete unblushing male in America" is telling: "a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height" (Goffman, 1986, p. 128). Although Goffman is referring specifically to an American norm, I am using his theorization to refer

more broadly to the Canadian context as well. In this scheme, Aboriginal peoples, among many others, are not included in the idealized American norm and are thereby excluded from both internal and external National space.

The choice for many people becomes one of living with a stigmatized identity or, if possible, repressing the discrediting information about oneself (Goffman, 1986, p. 42). Either choice absents Aboriginality. One must either repress his or her Aboriginal identity, as in the case of my father, or have the continued presence of his or her Aboriginality denied by the North American nation-states, which have been normalized as a white space. The extent to which North American national spaces have been normalized as white is evident in the exclusion of many marked as racially 'other.' In resistance to this erasure, the writer and curator Andrea Fatona notes how a number of Black Canadian artists have taken on the task of re-presenting, re-imagining, and re-inscribing "the Black body into the Canadian cultural imaginary" (Fatona, 2006, p. 228). The conscious re-inscription of the Black body into the Canadian cultural imagination is important in contesting the Canadian narrative of "Black invisibility" and a denial of a "longer black presence in this country" (Walcott, 2003, p. 18, 14 in Fatona, 2006, p. 228). The ongoing colonial discourse of white national space is expressed in different ways in regards to Aboriginal people and Black people. The former are relegated to existing only as a relic of the past, while the latter are understood solely as recent arrivals, new additions to the Canadian cultural mosaic. But for both Aboriginal and Black

Canadian communities, their collective histories exist only as a backdrop to the white national imagination (Bergland, 2000, p. 5).

Methodology

I began this research project with a deep personal interest in my own identity as a Métis woman, within the frame of contemporary visual culture. I have decided to use a combination of methods that will allow for a rich, qualitative exploration that also examines my unfolding understanding of what it is to be a Métis woman in a contemporary context. Thus I will employ visual analysis, semi-structured interviews, and auto-ethnographic reflections to explore Métis identity and contemporary visual culture. Through interviews with Garneau, Belcourt and Favell, and an analysis of selected examples of their visual work, I have gained a more nuanced conception of what it means to be a Métis person and, more broadly, an Aboriginal person in a contemporary Canadian context. Just as identity making is an ongoing and creative process, so too is the process of conducting research on contemporary Métis visual culture. As such, I have included multiple auto-ethnographic passages throughout this thesis in an effort to connect academic literature on Aboriginality with personal experience and reflections. These multiple methods are meant to reinforce the continuing existence and contributions of contemporary Aboriginal peoples.

Semi-structured Interviews

The in depth nature of my interviews with artists allowed me to gather a large amount of information through conversations with a small number of

participants, who have “unique and important knowledge about the social world” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2003, p. 119). I decided to work with a relatively small number of artists as I wanted to talk to them about their art, and to explore their thoughts about being an Aboriginal person, and artist, in Canada. The interviews were open-ended with limited structure so as to allow each artist more control over the direction of the discussion (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2003, p. 126). I prepared an interview guide prior to each discussion, which served as a general guide for topics related to the research questions and the artwork that I addressed in the interview.

Artists were originally identified as potential participants based on the relevance of their work to my research and on my personal interest in their artistic production. I began my search for potential interviewees online and was careful to look for artists who self-identified as Native people. In sending out the initial invitation to participate in my research, I outlined that the artist had been selected because their work addressed “the subject of mixed-race Aboriginal identity” (Short, 2008). In the interview guide, one of the questions I asked each participant was about the designation of “mixed-race Aboriginal” that I used to identify the artists and their work, so that each person might have a chance to respond to the description. Interestingly, all of the artists who responded to my invitation identified as persons of Métis descent. This occurred after a summer of personal research into my family’s ancestry so that I could apply for membership with the Métis Nation of Ontario and, thus, complete my application for scholarship money from NAAF. As I traced the connection between my Native family and myself, I started to gain a sense of myself as not just a mixed-race Aboriginal person, but a Métis person. Inklings of stories about this fugitive identity

surfaced, about the Red River, of European fur traders marrying Native women, of my great uncle twice removed, Edouard Beupré, the tallest man in Canada, and a Métis man. I realized that my ancestors were implicated in that history, a specific history that was identified with particular spaces in western Canada. Belcourt, Garneau, and Favell each reiterated my growing awareness of Métis identity, stating that they were not just mixed-race Aboriginal people, but Métis people (Belcourt, 2008; Favell, 2009; Garneau, 2008). Thus, my research has come to focus on Métis identity rather than on the more general descriptor of “mixed-race Aboriginal identity,” and explores how each of these artists addresses their identity as a Métis person in their visual art.

I used audio taping equipment to record interviews with the express permission of each artist. This allowed me to transcribe the interview, read through the information gathered and identify any common themes or topics of interest. Once completed, each artist was given a copy of their transcript for review, providing them with a chance to make any clarifications they felt were required. I also contacted the artists after the primary interview was completed for clarifications as required, regarding aspects of their artwork and/or topics discussed in the interview.

Auto-ethnography/autobiography

“Like Frederick Douglass talking about his grandmother, and James Baldwin talking about his father, and Simone de Beauvoir talking about her mother, *these people are my access to me*; they are my entrance into my own interior life. Which is why the images that float around them – the remains, so to speak, at the archeological site – surface first, and they surface so vividly and so compellingly that I acknowledge them as my route to a reconstruction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of a kind of truth” (Morrison, 1995, pp. 303-304 italics added)

The process of researching and writing this thesis, as an exploration of Métis identity and visual art is one of self-recovery. As Toni Morrison articulates in the above passage, this process requires a connection with people who we may not have known very well or at all, and yet with whom we have some sort of familial connection, as only they can provide answers, which may otherwise be unobtainable. As a part of the process of healing historical trauma, my auto-ethnographic writing allows me to bring into the present a silenced Métis past through an exploration of what has been hidden from view. Although Morrison writes about the role of autobiography, rather than auto-ethnography per se, the line between the two is blurred and one often informs the other. In my writing I employ auto-ethnography/biography to highlight and explore the genesis of my self-awareness as a Métis artist as I engage with other Métis artists. The research I conduct forms an “*ethnographic dialogue*” (Tedlock 1991: 78 in Ellis, 2004, p. 48) between myself and the Métis artists that I interview. This dialogue allows me to engage with the contemporary debates regarding Aboriginality, while also

acknowledging the uniqueness of my personal experience (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.9 in Butz, no date, p. 2).

Through autoethnography I can explore the familial and personal impact of the historical trauma, shame and alienation imposed through the colonial legacy in Canada. I can also examine the ways this history is registered in my psyche and my body. As a so-called “reflexive ethnographer” I can explore a range of sensations and emotions that provide a context for the research I am conducting, as well as reflecting on my position as a researcher and a subject (Ellis, 2004, p. 48).

“Remembering trauma,” writes Marlene Kadar, “is not a straightforward event” (2005, p. 88). Thus, my research must extend back to the trauma of my ancestors being persecuted as half-breeds. Indeed this is my beginning as I try to understand why my family rarely spoke of our Native heritage. For the culture of silence, which began with colonization, continues in the minds and hearts of many mixed-race Aboriginal peoples across Canada. Thus, I frequently find this research a physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally overwhelming process. I often feel isolated by the pain of a shared and lonely silence. Yet within the framework of academia this is what is required to explore the intense aftermath of colonization.

Visual Culture Analysis

The third aspect of my research involves engaging with a selected number of art works by Belcourt, Garneau, and Favell. Here I employ a visual culture analysis rather than a Eurocentric art history approach, which assumes an imperial

monopoly over the classification and valuation of culture (Townsend-Gault, 1998). Having said this, it is important to complexify and historicize the Eurocentric discipline of art history in order to acknowledge the work of many within the field who have been challenging art history to be more inclusive. This is, perhaps, best described in a brief discussion of what many have termed the “new art history.” Emerging over the past thirty years, this ‘new’ scholarship has questioned the traditional ideals of art objects as singularly representative of cultural achievement, while also disputing the linear progression of a universalist history (R. Phillips, 1989).

In his book *The New Art History*, Jonathan Harris constructs a trajectory of the formalization of the new art history, which he describes as having “developed forms of description, analysis, and evaluation” that were deeply entwined with and informed by the social and political activism of the 1970s and the “legacies of scholarship and political activism” from the past century (J. Harris, 2001, p. 9). Ruth Phillips describes the new art history as a response to the inability of the “old” art history to adequately explore the “visual productions of people who were not upper class, not men, and not white” (R. Phillips, 1989, p. 168). As such, the new art history that Phillips and Harris are describing addresses the plurality of histories that comprise “art history” using an interdisciplinary methodology so as to include many heretofore discredited art forms such as “craft, folk, and popular art” (R. Phillips, 1989, p. 168). In this context, the discipline of visual culture developed in order to, as Harris notes, reconceptualize “objects, and modes, of study” through the

examination of “advertising, film, and television...(and) the designed world in general” (2001, p. 213). Visual cultural analysis has, then, since its inception, provided an interdisciplinary method of exploring what Jenks describes as “all those signifying practices, representations and mediations that pertain to looking and seeing...as a product of the tensions between external images or objects, and internal thought processes” (1995, p. 16 in Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 14). Thus, visual culture acts as a bridge between sociology and art wherein the social practice of looking (who is doing the looking, how and why) is considered in evaluating and addressing the art work (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 14).

My interest in a visual culture analysis stems from the ways in which this method allows me to contextualize artist's work in tandem with their identity as Métis peoples. Indeed, the analysis of visual culture requires an acknowledgement of the seer rather than presupposing an essential viewer with a singular interpretation of a visual art work (Foster, 1998, p. xi in Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 15), unlike the “old” art history. Mirzoeff notes how visual cultural analysis highlights “the political stakes inherent in what we do” (in Mirzoeff, 2003, p. 6). Consequently, it can disrupt the Eurocentric (de)valuation of visual art by Native peoples while also recognizing what Hooper-Greenhill call the “critical provenance” of a particular work of art (2000). As Hooper-Greenhill explain, rather than merely examining the provenance of art as a “matter of inventory,” a “critical provenance” is “concerned with [the] relationships of power, knowledge and value” embodied in the life story of the art work (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 16). Each of the art works I

choose to discuss is an important manifestation of the external and the internal world, of physical realities and the accompanying thought processes for each artist. Thus, my analysis will include a synthesis of information from the artist about the history, genesis and intent of an artwork, my own visual culture response, and an analysis of how the work speaks to contemporary Métis culture.

Hybridity in contemporary Métis Visual Culture

Each of the artists I interview work with a variety of hybrid visual forms. One of the common themes expressed in contemporary art is an aesthetics of hybridity, or, what Drucker describes as an “encounter between traditional media in the fine arts and new technology” (2005, p. 144). The formal hybridity often witnessed in contemporary art expresses the “anxieties that arise” in the blurring of boundaries and the crossing of borders associated with supposedly “pure” cultural categories (Drucker, 2005, p. 145). The use of new-media techniques by Favell, and of traditional painting techniques rendered in new ways, as seen in the work of Garneau and Belcourt, all challenge the restrictions placed on artists based on imagined ideas of “pure” Aboriginal culture or the maintenance of unchanging “tradition.” Thus, I explore how the novel use of “traditional” media and Aboriginal concepts are expressed in the visual art of Belcourt, Garneau, and Favell and investigate how they disrupt the assumed hierarchy of any one “pure” culture.

Métis people have traditionally been defined as part-Native and part-European, usually of French or British, ancestry. From the early colonial period to the present, the overwhelming anxiety surrounding such miscegenation can be seen

in the statements by Canadian colonizers who, for example, saw Métis men as “more ‘savage’ than the ‘savage’” (Racette, 2001b, p. 47). One Catholic priest even used the term ““one-and-a-half-men,”” by which he meant “half Indian, half white, and half devil,” to describe the Métis (Dobbin, 1981, p. 5 in Racette, 2001b, p. 47). Yet the term *métis* had been in use since at least the late eighteenth century to describe a distinct group of people (Jaenen, 1991, p. 88 in Racette, 2004, p. 26) who understood themselves as related to, but different from Native and European cultures. As such, there may be hybrid elements that individuals choose to incorporate into their identities, in addition to a contemporary Métis identity. This is not to suggest that Métis identity is frozen in time, harkening back to Franz Boas and Edward Curtis who sought to capture “vanishing Indians.” Métis identity, like other ethno-cultural identities, is created through establishing a link between the present and the past which can be reworked, as needed and to various ends, and projected into the future (Brogan, 1998, p. 130; Eyerman, 2004, p. 161).

Most scholars now agree that it is folly to pretend that there is any “pure” group of people based upon homogeneous measures of race, nation, religion, and/or phenotype or that any combination of such standards is consistent and predictable in their interaction with each other. The myth of a “pure” culture, Bhabha contends, is a human construct meant to fulfill a hierarchical claim about the superiority of one group of “pure” people in opposition to a group of people who are “mixed” (1995, p. 208). A pure culture is purported to exist as a homogenous “identity,” which is authenticated by an “originary Past” of a people who can be traced back to some

unchanging 'beginning' (Bhabha, 1995, p. 208). This concept has serious consequences not only for those considered to be "real" Indians, but also for what is constituted as "authentic Indian art." Blundell and Phillip note how "many Euro-Canadians have equated 'traditional' culture with 'Indian' culture" wherein the latter must fit into a recognizably "tribal" aesthetic or risk being deemed an expression of assimilation with no sense of "Indian identity" (1983, p. 124). Here the notion of 'pure culture' suggests a "tribal Indian" who has magically been untouched by the forcible assimilation into Euro-Canadian culture in the colonial process.

These ideas that only "tribal" people produce Aboriginal art not only preclude Métis people but also leave out a vast number of Native peoples who may not adhere to the tribal aesthetic. Notions of tradition that require unchanging ways of being that Thomas describes as being "inherited by birth and...mysteriously replicated through generations" (2001, p. 165) are closely associated with the demand for authentic Aboriginal art. Yet the possibility of a purely tribal Aboriginal culture is virtually impossible in contemporary times. Indeed, Pearlstone and Ryan note, in writing about Native artists self-portraits, how "[a]ll Native American artists whose work postdates World War II have been born into and live within at least two cultures" (Pearlstone & Ryan, 2006, p. 15). Mohawk artist Shelley Niro reiterates this fact, stating that both "popular culture and family history" have impacted the development of her identity, and shaped her photographic work (in Pearlstone & Ryan, 2006, p. 14). In acknowledgement of this fact, Niro's photographic imagery incorporates the use of Western icons, such as Elvis and Marilyn Monroe, as well as

traditional references, to give form to her unique artistic perspective as a Mohawk woman (Abbott, 1994-1996, p. 2 in Pearlstone & Ryan, 2006, p. 14).

Hybridity is thought to be a realm in which supposedly fixed identities are de-stabilized, allowing for new possibilities of recombination. Bhabha, in his writing on 'Third Space' conceives of this process as a sort of "interstitial passage" where "cultural hybridity that entertains difference [exists] without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (1994, p. 4 in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 131). Unfortunately, the idealism of Bhabha's third space is insufficiently attentive to the continuing colonial contexts in North America, which often rely on particular kinds of cultural regulation to signify Aboriginal artistic self-expression. Thus, the rhetoric of authenticity has become an important discourse through which the markers of Aboriginal art are policed. In this instance, authenticity is defined by Phillips "in relation to non-Western objects as an essentialist marker of value posited on a dialectic of purity and contamination that was closely tied to Victorian theories of race and fears of miscegenation and hybridity" (Young, 1999; Phillips and Steiner 1999; Coombes 1994 in R. B. Phillips, 2002, p. 45). This evaluation of authenticity recalls the fear and hatred that Métis people suffered historically, and the continued distaste by non-Natives for art objects that do not conform to their conceptions of Aboriginality (Pearlstone & Ryan, 2006, p. 33). Yet, many Aboriginal artists continue making work that contests these restrictive categories and establishes hybridity as part of a thriving tradition in visual culture.

All beings have strong connections to the ancestral traditions that brought them here. In this instance, tradition is best understood in Thomas' explanation as a practice "whose defining quality is its embeddedness in a community, in a network of meaningful personal relationships in the present" (2001, p. 166). If visual culture is constructed in the Third Space of relation to other cultures in the present, then it is also built in conversation with the past. The historical circumstances that shape identity can be likened to what Holst, Petersen & Rutherford call "a fossil," since each person contains the "remnants of deep-seated antecedents" (1995, p. 185). These ancestors, the fossils that each person carries inside herself, pass forward those acts of cultural enunciation in the Third Spaces of long ago and all of them inform a person's identity and sense of belonging:

fulfillment is a *ceaseless* task...identity is part of an infinite movement, that one can only come into a dialogue with the past and future, a dialogue which is necessary, if one ceases to invest in a single (and therefore latent totalitarian) identity

Holst, Petersen & Rutherford, 1995, p. 189

Thus, movement between past and future, rather than a static, totalitarian, purity, is a vital component of cultural identity. In contradistinction to the more common use of the word "fossil" as a notion of unchanging and of sameness, Holst, Petersen and Rutherford (1995) suggest that the fossil carried by each one of us is a testament to the fluidity of identity, past, present and future. Kazimi reinforces this idea of fluidity in noting that all cultures, including Aboriginal cultures, "have borrowed, incorporated and absorbed influences from all encounters, reviving and, at times, reinventing themselves" (1997). Fluidity of movement between past and present,

and between cultures is an important part of Aboriginal visual culture, and especially contemporary Métis visual culture.

Chapter 2

A Short Overview of the Genesis of Métis within the “Aboriginal” Peoples in Canada

My kind of Métis: Children of the Fur-trade and Métis of Western Canada

The term Métis is generally understood as referring to a union between Aboriginal peoples and European settlers, which produced mixed-race offspring. These mixed people sprang up around the trading system in the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes area, which extended to the Pacific and Arctic coasts (Foster, 1985, p. 73). Commercial interest in the vast natural resources of New France led to the development of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) in 1670 (Miller, 1989, p. 117). Lonely and facing the challenge of survival in the harsh and unfamiliar climate, many of the European traders brought to Canada and employed by the Hudson’s Bay Company became acquainted with the “Native food sources” and “geographical knowledge” which were key to their survival (Miller, 1989, p. 124). In spite of the initial disapproval of the Hudson’s Bay Company, many European traders began to take Indian wives with whom they produced many offspring (Miller, 1989, pp. 124-125).

These unions were particularly useful in strengthening the commercial links between the local Aboriginal communities and European traders. (Miller, 1989, p. 125). The women brought their knowledge and expertise in processing skins and navigating various transportation routes and thus were extremely important to the

interests of the HBC and, eventually, the rival North West Company (NWC) (Miller, 1989, p. 125). In return for such economic partnerships, the European men had to give a customary gift to the Native woman's family before the "*mariage à la façon du pays* (marriage according to the custom of the country)" (Miller, 1989, pp. 125-126 italics in original). Thus, the Métis were born out of the fur-trade era when marriages between Native women and European men produced mixed-race offspring. Despite the central role of the Métis in Canadian history, it is interesting to note, as Racette does, that the contemporary term "Métis (May-tee)...was seldom used historically" (2004, p. 26). Instead, as Racette explains, a variety of terms ranging from "Métis (Meh-tis), Mechif (Meh-chif), Metif (Meh-tif), Bois Brulés or Half Breed were used synonymously" (2004, p. 26). The use of these different terms was often linguistic, i.e. English speakers used the term Half Breed while French speakers said Métis (Racette, 2004, pp. 26-27). By and large, there were two groups of mixed-race Native people associated with the HBC and the NWC, respectively, and they were differentiated by either their French Catholic European ancestry (NWC employees) or their English Protestant heritage (HBC employees) (Weinstein, 2007, p. 4). By the mid-eighteenth century, as Racette notes, "a collective identity appears to have been well-established" (Racette, 2004; p. 26). In 1821, the NWC amalgamated with the HBC, closing many fur trade posts and concentrating a great number of fur trade families in the Red River settlement (Weinstein, 2007, p. 3). Intermarriage was frequent between the French Métis and the English half-breeds and together they formed a "Métis" people, which had significant impact in the HBC

authorities consideration of the administration of the Red River (Weinstein, 2007, p. 4). Around this time, there were a number of Métis and Half Breed communities with a collective identity that had spread from the initial contact zones of the Hudson Bay, Great Lakes area, and the Mississippi and Missouri river junction to the Red River region, North Dakota, and the western Assiniboine river (Racette, 2004, pp. 34-35). Connections were maintained between all of these regional populations, further reinforcing a collective identity (Racette, 2004, p. 37).

Early contact stemming from the fur-trade industry was characterized by a dependency on Native knowledge and skill, on the part of Europeans (Miller, 1989). Indeed the mixed-race descendents of mixed unions were particularly skilled at adapting European technology to the Canadian landscape, as evidenced by Métis inventions such as the Red River Cart and the York boat (Weinstein, 2007, p. 2). These inventions contributed to the fur-trade by creating the transportation infrastructure necessary to move large quantities of material items across the Canadian colony (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 2-3). Importantly, many Métis communities developed at a time when the hierarchy of difference between Native and white settlers was less pronounced than at present due to the settlers initial dependence on Aboriginal peoples for their knowledge of survival in the colony (Lawrence, 2004, p. 99). During the 19th century, however, competition for land west of Upper and Lower Canada (modern day Ontario and Quebec) reached a fevered pitch as numerous parties attempted to lay claim to this western territory. Further, Peterson notes that during this time there were competing claims for “control over the interior fur

trade" (1985, p. 38) which had begun in the late 18th century and worsened during the early 19th century (Miller, 1989, pp. 124-127).

In 1869, the Canadian government began to survey the land near the Métis Red River Settlement in modern day Manitoba, without having consulted the Métis, who constituted the majority of inhabitants in the settlement (Miller, 1989, pp. 154-157). The survey itself served as a warning to Red River residents of the Canadian government's intention to annex the Hudson's Bay Company lands, or Rupert's Land, into the Dominion of Canada (Miller, 1989, pp. 152-154). This move was spurred by a number of factors, including the "land hunger" of farmers in southwestern Ontario and the fear that the United States might annex these lands for themselves if the Canadian government did not make the first move (Miller, 1989, pp. 152-154). It was also during this time that the competition for resources became a point of contention between the Indians and the Métis, particularly in the West, thus highlighting the differences between these groups (Lawrence, 2004, p. 91; Miller, 1989, p. 134). Members of the Blackfoot Confederacy were eager to enter into Treaty 7, which was signed in 1877 (Miller, 1989, p. 166), as a means of dealing with the commercial Métis buffalo hunters who were, at least, partially responsible for the dwindling buffalo herds on Blackfoot territory (Lawrence, 2004, pp. 91-92). As economic motives began to strain the relationship between European traders and settlers and Native peoples, the perception of racial difference, became more pronounced (JanMohamed, 1985, p. 61). Thus, people identifying as Métis, who had begun to assert claims to the territory that Peterson describes as "that part of the

greater Northwest where the woodland prairies dissolve into plains," (1985, pp. 37-38) were targeted as a racialized group.

In his discussion of the *Economy of the Manichean Allegory*, JanMohamed notes how, as interests in a colonized land gear up, the "manichean opposition between the [perceived] putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native" becomes ever more drastic as economic interests in the resources of the colonies increase (1985, pp. 61, 63). Hammond and Jablow, for instance, note how "Africans were perceived in a more or less neutral or benign manner before the slave trade was developed" but "once the triangular trade became established, Africans were newly characterized as the epitome of evil and barbarity" (in JanMohamed, 1985, p. 61). As the competition for resources pushed the impending tide of white settlers further west, so too were the resources of western Indians and Métis put under increasing pressure (Miller, 1989, p. 134) creating a more pronounced division between the Métis and their Indian relatives (Lawrence, 2004, pp. 98-99), but also between the Métis and their European relatives. Tensions between the Métis and the government culminated in 1870 with the Red River rebellion where 1,200 Canadian troops and hostile settlers wrecked havoc on the Métis, killing and injuring some, and dispersing many others further west (Weinstein, 2007, p. 12). In 1885, another deadly confrontation between the Canadian military and the Métis resulted in the Battle of Batoche (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 14-15).

With the Red River rebellion and the Battle of Batoche, those known as Métis were vilified by the Canadian government and some were charged with treason resulting in the hanging of Métis political leader, Louis Riel (Racette, 2001b, pp. 45-46). Racette notes how the Canadian media at the time echoed the sentiments of the government with newspaper headlines reading “*Riel was a killer*” (2001b, p. 46). Although not all Métis are necessarily linked to Louis Riel and the events of 1870 and 1885 (Lawrence, 2004, pp. 82-101; see Racette, 2001b, p. 45), I would argue that many, if not most, Métis have had to suffer the consequences of their defeat in battle and the subsequent stereotyping of Métis as “renegade half-breeds” (Van Kirk, 1985, p. 214). Perhaps the biggest loss of all, however, was the loss of land. The Manitoba Act, introduced in May, 1870, created the province of Manitoba and was intended, by Riel and members of the Métis National Committee, to safeguard land already used by Métis families in the Red River and provision land grants for future Métis generations, but at the cost of Aboriginal claims to that same territory (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 8-11). As Weinstein notes, the granting of such provisions in the creation of the province of Manitoba both “recognized and extinguished” Métis rights in one stroke of the pen (2007, pp. 11-12). Prime Minister Macdonald, for instance, did not allow the Métis to control the new province as a nation, instead retaining what Weinstein calls “dominion control of Manitoba’s public lands”(2007, p. 11). Harassment by Canadian troops and settlers in 1870 and again in 1885, forced many Métis to simply flee the area for fear of their safety, leaving behind their land and claims to Métis or Aboriginal title.

Indian, Métis, and Inuit: A Genesis of Contemporary Categories of Indigeness

If descent from Métis in the Red River settlements is said to be a defining factor of “Métisness,” then, as Jacqueline Peterson notes, there are “many roads to Red River” (1985). This narrowly defined notion of Métisness neglects those peoples who may have been involved with the fur trade, which developed in eastern Canada, and may have been mixed-race Aboriginal peoples, but who never followed the western expansion of the trade. Do these people count as Métis? And then there is the question of those Aboriginal people who claim no mixed ancestry but have no status and have, thus, been absorbed into the various non-status/Métis associations around the country. The problem with contemporary legal categories of Indigeneity is the tendency to collapse all of these differences into one, monolithic “Métis” or “treaty Indian” which, as Lawrence explains, “do not accurately represent either the citizens of Indigenous nations misnamed as Indian, nor the detribalized and nonstatus Native people misnamed as Métis” (2004, p. 96). Consequently it is important to note the considerable controversy, and the general slipperiness of categories, regarding who is classified as “Métis,” or “Indian” or “Inuit,” and for what reason.

Direct bureaucratic control was, and continues to be, a popular method for the extinction of large segments of the Aboriginal population through their exclusion from legally recognized “Indian status” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 82). Lawrence explains how these methods include “direct colonial control [which]...enabled Canada to create the Indian Act's legal status system and its highly divisive manner of externalizing

“half-breeds”... which automatically...“bled off” people from their communities” (2004, p. 7). The historical development of the contemporary Canadian nation-state is rife with examples of legalized methods for “bleeding off,” and thereby segregating portions of the Aboriginal Canadian population from Indianness. One such example is the extinction of Native women’s legal Indian status if they married non-status or non-Native men. The children of these unions had no recourse to Indian status, until the repeal of this particular form of imperial identity legislation with the 1985 Indian Act, also known as Bill C-31 (Lawrence, 2004, pp. 26, 64). This included the erasure of status for Native women who married Métis men, thereby rendering them Métis whether or not they were mixed-race, or had historic links to Métis communities (Lawrence, 2000, p. 74).

Other Native communities have simply never received any type of Indian status, and were thus “bled off” from the legislated recognition of “official” Indianness since its inception (Lawrence, 2004, p. 82). As Lawrence notes, the process by which entire groups of Native peoples were severed from “official” Indianness differed between eastern Canada and western Canada (2004). In the east Indian status was only granted to those members of recognized Indian bands or those living on federally recognized reserves (Gilbert, 1996, p. 15 in Lawrence, 2004, p. 82). In western Canada, however, those designated “half-breeds” now known as “Métis” were “arbitrarily externaliz[ed] from Indianness” (Lawrence, 2004, pp. 82-83). The Indian Act of 1876 came about as Canada gradually expanded into the west and sought to limit the number of Aboriginal peoples with whom it would have formal dealings (Lawrence, 2004, p. 88). For the first time in Canadian history, the 1876 Act “contained a provision

that...excluded anybody who was not considered to be 'pure Indian' from Indianness" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 88). This translated into government officials deciding who qualified as "Indian" based on the officials' "intentions and goals" (Hele, 2007, p. 167). Thus, Natives in the Sault borderlands in the 19th century, for example, were classified as "Indian" by non-Natives for a variety of reasons. Hele explains how Chief Shingwaukonse, the leader of the local Anishinaabeg, was classified as 'Indian' "because he 'wandered about,' had dark skin, did not live in a house, spoke only Ojibwa, and followed Anishinaabeg culture" in spite of his mixed-ancestry which was evident "in his blue eyes" (2007, p. 167). However, one of Chief Shingwaukonse's sons, a man named Pierre Lavoine (Tegoosh), was designated a Métis because he farmed and led a more "sedentary" lifestyle which included living in a "house" (Hele, 2007, p. 167). Thus, in spite of his father's classification as "Indian," Pierre Lavoine was seen as a Métis, a term that was (and, arguably, still is) used to delineate between those not considered by white administrators to be authentically Native.

The practice of separating relatives from one another through artificially constructed identity categories in eastern Canada also had consequences for how these divisions were to be enacted in the west. Here, factors such as blood quantum and/or self-identification were not taken into account in any uniform manner (Lawrence, 2004, p. 89). Rather, colonial European governments appeared to be most interested in finding those individual Native peoples who reinforced romanticized notions of authentic "Indianness" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 89). Lawrence describes how "any adulteration of popular stereotypes of Indianness was interpreted as evidence of mixed-blood"

(2004, p. 89). The perceived “adulteration” of Native peoples was differently handled at each of the signing of the numbered treaties around the country. At negotiations in the Northwest Territories, commentators described how all of the “so-called Indians of the north are half-breeds” who were left to their own discretion in choosing “treaty,” thus being designated as Indians or “scrip,” and being known as half-breeds (Leonard and Whalen, 1999, p. 53 in Lawrence, 2004, pp. 89-90). Further, anyone not present at the registration was simply deemed to be a half-breed (Holmes, 1987, p.4 in Lawrence, 2004, p. 90).

Scrip⁴ was usually given for title to up to 160 acres of land or up to \$160 in money scrip, immediately redeemable in cash (Lawrence, 2004, p. 90). People accepted scrip for a variety of reasons. It is estimated that between 1885 and 1887 approximately thirty percent of Scrip was issued to “Treaty halfbreeds” described in the Canadian Sessional Papers as “‘Indians’ withdrawing from treaty in order to apply for scrip” (in Andersen, 2000, p. 102). This likely happened due to the constraints that treaty Indians had experienced on their “hunting, fishing, and trapping activities” as a result of the provincial government regulations that did not, as promised in the treaty making process, protect the people from “forced interference with their mode of life” (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2000, p. 256). Thus, it may have seemed advantageous to some Native people in western

⁴ Scrip was a grant for money or land, given in the form of “a coupon denominated in a fixed amount of acres or dollars that could be applied to the purchase of surveyed dominion lands opened for homesteading” (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 8-11). As scrip could only be applied to the purchase of surveyed lands, many half breeds sold their coupons to “scrip speculators,” who travelled with the government commissioners, for a fraction of the stated value (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 8-11). This meant a marginal amount of money in the short term, but no title to land. Scrip documents received by ancestors during the half-breed commissions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is one of the ways in which contemporary Métis, such as myself, are able to prove Métis lineage.

Canada who were able to switch to “half-breed” status in return for money scrip, thanks to an amendment to the Indian Act in 1879, (Lawrence, 2004, p. 93). In the long term, choosing scrip meant being designated a “half-breed,” therefore relinquishing any future claims to “Indian title” (Teillet, 2007, pp. 59-60).

Following the discussion on the manner in which people were categorized as full “Indians” versus “Métis” or “half-breeds,” it is important to note that not all mixed-race Aboriginal people are, or would consider, themselves Métis. Nor are all Métis necessarily “mixed-race” Aboriginal peoples, rather they are non-status people whose family has been, for one reason or another, excluded from status. This reality has led to much confusion in attempting to create an all-encompassing definition of “Métis.” As Foster notes, there are many instances, such as with the Homeguard Cree of the Hudson’s Bay area who did not distinguish between the mixed-blood and Indian portions of their population (1977 in Foster, 1985, p. 80). Similarly, there are a number of phenotypically Native-looking Métis people from Cree speaking, northern communities who, Lawrence explains, “often consider themselves to be simply ‘Indians without status cards’” (2004, p. 86). The Canadian government’s bureaucratic control of identity categories has proven effective in allowing the government to create and define categories of Aboriginality for its own use (Sawchuk, 2001, p. 73), causing significant confusion in limiting Aboriginality to the simplistic categories of Indian, Inuit and Métis. Thus, Lawrence contends that the government’s “determination to separate the half-breed from the Indian...has allowed Canada to deny its fiduciary obligation to any community that lack Indian

status" (2004, p. 93). Those Aboriginal peoples not officially recognized as having "Indian Status," whether they would see themselves as Métis, non-Status, or some other unrecognized Aboriginal group, have suffered from a lack of protection of hunting and fishing rights, a basic source of livelihood, and, in most cases, have also been alienated from a land base (Lawrence, 2004, p. 95). Vulnerable groups such as these were frequently relocating (Lawrence, 2004, p. 95), their physical existence threatened by the limited options available for pursuing a livelihood on the edges of a racist society, and with no recourse to the protection and aid of treaty rights.

This short summary of the complex history of defining Indigeneity suggests, as Alfred and Corntassel explain, that the Canadian state's regulation of indigenusness has produced "an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism" (2005, p. 597). The many guises of contemporary colonialism, referred to as "neocolonialism" by JanMohamed (1985, p. 62) and as "postmodern imperialism" by Alfred and Corntassel (2005, p. 601), are related in their continued function to maintain control over Aboriginal peoples.

Postmodern imperialism is the continued process of colonization wherein the settler state's practice of domination is more subtly enacted (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 601), because some Native peoples have now more or less internalized, through centuries of coercion, many of the key value systems, moralities, institutions and modes of production introduced by the colonizer (JanMohamed, 1985, p. 62). According to Alfred and Corntassel, contemporary colonialism is conducted through less obvious methods of "eradicating the existence" of Indigenous "histories and geographies,"

rather than eradicating “the physical signs of Indigenous peoples as human *bodies*” (2005, p. 598). The repatriated Constitution Act of 1982 officially recognized the Métis as one of the three groups of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, in addition to Indians and Inuit, in an effort to demonstrate a “commitment to native peoples” (Teillet, 2007, p. 61). Yet, aside from the legal challenges that this move has faced since its inception⁵, the fact remains that a myriad of Aboriginal groups continue to be collapsed into three, easily definable categories of Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples with few meaningful options for genuine sovereignty (Sawchuk, 2001, p. 75). Thus, while important, legal recognition of the three Indigenous groups can be seen to continue to maintain the Canadian government’s control of these peoples and their identities within a postmodern, neocolonial context.

Painting a Nationalist Discourse

The notion of haunting has been central in nationalist discourses and national identity. Pheng Cheah, notes that colonial states created frontiers which drew an arbitrarily bounded community, resulting in a “popular national consciousness [that was]...initially weak” (1999, p. 237). Consequently, Cheah states that a national consciousness had to be “actively fostered through...artifice” (1999, p. 237) in the formation of the national imagination. Bergland argues that in the American context the modern nation was predicated on citizens haunted by “spectral Native Americans” whose “ghosts function both as representations of national guilt and

⁵ For a more in depth discussion regarding Aboriginal, and specifically Métis rights after the repatriation of the Constitution, see Teillet, J. (2007). *Métis Rights after Powley, Taku, and Haida*. In U. Lischke & D. T. McNab (Eds.), *The Long Journey of a Forgotten People: Métis Identities and Family Histories* (pp. 55-78). Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

as triumphant agents of Americanization” (2000, p. 4). Aboriginal peoples have been absorbed into America through a process of “ghosting” described by Bergland as a “technique of removal” (2000, p. 4). Indeed, Bergland continues, “By writing about Indians as ghosts, white writers effectively remove them from American land, and place them, instead, within the American imagination” (2000, p. 4). This literary removal of Native people reinforces their political removal, in the process creating a national identity that is contingent on an internalized national space within each American citizen containing in him or herself the imaginary Native person (Jehlen, 1986, p.13 in Bergland, 2000, p. 4). In this way, Native people have been made absent from the political and cultural memory that informs American nationalism.

The history of the literary ghosting of Aboriginal people in America is mirrored by a similar, albeit unique, ghosting process either through romanticized visual representation of Natives, or their complete absence, by Euro Canadian artists. The “old” approaches of European art movements played a crucial part in informing Euro Canadian visual aesthetics until the early twentieth century (O’Brian, 2007, p. 21). During this time, as O’Brian explains, art in Canada was “a product of political and cultural subordination” meant to maintain the one way flow of culture from the “metropolitan centres of Europe” to colonial Canada (2007, p. 21). Many European settlers travelled to the Canadian colonies in the 19th century, bringing with them their European artistic traditions. Artists such as British painter Paul Kane and Swiss national Peter Rindisbacher travelled to the Canadian colonies during this time, creating numerous renditions of the exotic Aboriginal populations

throughout their journeys. By way of example, I will briefly outline Rindisbacher's artistic career. Between 1821-1826, Rindisbacher created some of the most frequently referenced frontier images, particularly in the Red River Settlement area, which are seen by academics and popular audiences as providing unbiased, authentic representations of the past (Peers, 2009, p. 516). Rindisbacher painted and sketched prolifically, creating what Peers describes as "obsessively detailed images of settlers and Aboriginal peoples" (2009, p. 517). The quasi-naturalist/ethnographic tone of Rindisbacher's renderings of Aboriginal peoples, and his attention to detail are noted by many academics and historians in advocating for the supposedly unbiased veracity of his imagery (Peers, 2009, pp. 517-518).

Examination of Rindisbacher's artistic career and schooling, however, provide evidence of his artistic embellishments, particularly in regard to his depiction of Aboriginal peoples. As Peers notes, the artist was often conforming to eighteenth century European rules of visual composition rather than creating literal, "on-the-spot" sketches, as his work was often labeled (2009, pp. 523-524). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that elements of Rindisbacher's work were literally copied from illustrations of Native peoples by other European artists (Peers, 2009, p. 521). Thus, far from being objective, Rindisbacher actively embellished his depictions of the Native population in order to conform to romanticized European expectations of the fur-trading lifestyle in the Canadian colonies and thereby expand the market for his painting (2009, p. 521). Painted

representations of Aboriginal peoples during the 19th century adhered largely to the “salvage paradigm,” which James Clifford best describes as: “a relatively recent period of authenticity [that] is repeatedly followed by a deluge of corruption, transformation, modernization....but not so distant or eroded so as to make collection or salvage impossible” (1987, p. 122 in Crosby, 2007, p. 220). In this schema, the authentic Indian will always be an anachronistic relic whose personage can never be fully recognized in the present, or properly represented unless through the renderings of Western iconography. Images of Aboriginal peoples become absorbed into the national story as static images of Canada’s colonial past.

Painting has played an important role in mapping the vast territories of the Canadian colonies in the 19th century and creating the Canadian nation of the 20th century. The recent move towards a global system of nation-states wherein nations were seen as “fundamentally similar” meant that nations would have to create mass national histories and various national artistic and cultural traditions by which to differentiate themselves (Anderson, 2007, pp. 245-246). With the Native populations safely tucked into the portraiture of the 19th century, O’Brian explores how the infamous group of seven began their campaign to create a “wilderness painting aesthetic that claimed to be authentically Canadian and free from European influence” (2007, p. 21). Between 1890-1930, there was a rise in urban industrial development in Canada, to which Cole attributes the growth in fascination with the Canadian wilderness that was very much grounded in the “Western tradition of ...primitivism and romanticism” (Cole, 2007, p. 129). In the early 20th century, the

group of seven created work that was explicitly focused on human absence in the landscape, thereby promoting a unified Canadian identity, both artistic and national, based on a “wilderness ethos” (White, 2007, p. 13). As members of a colonial-settler nation, the landscape paintings of the group of seven sought to demonstrate “human sovereignty” over the land in accordance with 17th to 19th century ideals of individualism and liberty (White, 2007, pp. 18-19). Landscape painting aided the group in this goal by, as Mansfield describes, tying “identity to a literal place” as a means of naturalizing nationalism (Mansfield, 2007, p. 3). This nationalist discourse was, of course, implicitly white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and male (O’Brian, 2007).

Painting the Canadian landscape as either void of the Aboriginal peoples or, conversely, including only romanticized imagery for Western consumption either renders Aboriginal peoples totally absent or present only in an imaginary past. Both methods subsume imagery of the “Indian” first to the service of colonial fascination and, later, Canadian nationalism. This is the Native ghost of the Canadian national and artistic imagination. Ghosts are metaphors for repressed memories and historical events, national identities, trauma, white guilt, and more. Haunting, Gordon notes, necessarily involves ghosts, or phantom presences as a sign that “describes how that which appears to be *not there* is often a seething presence...meddling with taken-for-granted realities” (1997, p. 8, emphasis added). The presence of these Native phantoms disrupt the tenuously constituted ideal of a unified, Anglo-Canadian nation-state (Goldman & Saul, 2006, p. 648). The ghosts of Aboriginal people, as Cariou states, point to “a lurking sense that the places settlers

call home are not really theirs" (2006, p. 727). Haunting focuses on the absence of something, producing an ethereal state of unease which demonstrates that there is more to the picture than meets the eye (Gordon, 1997, p. 8). It can be described as a social phenomenon that points to the complexities of life that have remained obscured, or unrealized (Gordon, 1997, p. 7). Indeed, ghosts serve as a reminder of a felt absence that has been denied, by various means, and through their presence demand recognition.

Consistent with this analysis, I argue that Aboriginal ghosts lurk in the Canadian national imagination and question the artifice of nationalism and the means by which a Canadian national identity has been constructed. These Native phantoms ask us to consider the effect upon those whose histories are erased from the national imagination. Bergland argues that, although the power hierarchies created in this system of governance can themselves be thought of as unreal and insubstantial, they nevertheless effect the lives of those who struggle under them in very real and material ways (Bergland, 2000, pp. 6-7). For example, Aboriginal people have been consigned to a romantic past, or rendered invisible through their representation in both mainstream literary texts and through the systems of legal control and state definition found in the *Indian Act*. In-so-far as words are explicitly linked to history and memory, through their ability to "conjure" and "embody" historical memory (Bergland, 2000, pp. 5-6), this process can allow, or *dis-allow*. Memory, notes Brogan, "is the mirror that reflects ethnicity" and allows "groups to create meaningful identities through a negotiation with the past they claim as their

own" (1998, p. 130). Thus, through processes that can range from government legislation, to state schooling and popular media, the memories and histories of particular groups can be made spectral, in ways that have powerful implications for the domination and control of Aboriginal identities and communities.

Just as oral histories can function to pass on cultural values to subsequent generations among the Métis and other Aboriginal groups (Prefontaine & Barkwell, 2006, p. 8), the silence surrounding my Métis family has also been learned and passed on through several generations. I explore a similar absence of open identification as Métis in my interviews with Garneau and Favell and in their artistic production. Both artists admit to feeling disconnected from their Métis ancestry until, as adults, they made conscious decisions to reclaim an identity as Métis artists. Belcourt, on the other hand, grew up surrounded by many notable Métis figures, including her father, the Métis politician Tony Belcourt. Nonetheless, Belcourt has also struggled to re-present herself as a Métis person in the face of ongoing racism, some of it from within the larger Aboriginal community. Based on Belcourt's fair appearance and lack of legally-recognized Indian Status, her authenticity as a Native person has been called into question.

The silencing of narratives of Aboriginality is, itself, a traumatic event stemming from the ideology of colonization. Trauma, not unlike oral histories or familial silences, can be transmitted from one generation to the next (Denham, 2008). This ensures an intergenerational legacy wherein the effects of trauma endure even for events that are seemingly "forgotten." This form of historical

trauma is defined by Yellow Horse Brave Heart as “the ‘cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations” (2003, p. 7 in Denham, 2008, p. 396). Scholars who assess the legacy of traumatic events, for example, the Battle of Batoche in 1885 and the subsequent loss of land for the Métis, argue that these decisive moments affect not only those persons present for the experience, but can also shape those future generations of those whose ancestors were witness to the trauma. In this context, Abrams explains how such trauma persists

[a]s a result of the conspiracy of silence and the difficulty survivors have in communicating their trauma experience, children will often only receive information in fragments that are cast in mystery, thus perpetuating a narrative void surrounding the subject or the experience. (1999 in Denham, 2008, p. 398)

It is interesting to note that the period after 1885 has been referred to by Garneau and many other Métis as “The Big Silence” (2008), marking the defeat and resulting fragmentation of a sense of community and culture for many Métis. Indeed, the state sanctioned racism embodied in the violent oppression of Métis peoples in 1870 and, finally, in 1885 fostered a tacit permission for absencing Métis people from the cultural landscape of “Canadianness” for successive generations up to and including contemporary times. Likewise, the state sponsored exclusion of various Native peoples, Métis and others, from legally-recognized Native status throughout the history of Canada has had the added effect of excluding Métis peoples from Aboriginality.

Métis author and activist, Howard Adams, provides an excellent example of the manner in which shame and silence about being Métis was also passed on through families by drawing on his own experience from his parents and grandparents. Howards notes that the erasure of his Métis heritage was evident in the absence of any reference to Métis historical events during interactions between himself and his Métis friends and relatives on the Lépine scrip farm. The struggle of 1885 remained hidden from Adams and other Métis children by their parents and grandparents who were the “defeated generations” of that struggle (Adams, 1989, p. 98). Consequently, as Adams explains, instead of being proud to tramp “in the footprints of a noble guerilla warrior,” Adam’s grandfather Maxime Lépine, and most of Adams peer group lived their “lives [in] defeat, without hope, ashamed of ourselves as halfbreeds” in spite of the fact that their forefathers “had fought gloriously against the Ottawa regime” (1989, p. 98). Indeed, Adams described this shame as the feeling that the Métis were “the wretched of the earth” (1989, p. 98). Later in life, however, Adams would come to realize that this shame and silence was an intentional tool of colonization by which the “white image makers” of Ottawa cut out a debased path for a defeated Métis population (1989, p. 98).

Just as Adams, his parents and grandparents were haunted by the once “noble guerilla warrior” of Maxime Lépine, so too have Garneau, Favell, Belcourt and I been haunted by the ghosts of our Métis ancestry. All of our Métis ancestors grew up in a time when the shame of defeat and an undesirable ancestry were met with either derision, or a deafening silence. Nevertheless, memory is a dynamic force and

can be re-made through new narratives of collective identity informed by the past and reworked according to changing needs (Brogan, 1998, p. 130; Eyerman, 2004, p. 161). Although the formerly unacknowledged or absented memories have been embodied in successive generations through the “unconscious reenactment of trauma,” Brogan contends that it is still possible to “exorcise” these specters, so they are properly mourned (1998, p. 136). According to Brogan, the act of commemoration, actively recreates and gives presence to those memories in a process that reclaims those otherwise absent, making “whom and what we mourn our own” (1998, p. 138). In this fashion, the ghosts of Aboriginal ancestors who were absented from the Canadian national imagination can be repossessed to construct new legacies and the hope for a different kind of future.

The Presence of Absence in a contemporary Métis family

The story of Métisness in my family is similar to that of many people whose family's' downplay and ignore their connection to the First Peoples who inhabited this land. This erasure is the product of a centuries old colonial history of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual violence that has slowly degraded the humanity of entire communities of people. While some Native peoples openly express this pain, shame and denial and link it consciously to the process of colonization, others express the hurt subconsciously. My family tends towards the “unconscious” mode of non-remembrance. Yet, and in accordance with Brogan's assertion that memories of ethnicity may be “secretly broadcast” (1998, p. 130), while officially hidden,

allusions to our Métis identity did emerge in various family stories. Let me tell you one.

My father kept his hair in braids in high school. Long hair was “in” at the time and he played on several team sports, where he said the braids were the easiest way for him to keep his hair out of his face. Aside from playing basketball, volleyball and hockey, my dad also served as the student president in grade 12, and was an honour roll student. My dad and mom met in the twelfth grade, when her family moved to my dad’s small town. She was fair and freckled, with blonde hair and green eyes, a daughter of German and Ukrainian parents. The first time my mother brought my father home, she told me, her parents asked, had she had gotten him “right off the reserve?” Yet, as it turned out, the two families had some things in common since my dad’s mother is an immigrant from the Ukraine. Her family had settled in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, a part of the Canadian government’s scheme to settle the rather undesirable West by populating it with the less-desirable peoples of Eastern Europe. It was in North Battleford that my Grandma Mary met my Grandfather, Joseph Short, a Métis man who had recently left his family’s homestead in Park Valley in search of work.

My maternal Grandfather, Mike, and my paternal Grandmother spoke Ukrainian when they met at various family gatherings. Both of my Grandmother’s, Mary and Rose, visited regularly and continue to do so. Cabbage rolls and perogies were a typical food from my childhood. The culture and food of the Ukrainians are a familiar and accepted part of my heritage. In contrast, I never knew my Métis

Grandfather, nor was his heritage acknowledged. My Métis Grandfather died of a heart attack, after years of depression, illness and alcoholism, shortly before my parents wedding in 1978. I grew up with my Grandma Mary's second husband, Pete, as my Grandfather. He was a kind, Franco-Albertan man who was very active with the Catholic Church. He loved us like his own grandchildren and we were always encouraged to practice our French with him because we were "part French" from our biological grandfather's side, a man who we had never met. But he had spoken French, we were assured, and English, and maybe something else.

I was surrounded by my Ukrainian and German roots, and occasionally reminded of the French ones as well by my Papa Pete, as we called him, in lieu of Grandpa Short. My links to Ukrainian culture were openly available through my grandparents' stories and snippets of spoken Ukrainian, as was my German heritage, to a smaller degree. Growing up in Western Canada, it was not uncommon that many people had some sort of Ukrainian heritage. One day, in my mid-twenties, I was in Toronto with some friends and a couple of women I had never met before. They were walking briskly, their blonde hair trailing behind them, when they started to talk about being Ukrainian. "You're Ukrainian?" I asked, adding quickly "I'm Ukrainian too!" They looked me up and down before one of them responded, saying, "no you're not, you're too dark!" I was taken aback! Never before had I been denied my Ukrainian identity! I told my mom's parents about this conversation one day when I was visiting their farm. They looked at me and replied, "well, you're just a darkie."

“But what about my dad? He’s part Native, he’s Métis.”

“We don’t think of him as Native,” my Grandma said, “he owns his own business.”

After this statement, I didn’t pursue the topic any further. The racist implications of my non-Native grandparents response to my part-Native father were too overwhelming. The stereotypes of Native people as lazy and incompetent were alive and well in their statements. Apparently, in some bizarre inversion of logic, a “successful” Native person may overcome the Native part of himself or herself to become...white? I suppose, in the case of my father, his in-laws simply chose to emphasize the presence of his Ukrainian ancestry over the Métis ancestry. In the absence of an explanation for a complexion that is darker than is ‘acceptable’ for a Ukrainian person, my father was rendered a mysterious “darkie,” like me.

Perhaps it was the added confusion of being singled out as a “darkie” in my Ukrainian family that seemed to cause me, more than my siblings, to always keep a space in my heart for my dead Grandfather. I’m not sure why, except that it made me so sad to not have known him. I was intrigued by the stories that would occasionally slip out about him, about how quiet he was, how sad, and how much of his life was a mystery even to those he was closest to, including his wife, my grandmother. He often worked in remote areas, at a mine in Egg Lake and, I’m told, he helped to build the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line in the Northwest Territories. Sometimes he would be gone for work, and no one was sure where he was, but then he would return and say little of where he had been. When he wasn’t working, he was often drinking and ill, demanding silence from his five children, which he returned in kind.

These were times when the family would depend on Welfare to get them through the times when their father was out of commission. He died, with much left unsaid.

This is how the pattern of silence surrounding my Métis grandfather's side of the family was established. He did not speak and, it would seem, most did not question the secret life of this sullen man. What I have are off-hand comments gleaned from my father during my youth. Growing up in Calgary, Blackfoot and Blood First Nations were all around us, and this seemed to spark the occasional remark from my father. "You know the Blackfoot were our traditional enemies, because we're Cree." On other occasions, my father would storm into the house, angry because he had been pulled over by the police who, in an early example of racial profiling, were targeting him as a darker, possibly Indigenous man. Consequently, my dad was, and I think, continues to be edgy in airports, afraid he might be mistaken for someone from the Middle East. I suppose this is not surprising since I remember my maternal Grandfather, Grandpa Mike, teasing me when I was young by saying, "If you're dad's an Indian where's his Turban?" My mother always responded to my father's frustration by telling him that he was overreacting and really, he was just too angry. Over time, my dad's veiled remarks grew fewer in number, as did those of other family members regarding the "Métis" secret. This code of silence seemed to be strictly enforced, as we fell into a hush. It was only as an adult that I started to remember, started to wake up.

Yet, I had kept all of these stories, and more, locked up in my head for years. I'm not really sure why, but something about them felt important to me. At the same

time, they were also deeply confusing, as both the storytellers and the stories expressed this confusion. Part of the problem in resurrecting a Métis identity is that the memories I am trying to piece together are just that: pieces and fragments of what was. The narrative is disrupted, parts of it are lost, and what remains seems largely unconcerned with timelines. Thus, I am left with shards of information about what it is to be part Native and I find myself sifting through what Kidron terms the “fragmented parental tales of trauma and survival” (2003, p. 522). This unacknowledged history has often left me with a sense of confusion or wanting to refuse the pain and shame that attach to the Métis aspects of my family story. Indeed, my family’s narrative has focused so explicitly on the simultaneous creation and erasure, or presence and absence, of an Aboriginal identity that we seem now to constitute, in a tiny microcosm, the difficulties between settlers and Indigenous people which structure broader public discourse in contemporary Canada.

In this sense, my own experience of familial denial and confusion is a symptom of a larger history whose effects continue to be felt to this day. The impact of familial stories bound up in that trauma can be best described by Caruth’s assertion that they “carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (1995, p. 5). While I carry within me the legacy of trauma, transmitted from my father, and his father, I choose not to continue the pattern of silence. Indeed, the aim of this writing is to bring to light the repressed identity and associated trauma of my Métis ancestors (Kidron, 2003, p. 530). Thus, I hope that my autoethnographic and visual

analysis of Métis artists can elaborate a new set of meanings from a deeply sedimented history. While my own familial stories about being Native, about being white, about being neither Native-enough nor white-enough, serve as helpful guides for me in recovering my Métis self, it is also true that my generation was removed enough from our Native history that we could choose to ignore it, and let those fragments fly off like pieces of halfbreed scrip paper on the wind, never to be recovered. Perhaps this is what my Métis ancestors would have wanted, for my generation to one day forget the pain of being Métis. But I do not think that they would have wanted us to stop being Métis.

The Question of Art, the Question of Identity

*"My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists
who give them back their spirit "*

~Louis Riel, 1885

Louis Riel's prophetic vision is applicable, now more than ever. While Riel was not *the* leader of all Métis peoples, his pivotal role inspired many Métis-identified people, whether or not they have direct connections to him through the historical events of the late nineteenth century in Western Canada.⁶ I am not the only Métis person feeling the urge to recover the connection with my ancestors. Many are now, over one hundred years later, looking for answers to questions,

⁶ There are many discussions about the larger than life effects of Riel's role in the 1870 Red River Rebellions and the 1885 Battle of Batoche on the larger populations of Métis peoples. Suggested reading for further insight into this aspect of Métis history: Sherry Farrell Racette's paper entitled *Metis Man or Canadian Icon: Who Owns Louis Riel?* In *Rielisms: Catalogue of an exhibition held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery Jan. 13-Mar. 18, 2001 and at the Dunlop Gallery May 12-July 8, 2001* (pp. 42-53).

indeed, even beginning to ask the questions in the first place. As Wilson McArthur writes about recovering her Métis roots, “It seems that the Métis concept of destiny, or spirit memory, chooses particular people to make such journeys, and in my family, I was chosen, for some inexplicable reason” (2007, p. 329). I believe I am one of these Métis people who are trying to piece together the fragmented memories, using a variety of sources both within and outside of my immediate family. One very important part of this recovery is the process of contextualizing Métisness through this study of the visual culture of Métis artists. Through exploring the work of Belcourt, Garneau, and Favell I hope to contribute to, new understandings regarding the complexity of what it means to be Métis in a contemporary context.

My work responds to the loss of “spirit” of which Louis Riel speaks, and the legacy of historical trauma passed through many Métis families through this “code of silence.” Memorializing historical trauma actually involves what Kidron best describes as a “tight symbiosis of personal and collective memory-identity work” (2003, p. 537). Thus, my work, which began as a personal quest to recover and understand myself as a Métis woman, now aims to explore the broader Métis history and cosmology. Individual memory work can only find meaning through collective paradigms and the symbolic capital of testimony (Kidron, 2003, p. 537). Here, Saltzman notes how the act of representation found in visual art can “structure the visual object as the material trace of a fugitive body” or memory providing a sort of visual testimony to what once was (2006, p. 3). Consequently, I hope these visual representations, or testimonies, can create a sense of the interplay, between the

present and the past, in order to construct a more coherent narrative. Taking into account the testimonies of my Métis family through autoethnography, and of Métis artists Belcourt, Garneau and Favell, through visual culture, my writing will contribute to developing a new cultural synthesis through which previously unintegrated fragments and memories are given voice.

I hope this process provides a space for the past to have a place in the present, through visual narratives which, as Saltzman so eloquently states, “bear witness...to the histories that at once found and confound our identities” (Saltzman, 2006, pp. 6-7). For in-so-far as visual art creates “commemorative practices” which can form a new “collective memory” this process can also allow one to come-to-terms with the past through new insights into the bonds of kinship and experience (Denham, 2008, pp. 393, 399). Consequently, the process of creating, and commenting on Métis visual art acknowledges the cycle of historical trauma while also fostering a new dialogue with the collective “Métis memory.” In the upcoming chapters, I will weave together an analysis of visual art by artists of Métis heritage, and autoethnographic reflections in order to increase awareness of Métis peoples and identities, as one important step in redefining Métisness, in all of its complexity, and reconfiguring the shame and silence around being Métis.

Chapter 3 –Christi Belcourt

Christi Belcourt was born in Scarborough, Ontario before her parents relocated to the Belcourt family home in Edmonton. Belcourt's identity as a Métis woman was impressed upon her from a young age. She spent the early years of her life growing up with her paternal grandparents, both of whom were fluent Michif speakers, although they would not teach the language to their children or grandchildren for unspecified reasons (Belcourt, n.d.-c). Her father, Tony Belcourt, was a Métis leader for several decades, and attending political assemblies was part of Belcourt's awareness of her Métis heritage. Tony Belcourt's political career as an advocate for Métis and Non-Status Natives began with his election as Vice-President of the Métis Nation of Alberta in 1969 (The Métis Nation of Ontario, n.d.). When he was elected the founding president of the Native Council of Canada in 1970, now known as the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), Tony Belcourt decided to relocate his wife and children to Ottawa where he could "more effectively lobby the government regarding Métis rights" (Belcourt, n.d.-c). Since this time he has served, in various capacities, on associations such as the Native Council of Canada, the Métis National Council, and the Métis Nation of Ontario, among many others (The Métis Nation of Ontario, n.d.).

Belcourt's mother was adopted as a child and, perhaps for this reason, her western European ancestry played a smaller role in the development of Belcourt's socio-cultural identity. Belcourt's maternal adoptive grandparents and uncle lived in Nova Scotia. Thus, although Belcourt recognized them fully as her grandparents the

family was only able to visit them once every couple of years, due to financial constraints and the difficulty of traveling such long distances with three children (Belcourt, 2008). Belcourt describes how her awareness of her Métis heritage was largely developed through a “childhood [that] was dominated by Métis politics” (Belcourt, n.d.-a). Thus, her father’s political career as a Métis man ultimately had a strong influence on Belcourt’s identification with her Métis ancestry. Tony Belcourt’s political career also provided the impetus for the Belcourt family to move from Alberta to Ottawa in 1970, as previously noted. The majority of Belcourt’s childhood would be spent in Ottawa.

Growing up in Ottawa, Belcourt had a life-long interest in painting and drawing. As a child, her parents enrolled her in some arts-focused courses for adults which, Belcourt admits, was “awkward but interesting” (2008). It was not until Belcourt was sixteen that her passion for painting was awoken. A friend showed Belcourt her mother’s professional arts supplies, “oils and canvases and stuff,” as well as some techniques (Belcourt, 2008). It was the first time that Belcourt had access to these types of materials, and her life as a painter was begun. Belcourt dropped out of high school in Grade 11 and entered what she describes as “a dark period” in her life which involved working menial jobs and participating in drinking and drug use for a lengthy period of time (Belcourt, n.d.-c). She continued painting through out this period of her life and has, as such, been largely self-taught as an artist. Belcourt received some instruction, however, that helped turn her life in a more positive direction when she met Wilfred Peltier and Yvonne McRae, two

Odawa elders. Both elders taught Belcourt their stories and traditional teachings in an effort to bring Belcourt back from her dark lifestyle (Belcourt, n.d.-c). Yvonne McRae taught Belcourt how to make a tobacco offering and, perhaps unwittingly, put Belcourt on the distinctive artistic path for which she is now gaining recognition (Belcourt, n.d.-c). In 1993, McRae gave Belcourt a pair of beaded Mukluks, which inspired an attempt at “painting” beadwork (Belcourt, n.d.-c). Belcourt’s first beaded painting was “just terrible, a really bad painting” (Belcourt, 2008), but she persisted in teaching herself how to create the beaded style “dot paintings” that she is known for today.

Since Belcourt’s “breakthrough” year in 1993 when she was given the Mukluks, she has been hard at work producing a number of paintings and series, exhibiting her work and publishing books (Belcourt, n.d.-c). Her series *Great Métis of My Time* includes five portraits of contemporary Métis leaders and visionaries, and four paintings of historical beadwork patterns (Belcourt, n.d.-d). The *Mapping Roots: Perspectives of Land & Water in Ontario* series explores Métis and Anishnaabe perspectives on land and water through repainting maps to include Aboriginal place names and using her dot painting to represent important waterways and aquatic ecosystems (Belcourt, n.d.-f). Belcourt has exhibited her work most recently in 2010 at a group show entitled *Mantuc, Little Spirits: The Language of Glass Beads* in Zurich, Switzerland at the North America Native Museum (Belcourt, n.d.-e). She has also published two books, which document Métis and Aboriginal peoples traditions of plant use and beading, entitled *Medicines To Help Us: Traditional Metis Plant Use*

(2007) and *Beadwork: First Peoples' Beading History and Techniques* (2010) which contribute to the literature on two of the many traditions still maintained by Aboriginal people today. *Medicines To Help Us* also incorporates a large mural painting by Belcourt of all the medicinal plants included in the book. In my analysis of her work I will focus my discussion on the intersection between Belcourt's Métis identity, this mural, entitled *Medicines To Help Us*, and the painting *Bloodletting (does that make you more comfortable with who I am?)* as both paintings are powerful examples of her work and relevant to a discussion of contemporary Métis identity and visual art.

Remembering a style, making new traditions

Material culture and beadwork, in particular, have become synonymous with Métis identity over the past two centuries. Intriguingly, Métis beadwork and other "Indian-looking artifacts" housed in museum collections have more often been attributed to different First Nations communities rather than to Métis communities (Brasser, 2007 (1985), p. 221). Yet, as Blady and Brasser note, material artworks produced by Métis artisans developed a distinctive style, which combined influences from both European and Indigenous parental cultures (1996, p. 137; 2007 (1985), p. 225). The identification of works held in various collections is complicated by the historic tendency for various ethnologists, European artists, travelers and collectors to label items as stemming from culturally homogenous "Ojibway," "Cree," "Blackfoot" or other Native communities, ignoring the important cultural differences within and between groups (Brasser, 2007 (1985), p. 222).

Métis populations developed alongside their various parental cultures.

Racette notes how “certain ethnic combinations dominated the cultural tone of the community” (2004, p. 46). The complexities of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships in early Canada, as they relate to Métis peoples is noted in the designation of artifacts as “Cree or Cree-Métis type” (Blady, 1996, p. 136), an oversimplification of Indigenous material culture that collapses the multiplicity of Indigenous identities into one, or possibly two groups, depriving the group members of a complex personhood (Gordon, 1997, p. 4). The colonial project of curio collections, which would later feed the vast storehouses of European and Euroamerican museums, is an early example of creating a singular, sedimented identity, rendering the heterogeneity of Native peoples unreal in the Canadian imagination.

Historically, Métis peoples have been identified by their strikingly unique beadwork styles. Early travelers described Métis dress as “...bright colors, semi-European, semi-Indian in style....elaborately decorated with glass beads, porcupine quills, feather quills, etc.” (Kurz, 1937 in Brassier, 2007 (1985), p. 224). Beadwork styles, Blady notes, embodied “sparkling delicacy” with a complexity displayed in the “motif repetition and colour alternation as well as an extensive palette...balance...[and] non-symmetrical composition” (1996, pp. 137-138). Métis women dressed their men in highly decorated finery, with a sense of competition and pride embodied in the skill and tradition of their handiwork (Harrison, 1985, pp. 71-72). Women presented their husbands and children in silks and fine

beadwork in the spirit of friendly rivalry amongst community members (Racette, 2005, p. 17). This pride in maintaining a Métis cultural and artistic identity has continued to the present day, in spite of attempts to quash any such traditions.

The suppression of cultural and artistic traditions of Aboriginal peoples across Canada came into being through the *Indian Act (1876)*, and a number of subsequent amendments from 1884 through to 1933 (Racette, 2009, p. 295). I will not list here all of the specific amendments, but name only a few to demonstrate the manner in which the *Indian Act* regulated the ceremonial life of Aboriginal peoples. In 1884 the infamous banning of the potlatch on the west coast was implemented through the addition of section 114 and in 1914 section 149, which made the wearing of “aboriginal costume” illegal without the explicit consent of the Indian agent (Racette, 2009, p. 295). The prohibition of ceremonial objects had a direct effect on the overall artistic production of a community since, as Racette notes “ceremonial objects...often represent[ed] the highest artistic standards of a community” (2009, p. 295). This translated to a scheme of obsolescence by banning the events associated with high-calibre artistic production, as well as more overt means of controlling self-expression by, as Racette explains, the Indian agents active encouragement of “art they perceived as devoid of cultural meaning or purpose” (2009, p. 296).

Despite the obstacles, many Aboriginal peoples continued to create work that would be perceived as “devoid of cultural meaning” to the untrained eye. Beadwork and other arts, for example, were of great cultural importance to the Métis, as these

were artistic expressions of solidarity, cultural integrity and, Penney contends, “resistance to the domination of ‘whites” (1991, p.61 in Blady, 1996, p. 136). Indeed, in the many ancestral Native communities to which Métis descendants maintained ties, the Ojibway and Cree words for beads and the hides upon which they were stitched, portray them as animate objects (Racette, 2009, p. 287). This meant that, as Racette notes, “women worked with living media on living surfaces to construct messages for an unseen viewer, actively engaging the spirit world through their artwork” (2009, pp. 287-288). The connection to ancestral spirits and spirits of the natural world, as well as the expression of cultural identity imbue these traditional art forms with powerful meanings in addition to decoration for aesthetic purposes.

Not surprisingly, after the introduction of the Indian Act, there was a marked decline in the production of “traditional” media and art forms from the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century (Racette, 2009). Canadian legislation, which forbids certain cultural practices, effectively set in motion the process of invisibilizing Aboriginal and Métis artistic practices. The few historians, such as Ted J. Brassier, who paid any attention to Métis artistic production colluded with this notion of the “vanishing Indian” in arguing that “...métis culture and its artistic expressions flowered and withered before the ethnologists began their systematic collections of documented artifacts” (2007 (1985), p. 221). Brassier’s assertion that “métis culture” grew and died before any Europeans could properly document it merely reinforces the absence of Métis peoples from the historical record (Bergland,

2000, p. 3). It also negates the fact that Métis peoples have continued to produce culturally specific, traditional artwork well into the present day. The narrow stipulations that European and Euroamerican observers have set about what qualifies as “traditional” art further negated Métis art forms. Métis artists responded to a variety of factors in the production of their crafts, including market demands for clothing at Fur-Trade posts and trinkets for the collectors and, later, tourists, as well as the need to clothe their families and supplement or single-handedly furnish an income for their families (Racette, 2004, 2005).

The growing dependence on women’s handiwork to provide income, combined with the government’s banning of cultural production practices in the *Indian Act* resulted in the commoditization of Aboriginal art and the belief that this stylistically hybrid work is not, Phillips contends, “true ‘primitive art’” (1998, p. 7). Unfortunately, this negative association with commoditized art production persisted throughout the twentieth century and into the present (R. B. Phillips, 1998, p. 6). This created a polemic conception of art made by Aboriginal people whereby it is either not “Native” enough because it incorporates, for example, contemporary mediums such as acrylic paints and digital media, or it is altogether too “traditional” to be classed among work by western European artists and is, therefore, rendered to the status of craft. Either mode of thinking creates an absence of recognition for contemporary Métis visual artists, no matter their chosen medium.

Ghost Flowers

As I was searching for Métis visual artists to interview for my thesis project, I was struck by Belcourt's images, produced through a technique of painstakingly rendering flowers, plants, birds and other animals with multicoloured dots of paint, which produced images that were both beautiful and unique. The attraction to this work surprised me, as flowers have haunted me throughout my life. As a child my maternal Grandmother had decided that, of my siblings, I would be the one to receive everything floral, while my sister got brain teasing games and puzzles and my brother got trucks and action heroes. I would have happily settled for a toy bulldozer to bury my flower patterned matching vest and blouse, along with the flower infested, scented journal. I had no idea why my maternal Grandmother persisted in giving me flowers.

One day, speaking with another artist who painted beautiful, Georgia O'Keefe-esque flowers, I realized that something had changed. I laughed as I told her the story about my Grandmother and the flowers, and reflected that I was now speaking with this artist because I found the flowers dazzlingly captivating. Now I have returned to the flowers, or they have returned to me, through the work of Belcourt. I was astonished to learn that, some groups, such as the Sioux, historically referred to the Métis as what could be translated to the "flower beadwork people" (Brasser, 2007 (1985), p. 225). Further, the presence of the flowers and various other plants that appear in Belcourt's work is one of healing and resilience (Henriksson, 2003). The legacy of shame and silence that has surrounded many

Métis families, including my own, was broken through the ghostly presence of flowers that have resurfaced through out my lifetime. The presence of flowers in my life has served to remind me of something once lost to silence that has now been brought to light. This newfound presence has similarly caused new pain associated with the questions of authenticity, who is or is not a Métis person and who gets to define Métis identity. It is intriguing that my maternal Grandmother, the woman who would tell me as an adult that she didn't consider my father to be an "Indian" because he owned his own business, was the one to give me flowers throughout my life. It is those same flowers that give me the strength to heal by ending the cycle of silence.

It is important to note that it has historically been women's work to create and embellish the material culture of Métis peoples. Many of the finest artisans remain nameless, their legacy being passed on through teaching their skills to successive generations of female workers (Racette, 2001a, p. 181). My childhood rejection of flowers and the feminine was, perhaps, an early, unconscious association between the devaluation of women's work and related symbols of femaleness. Belcourt's extensive use of a variety of plants, as well as flowers recalls not only the connection of Métis people to the physical land of Canada, but reminds the viewer of the absence of Métis women from the historical landscape. Where Garneau's work focuses explicitly on the hyper-masculine realms of violence, domination, and other physical reminders of colonization, Belcourt reintroduces the specters of the countless Aboriginal women whose skilled work defined, for many

settlers, collectors, European painters and others, a recognizable, though largely unacknowledged, Métis material culture (Brasser, 2007 (1985); Harrison, 1985).

Belcourt's self-portrait, *Bloodletting (does that make you more comfortable with who I am?)* (Figure 1), addresses the question of Aboriginal identity and visually connects the artist with her Métis ancestry through symbolic imagery of pain associated with the denial of Aboriginal identity. The story behind *Bloodletting* is one that discusses the policing of identity by Aboriginal peoples. This sort of behaviour serves to reinforce the absencing of some Aboriginal peoples, furthering the pain of colonial identity legislation. Belcourt creates a visual record of a Métis woman through self-representation in *Bloodletting*, which addresses the ongoing interplay of internalized and systemic racism, while also providing her with a physical presence as a Métis woman.

Bloodletting (does that make you more comfortable with who I am?)

One painting in particular struck a chord with me while browsing the artwork on Belcourt's website. Entitled *Bloodletting (does that make you more comfortable with who I am?)*, Belcourt uses graphic imagery and stylized self-portraiture to confront the viewer with the question of her Native ancestry. The face in her self-portrait is oddly reminiscent of Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror*, with the flattened profile of Belcourt's nose, which runs the length of her face and clearly demarcates the two sides, one dark and one light. The woman is bordered on either side by plants, and in her hand she holds an eagle feather, which she has taken up in lieu of the alcohol and cigarettes, represented on the bottom, right corner of the

painting. Her right forearm bears four cuts from which she lets her blood drip out of her into a bowl held on her lap. The act of bloodletting is an ancient healing modality used by practitioners around the world. Throughout time, blood has been equated with life (Kuriyama, 1995, p. 18). In the practice of bloodletting, the quality of blood is associated with the quality of life wherein the presence of “bad” blood, or an imbalance by way of too much blood required treatment by draining (“letting”) some quantity of blood from the body of the patient (Kuriyama, 1995, p. 19). Belcourt’s *Bloodletting* is a record of and a response to a hurtful event that took place several years ago. In this image, Belcourt calls on the healing powers of the practice of bloodletting while also connecting the biologized policing of Aboriginal identity, which seeks to equate First Nations “status” to blood that has not been overly diluted by too much “bad,” non-Native blood.

The artist was attending an Ontario Arts Council (OAC) meeting at a nearby First Nation community. There were a number of artists in attendance, among them a senior artist whose work Belcourt greatly admired. During the meeting, the senior artist spoke out, stating that he “didn’t think anyone who didn’t have status should be entitled to arts funding” (Belcourt, 2010). As Belcourt was the only Métis person in attendance at the meeting, it was clear that the senior artist was singling her out in the audience and calling into question her authenticity as an Aboriginal person. “He was saying,” comments Belcourt, “only First Nations people are really Aboriginal people” (Belcourt, 2010). Belcourt’s initial reaction was to be hurt, although this quickly morphed into anger. Belcourt’s self-portrait stares straight at

the viewer, while draining her own blood, challenging the viewer to question his or her assumptions of who qualifies as an “authentic” Aboriginal person:

...I was thinking "what part of me would you like me to drain out to make you happy? the White side? The Aboriginal side? No! I am grateful for all of my ancestry and nobody can remove it from me. And I'll be damned if I'm going to let anyone insult my ancestors. And as much as you may wish it to be, my grandmother, grandfather and all my Métis and First Nations ancestors are a part of me!" So that was the initial thought process that inspired the piece. It's a bit of a farce because of course you cannot remove what is inherently within every fibre of your being at birth. (2010)

One aspect of the colonial legacy is that Native and non-Native people now also perform the work of policing the colonially informed categories of Aboriginality. In failing to acknowledge Belcourt as an Aboriginal woman, the elder is “ghosting” Belcourt’s identity, or viewing it as unreal. This is similar to the process of creating and maintaining a national identity through “ghosting” Native people, or failing to acknowledge their existence, in North American lands (Bergland, 2000, p. 4). By failing to recognize Belcourt’s Aboriginal ancestry, the senior artist created spectral images of them, relegating them to the realms of the unreal.

Belcourt’s strong identification as a Métis woman is not simply a strategic erasure of her mother’s non-Native ancestry in order to boost her claim to Aboriginal ancestry through her father. It is an assertion of a fully developed identity as a Métis person, and an Aboriginal woman. As Belcourt states,

I just see myself as being Métis. Some people would say, “that’s a contradiction, Métis are mixed.” And my mom is not Native, so by rights, I should see myself as a mixed person and I guess I do, but I don’t think about it. If somebody asked me “what are you?” my first reaction is “I’m Métis.” And I don’t feel the need to go into anything else. And, well, the Métis symbol is the infinity symbol and it does mean that, the fusing of

two nations into one forever, or something along those lines. So, you know, even within our flag it's the Métis symbol, the infinity symbol, that's what it means. So there's no reason to look at yourself as "half-this or half-that." You're just a whole. (2008)

Belcourt's attitude towards her mixed ancestry, and identification as "wholly Métis" challenges the notion of what Brown describes as the vile and conflicted "half" person by "embodying the paradigm of simultaneity rather than alienation" (2004, p. 239). Yet her statement that she is "just a whole" in spite of being a "mixed person" highlights the extent to which colonial-era fears of miscegenation, or too much of the wrong kind of blood, continue to influence Aboriginal identities.

One of the issues that I did not discuss with Belcourt during our interview was that of physical appearance. As a "wholly Métis" person, Belcourt creates and maintains strong connections to her Métis heritage through her work. Belcourt also stressed the importance of "knowing your history" through the knowledge of one's links to ancestral communities (Belcourt, 2008). It is interesting to note that the practice of bloodletting has a contemporary counterpart known as apheresis, which takes form as blood donation and transfusion (Mazda & Schmidt, 2010, p. 27). In this context, whole blood is rarely the end product given to recipients as new technologies emerge that separate a donor's blood into its constituents, such as platelets and plasma (Mazda & Schmidt, 2010, p. 31). In the context of the OAC meeting, Belcourt's Aboriginal identity is understood as constituted only by her fair complexion and outsider status as a Métis woman rather

than a member of the First Nation community, rather than by her intimate connection to her Métis ancestry. One of the continuing colonial legacies is the existence of a white-supremacist ideology wherein Lawrence describes the practice of “devaluing the humanity...of dark-skinned individuals and rendering ‘inauthentic’ the Indianness of those with light skin” (2004, pp. 173-174). This method of separating people based on appearances is common both within and outside of Native communities. Were Belcourt able to provide other legitimized claims to Indianness in this situation, such as Indian status and band membership, she might not have been singled out by the senior artist (Lawrence, 2004, p. 185). However, without these markers, Belcourt was not recognized as Native.

A long colonial history of intermingling between European settlers and Native inhabitants has insured, however, that a large number of mixed-race Native people, who may or may not have status, and who may or may not claim Métis ancestry, exist in the present day in Canada. Belcourt’s knowledge of her family and community history allows her to maintain a sense of connection to her Aboriginal, Métis identity, in spite of challenges to that identity. As Belcourt explains, “[o]nce you know their story, then it becomes your story... its part of who you are... [o]nce you know your story...nobody can take that away from you” (Belcourt, 2008). In *Bloodletting*, Belcourt demonstrates what Brogan describes as a “continuity

between present and past” (1998, p. 31) by highlighting her connection to the spirit world represented by the plants surrounding her.

These plants are Belcourt’s stated “helpers...healers....and inspiration” (2010). The theme of healing runs through out Belcourt’s work. In this self-portrait the Métis images of healing plant helpers and Aboriginal symbology are combined with the practice of bloodletting (Belcourt, 2010). In *Bloodletting*, Belcourt challenges those who see her as not having enough “blood” to be an Aboriginal woman by showing viewers the blood that flows from her veins. The plants that surround Belcourt are her allies, which help her to heal past injustices. Plants have become one of the central focuses of Belcourt’s dot painting style and like the Métis artisans of the past two and a half centuries, the natural world⁷ is key to Belcourt’s work. The representation of plants as sources of healing, protection and cultural revival for Belcourt, and for the Métis community at large, are the focal point of the piece entitled *Medicines to Help Us*.

Medicines to Help Us

⁷ It should be noted that the idea of “nature” is a conceptually loaded term whose meaning shifts, as Cronin notes, “according to the landscape under consideration” and “dominant cultural values regarding nature” (2011, p. 4). Neil Evernden makes the distinction between “nature,” as the “great amorphous mass of otherness that encloaks the planet” and “Nature” as a “system or model of nature which arose in the West several centuries ago” (1992, p. xi). Both authors comments indicate the manner in which the subjective, socially-constructed sense of Nature is conflated with nature as the “amorphous mass of otherness” whose existence is predicated on the Western division between humans and non-humans (Latour, 1993, pp. 10-11). Both conceptions of N/nature are Western constructs that do not adequately represent the “natural world” from which Belcourt draws her artistic inspiration, with particular emphasis placed on the plant-life of this world. In particular, as part of an Aboriginal world-view, Belcourt does not see herself as separate from the plants that she depicts. Rather, Belcourt acknowledges the plants as her “spirit helpers” and, therefore, unique beings unto themselves, what Hornborg describes as “communicative subjects rather than...inert objects” (2006, p. 22).

While attending a conference entitled *Métis in the 21st Century* at the Gabriel Dumont Institute in 2003, Belcourt was struck by the words of Métis elder Rose Richardson who spoke of the need to preserve “natural habitat of various plant species” (Belcourt, 2007, p. xi). As her awareness of the importance of the natural world, both for her ancestors and herself, has grown, along with her artistic practice and her sense of identity as a Métis woman, nature has figured largely in Belcourt’s renaissance as a proud Métis woman, providing her with a sense of stability after a chaotic period in her life. The plants that surround Belcourt in her self-portrait, *Bloodletting*, take centre stage in *Medicines to Help Us* (Figure 2). In *Medicines*, the emphasis has also shifted from one of confronting and healing personal pain to attending to the collective shame and denial suffered by many Métis people post-1885.

After attending the conference, Belcourt was approached by the Gabriel Dumont Institute to create “a user friendly resource that would honour the generations-old Métis healing tradition” while also providing access to the “timelessness of traditional Aboriginal beadwork” that Belcourt’s work evokes (The GDI Publishing department, 2007). The result is a resource kit by the same name as the painting, *Medicines to Help Us*, which includes a book and a mural. The mural is contained on thirty separate prints, which can be reassembled into a scaled-down replica of the full-sized painting. Both the resource kit and the painting focus on “the present rather than the past in...consideration of the obstacles faced by the Métis in the contemporary world” (Henriksson, 2003). Belcourt realized that there is a large

gap in recognizing the history of Métis people, with a “[dis]connect in the public’s perception between the Métis of 1885 and the Métis of today” (Belcourt, n.d.-b). When Belcourt first set out to paint beadwork, she had to spend a significant amount of time exploring the manner in which beadwork patterns and plants were constructed (Belcourt, 2008). Her aim was not simply to copy beadwork patterns or to create realist renderings of plants, but to create her own designs, inspired by tradition (Belcourt, 2008). As such, Belcourt’s work is based on historic beading patterns combined with her own designs and consequently her work performs the important task of linking the past with the present. In addition to dot painting in Métis beading style, Belcourt paints *Medicines to Help Us*, and many other similar pieces, on a black background to represent the black velvet that Métis beadworkers used historically (Belcourt, 2007, p. xii).

Each of the twenty-seven plants represented in *Medicines* can be found across the Métis homeland, which is defined as encompassing areas from Ontario to British Columbia (Belcourt, 2007, p. xii). Belcourt notes that each of the medicinal plants can “help to heal from generations of shame, violence and abuse...[to] restore a good way of life” (2007, p. xiii). A strong history of healing through the use of medicinal plants by Métis peoples as described by Métis elder Rose Richardson, as well as the recording of “stories or knowledge [that] were embroidered into clothing and on items of everyday use” are embodied in Belcourt’s painting (2007, p. 8). Many Aboriginal people, Métis included, Belcourt admits, are in need of powerful healing after the erasure of identity and community through violence, shame and

other tools of oppression (Belcourt, 2008). Aboriginal peoples express the effects of this oppression differently, and for some it may have had minimal impact. However rather than focusing on the negative, which is a method that can reinforce the political erasure of Aboriginal peoples from the Canadian psyche (Bergland, 2000, p. 3), *Medicines* seeks to create a renewed, positive image of cultural survival and recovery.

A Healing Journey

When I first meet Belcourt at her house, she is dressed casually with her hair pulled back, but I notice right away that she is wearing moccasins, which are beaded with beautiful flowers. I am nervous because I don't want to seem too emotional or weird when I talk with Belcourt and during the first two years of my thesis program, I would often get upset and cry. This has been inexplicable to me, how the feelings of sadness, fear, confusion and loneliness would creep up, seemingly out of nowhere every time I talked about some aspect of my research project. In this interview I want to keep it under control so that I don't come off as totally crazy.

Belcourt's generosity and openness ease much of the tension I have and, with her permission, I turn on my tape recorder and the interview starts. It becomes abundantly clear through out the interview that Belcourt identifies very strongly as Métis, through and through. However her confidence in her assertion of a Native identity as a Métis woman is

misleading, as she has not always felt so confident, (as she depicted in *Bloodletting*), and claiming a Métis identity in the overwhelming silence surrounding Canada's "Forgotten People" (Lischke & McNab, 2007) has been a continual struggle. During the interview, Belcourt speaks of the destructive ways in which generations of Aboriginal families have tried to cope with the loss of "the important things that made us healthy and stable" (2008). Belcourt has also battled with years of drinking and drug-use, and a disconnected sense of self (Belcourt, 2010). Paintings such as *Bloodletting*, and *Medicines* represent Belcourt's commitment to healing herself and giving back to the larger Métis community so that others may do the same.

Prior to the interview I had been worried that, in the face of someone who seemed to be so accepted as Native, based on her art and her participation in the community, I would be seen as not "Native" enough. Belcourt, although fair-skinned, has the cultural connection of being born to a father who is a well-known Métis activist. I am simply a fair-skinned person with a haunted awareness of seldom-mentioned Métis ancestors. Michaels explains that, in spite of contemporary literature demonstrating the socially constructed nature of race, "the acute social consciousness of race gives it a physical reality, as if it were a biological fact" (2002, pp. 236-237 in H. J. Brown, 2004, p. 224). Thus the socially determined meanings of physical markers have very real consequences. In this case, as a fair Native person researching a silenced part of my family history, I feared that the

validity of my research would be called into question by a lack of contemporary markers of “Indianness.” However, focusing solely on physical markers of identity such as appearance, or any other over determined indicators, is a dangerous trap as it further limits the already narrowly defined categories of Aboriginality in Canada.

The interview with Belcourt is very revealing as it highlights my own discomfort with the subject of my research, and the anguish I often feel. I could not understand myself as fully “Métis” because I still did not comprehend the depth of what it meant. Like any other identity, Métis identity is fluid and changes depending on context (Moraga, 1996, p.234 in Lawrence, 2004, p. 178). Garneau notes that Métis identity is not boundless, but is “held in orbit by common histories, family and culture, geography, ancient and recent alliances, and, for many, resonant stories of coming to greater Métis consciousness and presence” (n.d.). Over time and through re-awakened connections to my Métis ancestors and to the contemporary Métis community, I have gained a deeper understanding of being Métis. Some people have refused to acknowledge my Métis identity, but mostly I have been greeted with overwhelming acceptance. For both Belcourt and I, renewing and representing ourselves as Métis women through our work, respectively, is an important part of the healing process.

Above and Beyond

Métis have always been innovators of traditional styles, incorporating diverse elements in material and design. One innovation whose popularization can be attributed to a Métis artisan is the moose hair tufting work of Métis artist Madeleine Bouvier Laferte (Lafferty) (Racette, 2009, p. 302). Madeleine made use of the moose hair when she was unable to acquire the silk thread and beads needed for wool punchwork techniques during the First World War (Hail and Duncan, 1989 in Racette, 2009, p. 302). Belcourt's use of "dot painting" is yet another innovation in the long history of Métis artistic traditions. Métis peoples from around Canada have responded very positively to Belcourt's work. One Métis woman tried to photocopy a poster of one of Belcourt's dot paintings. The clerk told her that she could not do so because the work was copyrighted, to which the woman responded "but this is ours" (Belcourt, 2008). The style in which Belcourt's dot paintings are created are often combinations of her own patterns with historic patterns, which leads many Métis people to "see themselves" in the work (Belcourt, 2008).

The work is a source of pride, beauty, history and tradition for Métis peoples. It creates a record of the history from which Métis peoples have too often been excluded, making visible and real the ancestors who were erased from the past through mislabeled museum acquisitions and assertions of inauthenticity. Belcourt's work is also a public acknowledgement of the generations of Métis women who contributed to, and continue to create, a recognizably Métis aesthetic. This has been met with varied responses, and Belcourt describes how her work has been dismissed "by some people before, who think that the work is simple or decorative

or something” (2008). Belcourt’s visual representations, both of herself as a contemporary Métis woman and of contemporary beadwork designs, function to create a narrative of remembered ancestors and past events, which is continuously changing as it is reflected upon and reinterpreted by successive generations of Métis peoples (Eyerman, 2004, pp. 160, 163, 167). In choosing to take up a hybrid style of painting that simulates the beading practices of her Métis ancestors, Belcourt is confronting the absence of representation of Aboriginal artists working in traditional mediums in the present.

Chapter 4 – David Garneau

As an artist and arts writer, David Garneau is keenly aware of the void in the representation of Métis culture, let alone in the field of contemporary Métis *visual* culture. As such, Garneau has made a commitment to develop new metaphors and images in an effort to describe his experience as a contemporary Métis person, while also acknowledging a deep concern for the ongoing violence perpetuated against Aboriginal peoples (Garneau, 2008). As with Favell and Belcourt, Garneau wishes to create critical representations of contemporary Métis identity through the *revision* of history from an Aboriginal perspective. Like many people who come to terms with their Métis identity later on in life, Garneau's process has involved a multitude of steps, described by Mattes as including "decoding, locating... establishing, [and] acknowledging ... a connection to the culture" (2003). Although Garneau's public acknowledgement of his Métis ancestry has been surreptitious at times, it is clear that the artist feels a sense of urgency to ameliorate the representation of Aboriginal peoples broadly, and Métis peoples specifically, as a step toward a critical engagement with contemporary Métis culture. In the following chapter I explore Garneau's complex process of negotiating a Métis identity and his concern for the state of contemporary Aboriginal peoples through work, which includes selections from his series *How the West Was...* (1998), and a painting entitled *Evidence (Neal Stonechild)* (2006).

Garneau's involvement in the world of Aboriginal art began as a youth in the late seventies when he made sculptures of the old men he would spend time with on

the streets of downtown Edmonton. Garneau began to sell the sculptures to the Bear Claw Gallery, an Aboriginal gallery in the city's downtown core, where the gallery owner "mistakenly" assumed that Garneau was Native (Garneau, 2008, p. 13). The sculptures sold well until Garneau quit making them when he began to have ethical issues with, as he states, "making money off those men" (2008, p. 13). Garneau then took up painting and began to work on pieces addressing Native-white relations in Canada. He completed his BFA in painting and drawing in 1989 and his MA in English Literature in 1993, both at the University of Calgary (Hornaday, 2008).

Prior to 1997 Garneau focused his attention on writing about the arts. He was the co-founder and co-editor of Artichoke magazine (founded 1989) and Cameo magazine, a writer for Border Crossings, as well as the western regional editor for C magazine (Garneau, 2008, p. 9, 2009). He paid particular attention to filling the void in reviews on Aboriginal art (Garneau, 2008, p. 9). Between 1994-1999, Garneau also taught theory and studio courses at the Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD) before moving to Regina, SK to teach at the University of Regina's Department of Visual Arts from 1999 to the present (Arosteguy, 2010; Garneau, 2009). Garneau has also curated a number of shows between 1998 and 2004 around the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. At the time of this writing, Garneau has been co-curating an online exhibition with Richard Fung and Cynthia Lickers-Sage, entitled *non-compliance*, which is described as an exploration in "Aboriginal media works representing major artists and movements within media arts discourse" (Urban Shaman Gallery).

In the summer of 1980, when Garneau was 17, he worked in an orphanage in the town of Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta, the infamous Métis pilgrimage site where Belcourt's father grew up. During his time here, Garneau experienced an "incident" that reminded him of the reality of oppression of Aboriginal people (Garneau, 2008, p. 11). This event would eventually lead Garneau to create a short film that acknowledged the ongoing oppression of Aboriginal people, while also implicating himself as an Aboriginal man, in this narrative. Garneau included his voice in the film but not his image, as he was not yet ready to publicly identify as Métis (Garneau, 2008, p. 11). The making of the film coincided with Garneau's move to the University of Regina, where he would meet Métis painter and mentor Bob Boyer. Boyer was instrumental in Garneau's decision to eventually embrace and publicly acknowledge his Métis heritage, telling Garneau that he could sit on the fence if he wanted to but, "basically it wouldn't be acceptable" (Garneau, 2008, p. 2). Garneau's extended process of "coming out" as a Native person is reflected in his own narratives. As he notes, it wasn't until the fall of 2001 that he "became Métis," although it "really happened in summer 1997," but some people claim it was as early as 1980, to which Garneau responds, "I wasn't born Métis, was I?" (Thomas, 2001, p. 3).

These differing 'origin stories' demonstrate Garneau's distinctly non-essentialist understanding of Aboriginality (Garneau, 2008, p. 4). There is a narrative fluidity that gives Métisness a slipperiness that often evades simple, categorical definition. For Garneau, a non-essentialist conception of Métisness is

imperative for understanding how identity categories are historically contingent. Given Garneau's sensibility it is not surprising that he often contests political designations of Aboriginality: he has not, for example, applied for a Métis card from the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, although he would qualify for one. While he concedes that these political definitions do have a certain utility, Garneau nevertheless argues that his Métisness "is less a political designation than it is an ongoing performance" (2008, p. 4). Garneau's contention that his Métis identity is performed rather than politically designated points to his conception of identity as a process rather than a thing (Brogan, 1998, p. 139). Garneau reminds us that "being Métis is not simply a matter of bloodline and a subjective sense" but that Métis identity is founded in "an ongoing social engagement, a continuous negotiation of meanings in community" (Garneau, 2009). As with memory, where every subsequent visit refines and redefines a memory (Sjöberg, 2005, pp. 69-70), each performative act creates a reworked understanding of ethnic identity (Brogan, 1998, p. 139).

The almost total lack of representation of Métis peoples, both historic and contemporary, leaves many, such as Garneau, Favell and myself, at a loss as to what it means to be a Métis person. This stems from the "conspiracy of silence" created by the trauma of colonization described by Abrams: "children will often only receive information in fragments that are cast in mystery, thus perpetuating a narrative void surrounding the subject or the experience" (1999 in Denham, 2008, p. 398). Garneau's process of becoming Métis is largely informed by a need to bring the past

to light in order to mourn what has been lost through the trauma of silenced Métis identities (Brogan, 1998, pp. 136-138). Through his art, Garneau performs ethnicity through many commemorative rituals, the purpose of which, Brogran notes, is to “make whom and what we mourn our own” (1998, p. 138). Indeed, the didactic nature of Garneau’s work in *How the West Was...* creates a place for Métis peoples by including them as Aboriginal peoples in the popular culture history of colonization in (North) America.

How the West Was

How the West Was... goes a long way towards locating Métis people in the colonial history of North America beyond simply invoking the well-known face of Louis Riel. Here the mythology of the western frontier, its “might is right” mentality and simplistic categorizations are disrupted as layers of the story are literally peeled away to reveal the often violent intermingling of people through domination and assimilation. As an artist, Garneau chose to paint *How the West Was...* through images that provide a somewhat distanced, but nevertheless trenchant, anti-racist critique on the history and trauma of the colonial process (2008, pp. 10-11). His paintings in this series contain subtle clues about the artists Métis ancestry for the observant viewer, although “coming out” as Métis was not a goal for this series. Rather, Garneau’s work challenges the “historical amnesia” that Audrey Lorde so aptly describes as keeping “us working to invent the wheel every time we have to go to the store for bread” (1995, p. 283). For many Aboriginal youth, this is due to an absence of critical engagement with the “the living memories of the community”

(Lorde, 1995, p. 283). Thus, Garneau's overarching goal was to deconstruct the "cowboys and Indians" rhetoric of popular culture and create a critical lens for looking at the mechanisms of colonization and imperial expansion and their effects on Aboriginal populations across North America.

The title of the series itself provides an interesting context in which to consider Garneau's reworking of the colonial narrative. *How the West Was...* is a sort of play on words of the 1962 film entitled "How the West was Won," which provides an excellent backdrop for examining the disruption of the colonial narrative. This film romanticized the Westward expansion of the American empire during the 19th century by following the saga of a white settler family on their westward journey over several generations including, of course, battles with Native Americans (Kitzmann, Mithander, & Sundholm, 2005). The film's theme of imperial westward expansion is premised on the concept of "manifest destiny," or the god-given right of white America/Canada to rule North America (Eyerman, 2004, p. 28). Many of the images in Garneau's comic book style paintings in *How the West Was...* have been reappropriated from the "(mis)representations" of Native cultures within popular culture (Garneau, 2004), and the sources for this are plentiful. Garneau notes that his sources include, "Classic Illustrated comics about the west...a Norman Rockwell painting...contemporary cigarette ads...great Canadian historical paintings [and]...pulp cowboy novels from the 1960s" (2003). *How the West Was...* consists of a series of over fifty oil painted canvases of various sizes arranged into eight distinct

comic book “pages.”⁸ Each canvas is placed so that its border fits into a 6’ x 26’ rectangular “page,” although this is many times larger than a typical comic book.

The boundaries of each canvas are evenly spaced, which gives the effect of recreating the lines demarcating the different panel in a comic book. Each “panel” within a “page” is typically read from top left to bottom right as with a book. What is interesting about Garneau’s comic book style for these paintings is how well it illustrates the notion of a hybrid form, where the ‘Indian’ is both obvious, and nevertheless, vanishing, in relation to the cowboy. As Pratt notes in his discussion on narrative in comic books, the comic book itself is a hybrid art form as it contains “both literary and *pictorial* narrative dimensions” (2009, p. 107). As with film, comics combine “pictures and words” to create a coherent narrative in a distinctive type of visual media with an overarching story woven through it (Pratt, 2009, p. 107). The “particularly successful” nature of Garneau’s *How the West Was...* stems from the manner in which, as O’Keefe explains, it “mimics the weird archaeology of the brain” by patching together memories that build a narrative “about such things as who we are, where we come from, and what it all means” (2006). The comic book panels interact with each other, O’Keefe continues, so that the “integrity of the worlds has been breached, letting other scenes show through” (2006). Some pictures are contained to one panel/canvas, while others are spread across several canvases, or one part of a canvas seems to spill onto a neighbouring canvas, thereby visibly connecting the story.

⁸ While the *How the West Was...* series was travelling with the *Cowboys and Indians (and Métis?)* exhibition any number of comic book “pages” would be displayed in each gallery. Not all eight were necessarily shown together.

Garneau's *How the West Was...* makes use of the interconnections between various panels to write Métis peoples into the broad history of Native peoples in North America. It was not until 1982 that Métis peoples were recognized as one of Canada's official Indigenous populations and, consequently, there is very little information in either popular culture or literature about the Métis. The paintings in *How the West Was...*, Garneau contends, are therefore "a comic book history of the settlement of the west collaged from appropriated images" (2008, p. 9) meant to deconstruct the Frontier mythology so prominent in popular culture and re-insert the forgotten struggles of western Métis into the violent settlement of the North American West. Simultaneously, *How the West Was...* is a covert reflection on Garneau's own relationship with the violence of colonization as a man of Métis ancestry. The ancestral fossil (Holst Petersen & Rutherford, 1995) that informs his sense of being Métis is one in common with the colonized First Nations as Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Yet Garneau's experience is distinctly shaped by the story of his Métis ancestor, Laurent Garneau, whose gradual western migration and eventual participation in the Red River Resistance of 1870 and the Battle of Batoche in 1885 has earned Laurent recognition in several texts regarding memorable Métis figures (Dorion, Garneau, Gross, & Barkwell, 2001, p. 105). In this context, *How the West Was...* brings together the unlikely combination of irony and didacticism to represent the story of the settlement of North America through assimilation and violence.

Moving through subsequent pages in *How the West Was...*, the story becomes increasingly violent. Page four (Figure 3) of the series includes the introduction of new technology, the railway, a key tool in the Canadian government's victory in the 1885 Battle in Batoche (Miller, 1989, p. 238) and to the rapid extinction of the once vast herds of buffalo roaming North America, upon which so many Native peoples relied (Hornaday, 2008, pp. 208-209). Garneau notes the incursion on Native peoples hunting patterns and way of life with a comic book scene in which several Native men are piling large rocks on a railroad while a train steams towards them. The text on the picture reads, "The Sioux realized they could/not trap a train. From then on,/they fought the railroad every/foot of the way." The train is also a metaphor for the colonial assertion that all Native peoples were victims of the tide of European progress who would eventually disappear through a combination of assimilation and domination.

The panel below and to the left contains a battle scene with what appears to be British troops fighting on the open plains. Several tears have been painted over top of the scene to reveal running buffalo, perhaps attempting to flee the coming decimation of their herds. These are the images of pressure and control through explicit violence as settlement of the west continues. Garneau instructs his viewers that colonization was not simply a matter of fighting it out for a piece of land against dehumanized "savages," but that it involved calculated decisions to contain, restrain and remove the Native inhabitants whose physical presence in the land was literally in the way of Euro-American progress. Manifest destiny did not simply happen, it

was a devastating set of practices intentionally carried out against the Native peoples of North America by the American/Canadian colonial regimes (Eyerman, 2004, p. 28). Racialized representations of Native masculinity, for example, served as an excellent means through which to sooth the anxieties of white settlers by portraying the 'primitive' nature of Indigenous men, thus rationalizing their brutalization (Fanon, 1970 [1952] in Belcourt, n.d.-d, p. 134).

JanMohamed notes that the "perception of racial difference is...influenced by economic motives," citing the example of the manner in which Africans were perceived as "more or less neutral" until the advent of the slave trade when they became "characterized as the epitomy of evil" (1985, p. 61). Fear of miscegenation is fear of the loss of control by those in power, the "cowboys," or white Europeans, in this case, versus the "Indians." Thus the spur and lassos of page one (Figure 4) have turned into military maneuvers by the middle of Page seven, where the canvases highlight multiple tears, indicating the complex effects of white settlement. A grassy, prairie landscape is torn away in several places to reveal the images of a well-muscled Indian wrestling a cowboy to the ground on the left and a pioneer type on top of a headdress sporting Indian to the right. Tears from these images contain the words "Violen[t]...Breed," "clutches of Riel..." and "Trouble...in Canada...full-blooded...whites...the halfbreeds...a renegade army." The last page of *How the West Was...* (Figure 6) contains portraits of those figures who are arguably the best-known Métis, Gabriel Dumont and Louis Riel. Riel's contributions to Canadian history are fully recognized and, thus, have become important for many Métis,

Mattes explains, as “a way of locating oneself” (2003). Garneau’s final portraits in this series are beautifully rendered in a Van Gogh style in an effort to retroactively insert Métis people into the predominantly white, or cowboy, cultural imagination (Garneau, 2009, p. 388). However, there is a tell tale rope painted across the bottom three canvases, denoting the ultimate fate, death by hanging for treason, of Riel.

In *How the West Was...* Garneau presents the Métis as “an Other whose existence raises questions about purity and self-representation and who destabilizes the neat cowboy/Indian dichotomy” (Garneau, n.d.). Thus, the series is a reflection on how Garneau navigates his Aboriginal identity and an insertion of the halfbreed, and a Métis perspective, into the settlement narrative. On pages seven and eight (Figure 5, Figure 6), the final pages of *How the West Was...* Garneau acknowledges the “Halfbreed Rebellion” and their prophetic leader, Louis Riel. He hints at the violence directed towards these “half” people who existed outside of the pure cowboy/Indian binary. Garneau’s use of imagery from popular culture is a method “bearing witness” to the subordination of Métis peoples:

Oppression and subordination render individuals or groups of people as other by objectifying them...to put it simply, objects are not subjects. Through the process of bearing witness to oppression and subordination, those othered can repair damaged subjectivity by virtue of address-ability and response-ability (Oliver, 2001, p.7 in Fatona, 2006)

Not only did the existence of people along the spectrum between the white/Native binary challenge the assumptions inherent in the existence of these categories, but the halfbreeds themselves challenged assumed Canadian authority over the land of Manitoba. The halfbreeds were a subversive element undermining

the power of the “cowboy,” or white, colonial Canadian government in particular, for which they were violently oppressed, and subsequently rendered inhuman. Thus, Garneau rewrites the myth the Western frontier to include a specifically Métis presence and to bear witness to the violent mechanisms through which settlement occurred.

The racism and violence directed at Aboriginal peoples during settlement has not simply evaporated over time but continues to this day in many different forms. During my interview with Garneau, he repeatedly mentioned the difficulty he had with deciding whether to “come out” as Métis. While I had some ideas about why this might be a difficult process, I was still in the early stages of reclaiming *my* Métis identity. However, the reality of racism, and the role it might play in ones decision whether or not to “come out” as Métis were made painfully clear to me almost immediately after the interview.

Autoethnographic Interlude: Immigrants and Indians or authenticity in action

In order to interview Garneau I headed west to meet him at the University of Regina, where he teaches. I decided to fly in to Calgary, where I grew up and where my immediate family still resides, and to visit the beautiful Prairie landscape that I miss so much. As my mother had expressed some frustration at my decision to research my father’s Métis ancestry and write my Master’s thesis on the topic of Métis identity, I decide to invite her to drive to Regina with me for the interview. My hope was that this trip would help my mother feel more included in the research process, and in my life.

My mother and I arrive the evening before my interview with Garneau and stay with my great Auntie Freida. Auntie Freida grew up in Park Valley with Maria Campbell, although Freida left the area once she was old enough to strike out on her own. As we visited she asked me why I was interviewing Garneau and I told her about my thesis on contemporary Métis visual culture and identity. The three of us continued to chat about the Saskatchewan Roughriders football team and other life events before retiring to bed.

In the morning I got prepared for my interview with Garneau. I was nervous and didn't know what to expect. I was also concerned about whether or not he would even recognize me as a Métis person. My mother was to drive me to the University but before leaving, my Auntie Freida asked why I was even interested in this kind of research, "since I am so fair." She then tells me how her granddaughter got employment at the casino downtown because she told the employers she was Métis, but Freida thought she shouldn't have said that because she didn't look it. "But Auntie Freida, aren't you Métis?" She is my Métis grandfather's sister. "Don't call me that. It's a dirty word."

I forget my notes at Auntie Freida's house. But my Mom goes back to bring them to me and the interview goes very well. Garneau is very gracious, and we drank pot after pot of black tea in his office/studio, surrounded by books and his in-progress paintings. We talk a bit about our Métis ancestors and family names. I am thrilled to speak with Garneau and leave the interview with a big smile on my face.

My Mom picks me up outside the visual arts building and suggests that we go to lunch. Then she drops the bomb.

“You know Jessie, I don’t know why you’re doing this. You can move into a teepee and live off the land, but that won’t make you any more Native than you are. You’re barely even Native at all. You’re mostly Ukrainian. Why don’t you write about them? It’s just cool to be mixed-race these days.”

When we get home my great-Aunt asks me if I can even be considered Métis, since I’m so fair. My Mom smiles at me from across the table. In the kitchen, my mom begins grilling my great-Aunt, her in-law, about her identity.

“If you didn’t say you were Métis then what were you?” She was French. Again, it was not a good thing to be Métis; you certainly never said you were.

My mom wonders aloud, “what’s so great about getting a status card and/or a Métis card? You don’t really get that much, maybe a small tax break and cheaper gas, but it’s not that much. Then you’re getting special treatment.”

My great-Aunt agrees, a card is not really worth it and she doesn’t want a card.

She’s a hard worker. She doesn’t need a card.

My mom describes how her brother couldn’t get a job as a firefighter in Edmonton because they had to consider all the “minorities” before the white men, so all the women, people of colour, Natives, etc take jobs away from perfectly good white men. It’s hard being a white man these days.

I am boiling over, but trying to stay cool. I can’t look at my Mom cause I’ll explode in some non-sensical word circus and she will feel vindicated. She’s using my great-

Aunt as a sounding board to prove her point. Being Indian isn't really all it's cracked up to be.

I'm not even sure if my mother remembers saying all of this to my Aunt and me or if she suspects how much of an impact her words had on me. I imagine that there are a variety of reasons, both personal and societal, why my mother reacted the way she did during our trip to Regina. I haven't had the heart to discuss this interaction with my mother since our trip several years ago, so some of my analysis of our engagement is speculative. Nevertheless, there is a strongly racist undertone to my mother's words that belie the reality of continued racism that Aboriginal people face in Canada. My mother's statement that I will never be more Native, even if I move into a teepee, is informed by and reinforces the neocolonial authenticity discourse which create and maintain regimes of essentialized "Indianness."

Authenticity works as a binary, rendering all categories into an "either/or" at opposite ends of the spectrum (Young, 1999; Phillips and Steiner 1999; Coombes 1994 in R. B. Phillips, 2002, p. 45). Thus, we have oppositions such as white/Native, civilized/savage, present/past. Her words also reinforce the colonial myth of the vanishing Indian as "irrevocably lost" to our family (Lawrence, 2004, p. 135), as according to her, I am not Native enough to exist on the Native end of the spectrum. My mother's reliance on dialectic markers of authentic "Indianness," such as blood quantum and living off of the land in a teepee, also narrowly reinforce the limited possibilities for all "authentic" Native peoples to embody a complex personhood (Gordon, 1997, p. 4) that does not resort to tired stereotypes.

It became clear during our visit that my mother's essentialist understanding of Aboriginal identity was creating a sort of binary opposition between my Aunt Freida and myself, because my Aunt is visibly Native. The conversation was infuriating, but also strangely telling of Native/non-Native relations in Canada today. Both my mother and Aunt seemed to be talking at each other, but not hearing exactly what the other was saying. There was a presence of absence in their conversation. My mother was reinforcing her privilege as a white woman by assuming the authority to question my Aunt's sense of self as a Native person. But my mother was also not hearing the presence of pain associated with being visibly identified as a Native person. This was evidenced by my Aunt's assertion that she was French, rather than Métis, and hardworking so as not to need any "hand outs." My Aunt, on the other hand, largely appeared to ignore my mother's racist demands and observations, a skill likely developed over a lifetime of coping with similarly racist attitudes.

Evidence of Racism and (Neal Stonechild)

One instance of ongoing systemic racism direct is found in the now well-known occurrence of "Starlight tours." For decades in the late 20th century, Brass describes how police took Native men to rural areas around the city of Saskatoon and left in fields to "walk home and sober up" (Brass, 2004). The Neal Stonechild case broke open the fatal impact of this practice, as Stonechild's frozen body was found in a field where he had been left to freeze to death overnight (Breschuck,

2009).⁹ Garneau's desire to acknowledge the ongoing violence being perpetuated against Aboriginal people is taken up in his painting, *Evidence (Neal Stonechild)* (2006). *Evidence (Neal Stonechild)* (Figure 7) presents the viewer with the autopsy image of the battered face of Stonechild (CBC News, 2009). Not only had Stonechild been left to die in a field (his body had to thaw for three days before an autopsy could be performed), but the deep cuts on his face were actually a result of being whipped in the face with handcuffs (Breschuck, 2009).

This kind of systemic violence towards Aboriginal peoples, Garneau contends, cannot be "swept under the carpet and forgotten" (CBC News, 2009). Garneau uses his beaded painting technique, by which he uses small dots to render a "beaded" layer over the initial image. His technique of "beaded" painting is in recognition of Garneau's Métis ancestry, providing a link between Stonechild and the Aboriginal men before him who have died in a similar manner at the hands of authorities. Garneau had great difficulty deciding whether or not to display this painting, especially given his concern that "the depiction of a First Nations person in death would violate cultural norms" (CBC News, 2009). But he received the support of First Nations elders to proceed with the exhibition of this powerful image in order to establish the ongoing power of racism towards Aboriginal peoples in contemporary Canada (Breschuck, 2009).

As a visibly Aboriginal woman in a country that is renowned for its racism towards Aboriginal peoples, it is reasonable to think that my Aunt would associate

⁹ I have heard of similar stories in Calgary from a friend working at a Tim Horton's on the edge of the city. He told me that it was not uncommon for city police to drop ill dressed, and sometimes nearly naked, Aboriginal men in their parking lot in the middle of winter.

shame and danger with an Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal author Thomas King speaks eloquently about the appeal, and disadvantage of “appearing” Native:

I want to look Indian so that you will see me as Indian even though being Indian is more of a disadvantage than it is a luxury...Middle-Class Indians can afford the burden of looking Indian. There's little danger that *we'll* be stuffed into a police cruiser and dropped off on the outskirts of Saskatoon (King, 2003, p. 59).

King notes how “looking” Native is more often a burden than an advantage. I would add that King’s statement also demonstrates how this burden affects Aboriginal people differently. Of particular concern to Aboriginal women such as my Aunt, is the ongoing issue of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.

Amnesty International’s Canadian statistics demonstrate that “young Indigenous women are five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as the result of violence” (2006). The question of class also affects my Aunt Frieda who grew up in a generation when extreme impoverishment affected many Métis people. Thus, her hesitance to proudly claim Métis ancestry is also generationally informed. Howard Adams, a Métis author of my Aunt Frieda’s generation, noted in his book (originally published in 1971) that the seemingly simple act of “seeking employment as a native was more than looking for a job, it was asking to be insulted” (1989, p. 10). For Adams, as for many others, racist insults were part and parcel of employment, in any position, as a Native person.

Filling the Void

While contemporary mixed-race identity may afford some credibility in popular culture, it also allows me a space to acknowledge and explore the “Native”

aspects of my family that have otherwise been silenced and shamed for too long. Viewing my claim to Métis ancestry as a resource grab (social-status and “hand outs”) embodies the contemporary colonial discipline of Aboriginal identity by reducing being Métis to a vaguely bipolarized manifestation with no connection to the contemporary Métis community. This is contemporary colonialism, which Alfred and Corntassel describe as being conducted through the less obvious methods of “eradicating the existence” of Indigenous life ways, “histories and geographies,” rather than eradicating “the physical signs of Indigenous peoples as human *bodies*” (2005, p. 598). Yet, it is obvious that for some Aboriginal peoples the threat of physical violence remains.

Garneau’s *Evidence (Neal Stonechild)* is a reflection and a commentary on the role of systemic racism in creating and maintaining a presence of absence for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The history of violence towards Aboriginal peoples in *How the West was....* is also present in contemporary times in *Evidence (Neal Stonechild)*. Garneau’s revisionist history in *How the West was....* not only exposes the vilification of Aboriginal peoples in order to justify the violence of the white, masculinist regime of colonial expansion in North America, it also creates a presence for Métis peoples in this history. The graphic imagery of continued racist violence against Aboriginal peoples is then contemporized in *Evidence (Neal Stonechild)*. Although Neal Stonechild was a First Nations man, Garneau hints at his connection with Stonechild as an Aboriginal man, and the violence that Métis peoples, as

Aboriginal peoples, can also suffer. Garneau makes this connection through the overlay of “beaded” dots, a nod to his Métis ancestry, on Stonechild’s battered face.

Garneau and myself, along with many others, have suffered a cyclical conspiracy of silence. It is “the Big Silence” that happened after the defeat of Riel and his Métis fighters in 1885 at Batoche that created a profound absence of presence for Métis peoples. And it is this silence, driven by systemic racism, that kept the Native communities around Saskatoon silent about the freezing-deaths of their men at the hands of police (Reber in Breschuck, 2009). Silence also reinforces stereotypical notions of Aboriginal identity by which some people, because of how they look or how they were raised, are excluded from claiming their Aboriginal ancestry. Garneau’s work engages and dispels the multiple silences of the past, and the present in order to bear witness to the reality of Aboriginal peoples in the present day.

Chapter 5 – Rosalie Favell

Rosalie Favell was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba to a Métis father and a mother of Scottish and English descent. The second youngest of four children, Favell grew up in a family where there was an absence of explicit connections to their Métis ancestry. The absence of acknowledgement and Favell's efforts to establish a contemporary Métis identity both feature prominently in her work. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus my analysis on select pieces from three series of works, *Longing and Not Belonging* (1999), *Plain(s) Warrior Artist* (1999-2003) and *Belonging* (2003), which are presented in her catalogue entitled *I searched many worlds*. There is significant overlap amongst the series, providing a rough trajectory of Favell's movement through different levels of awareness of self as the work progresses. Thus, as Kalbfleisch explains, Favell's work is an exploration of "personal and cultural identity" and the multiple intersections between "Métis culture, family culture and inferred popular culture as well as....gender cultures" (2009, p. 206). The movement is not linear, but cyclical, or perhaps a sort of upward spiral in which Favell travels from her childhood home life (*Longing and Not Belonging*) into adulthood outside of Winnipeg, where she can move more freely to discover herself as a contemporary Métis woman and a lesbian (*Plain(s) Warrior Artist*). Ultimately, Favell returns to her family home as she left it (*Belonging*), although she does not return to a place where stereotyped identities are silenced. Instead Favell returns, as a self-created Métis woman, with the confidence to belong.

Favell began her journey toward the recovery of her identity with a move to Toronto where she studied photography at Ryerson before graduating with a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Photographic Arts in 1984. Between 1984 and 1996, Favell participated in a number of group and solo exhibitions, both nationally and internationally. She then moved to Albuquerque where she received an MFA from the University of New Mexico, in 1998. Favell is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Cultural Mediations at Carleton University, Ottawa. She has exhibited in a number of solo and group exhibitions from 1985 to the present, with key exhibitions including *Portraits in Blood*, Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA) Gallery, Hamilton, Ontario, 1993; *Longing and Not Belonging*, New Phase Art Space, Tainan and International Visual Art Centre, Taipei, Taiwan, 1998; *Emergence from the Shadows: First Peoples' Photographic Perspectives*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec, 1999-2001; *Rosalie Favell: I Searched Many Worlds*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2003; *About Face: Self-Portraits by Native American and First Nations Artists*, Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2004. Favell has also won numerous awards and travel grants, which have allowed her to travel to India and Taiwan. In addition, from 2002-2003, Favell was a participant in the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA) Canada/Mexico artist's exchange program where she spent time in Merida, Mexico and Banff, Alberta.

Favell's work has received some critical attention in photography journals such as *Blackflash*, and in various MA and PhD theses, although many people continue to identify Favell as a First Nations artist. Yet, as Favell joked during our

interview, she considers herself to be “more hardcore Red River Métis” (Favell, 2009). There is, of course, a dearth of literature and understanding about what constitutes a “Métis” identity, in spite of official recognition of the Métis as one of Canada’s three Aboriginal peoples. This continued absence of an expressly Métis presence within the field of contemporary Aboriginal visual culture parallels the absence within Favell’s immediate family. Thus, many of the themes broached in Favell’s work refer to her Métis heritage, as well as broader concerns regarding visibility and the ownership of Métis imagery as a part of the larger Aboriginal community. Favell, as Barry Ace notes, “is clearly not speaking for Métis people, nor is she presenting herself as a spokeswoman or expert on Métis culture” (Ace, 2007, p. 24). Rather, Ace continues, Favell’s aim is to provide evidence of contemporary Métis persistence in an effort to reclaim Métis from the realm of “historical inaccuracies [and absences] surrounding Métis land and aboriginal rights” (2003, p. 26). By addressing these inaccuracies and absences in her work, Favell creates a presence for contemporary Métis visual culture.

Of her three siblings, Favell and her older sister looked like their visibly Native, Métis father, while her brother and younger sister were fair like their mother (Favell, 2009). Favell notes how this difference between siblings created a largely unspoken tension through out her youth. Having no real way to cope with the racism that was often hurled at her as a child because her family did not openly discuss their Métis heritage, Favell was often frustrated and hurt as a child. She describes trying to scrub the “tan” off of her body in the bath (Favell, 2009). Her

mother remarked to Favell that “it wouldn’t come off, that my dad had Indian blood in him and that’s where I got my Indian blood from. But we didn’t really talk about it” (Favell, 2009). Upon reflection, Favell realized that the majority of her father’s relatives were “brown-skinned” like her older sister and herself (Favell, 2009). The process of self-exploration did not begin until her early twenties when Favell first came out as a lesbian (Favell, 2009). With the support of her then partner, a First Nations woman, Favell was able to begin exploring her own Aboriginal identity.

Photography has played an important role in Favell’s artistic and personal life and she has taken up this practice as a key means of expressing herself (Favell, 2009). As a youth, Favell recalls receiving a camera, possibly the plastic-bodied Diana that was popular in the 1960s. After this initial excitement Favell enrolled in a night class in photography during her late teens and has continued to experiment with developing her own photographic vision since then. This interest in the photographic medium is also fuelled by a life long fascination with the family photo album as an archival document. As Favell explains, “everyone grew up at some level having a picture taken of them as a kid...Some families have photo albums....and I like those historical photos, I really like the idea of documenting a moment in time” (2009). Favell’s extensive use of her family’s photographic archive in her work is not, however, a matter of straightforwardly re-presenting those images. Instead, Favell’s work incorporates images from her family’s collection, and rearranges and/or digitally manipulates them in new ways in order to disrupt the whiteness,

middle class status, and heterosexuality associated with the cultural artifact of the family photo album (Payne & Thomas, 2002, p. 118).

A Complicated Past – Photography and Indians

Photographs are ambiguous, according to the novelist and art critic John Berger. 'A photograph arrests the flow of time in which the event photographed once existed,' he writes in *Another Way of Telling* (1982). 'All photographs are of the past, yet in them an instant of the past is arrested so that, unlike a lived past, it can never lead to the present. Every photograph presents us with two messages: a message concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity.' Photographs of tribal people, therefore, are not connections to the traditional past; these images are discontinuous artifacts in a colonial road show (Vizenor, 1995, p. 413).

The history of photography is deeply entwined with the history of colonization of Native peoples. Photography has been used as a tool of disempowerment, through which Aboriginal populations around the world have been catalogued, categorized, and memorialized. In the late 1800s the overt emphasis on biblically based racist ideologies shifted when, as Harris explains, it "began to be replaced by pseudoscientific inquiry conducted on both sides of the Atlantic" (2003, p. 24). The search for a clearly established code or racial hierarchy, Harris continues, were developed in "the so-called sciences of craniology, physiognomy, and phrenology" (2003, p. 24). These pseudosciences attempted to solidify the racial hierarchy, with white people at the top, based on certain visual and physical markers (Hall, 1992, p. 22-24 in M. D. Harris, 2003, p. 24). In this context, the camera was a tool used to establish the colonial gaze, and to dominate colonial populations through reinforcing the inferiority of Native peoples (Thomas in Payne & Thomas, 2002, pp.

115-116). Indeed, as Sen notes in describing the relationship between the British and the Andamanese, the practice of photographing colonized peoples often ran parallel to the ethnographic projects of anthropometry, which involved measuring colonial subjects “using calipers and grids” and recording “social, political, and psychological qualities...[and] physical characteristics that struck [the observer] as significant” (2009, p. 365). Thus Aboriginal peoples were rendered the passive subjects of a European “science” that sought to document the oddities of physical, social and psychological variations and imbue them with hierarchical and racial meaning.

It was in this vein of quasi-scientific inquiry that various anthropologists, artists, and collectors flocked to North America to capture images of the Native populations. Photographs taken of Indigenous North Americans reinforced stereotypes such as those of the “wild Indian” (Warley, 2009, p. 207). The visual surveys of Native peoples by Europeans, such as those by anthropologist Franz Boas and photographer Edward Curtis, created a type of “evolutionary historicism” (McIntosh, 2007, p. 32; Warley, 2009). Here, as McIntosh notes, romanticized portrayals of the “dying” Indigenous populations in North America created strategic erasures in an effort to “dominate and exterminate through simulated textual and image misrepresentations served up as factual documentation” (2007, p. 32). However, the photographs taken by the likes of Edward Curtis demonstrate white desire for imaginary Indianness rather than any ‘lack’ of authenticity on the part of Native peoples themselves (Warley, 2009, p. 207). Furthermore, Warley explains

how the romanticized images of Natives produced by Curtis and Boas were paradoxical in that, at the same time “others were photographing [Native] children who were ostensibly making the transition from ‘savage’ to ‘civilized’ in residential schools” (2009, p. 207). These were parallel colonial projects, which simultaneously created and destroyed “real” Indians, by removing from Native peoples the possibility to represent the complexities of their often-contradictory lived experiences.

The erasure of possibilities outside of the savage/civilized binary is part of the racism inherent in colonization. In this discourse, race both acknowledges and denies the subjectivity of the “other” while simultaneously binding the identification of the other so that only an overdetermined social signifier, such as skin colour, can define him or her (Eileraas, 2007, p. 3). Eileraas describes how identity-fixing acknowledges the subjectivity of the other only in so far as associated stereotypes will allow, thereafter collapsing the “other” into “static, monolithic objects of discourse” (2007, p. xiii). Consequently, photography’s historic use as a tool of subjugation on colonial populations continues to affect Native peoples to this day, as the assumed separation between “indigenous tradition” and “contemporary life” portrayed in the pictures of Curtis, Boas and others, remains a marker of authenticity for Native peoples (Hill, 2008, p. 59) both within and outside of their communities. Thus the lasting, albeit anachronistic photographic images produced by Europeans for European consumption continue to pose problems for Aboriginal

people today as these images are viewed by non-Native peoples as enduring representations of Aboriginality.

While identity fixing also affects other 'others' who exist outside of established norms of religion, class, gender, sexual orientation -- Native women who have often been particularly absent from the photographic and historical record. When they are present, Lippard notes, it is only in the idealized "spiritual warrior/goddess" or "squaw" binary, which are "western-created counterparts of the Madonna-or-whore syndrome...[that] neatly by pass most realistic modern female identities" (1999, p. 135). At issue is the elimination of the possibility for marginalized persons to exhibit the subjectivity of a "complex personhood" (Gordon, 1997, p. 4). Complex personhood, writes Gordon, "is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning" (1997, p. 5). This complexity was rarely available in images produced through the colonial project of nineteenth and twentieth century Euro(North) American photographers who focused on capturing and defining Indianness. This does not mean however, as Lippard notes, that the "faces of Indian people....[should] be rejected out of hand because of their dubious origins" (1999, p. 138). For despite the fictionalized history presented in the ethnographic photographs by renowned figures such as Edward S. Curtis, photographic archives remain important to contemporary Aboriginal peoples (Thomas in Payne & Thomas, 2002, p. 116). As Iroquoian photographer Jeff Thomas explains, ethnographic photographs constitute a physical record of the

historical presence of our ancestors in an “urban environment” that has been largely rendered devoid of “evidence of my ancestors” (Thomas in Payne & Thomas, 2002, pp. 119, 123). Thus many Native artists, and women artists in particular, including Favell, are reclaiming and reworking these historic images in an effort to update the visual imaginary shaping contemporary Aboriginal arts (Lippard, 1999, p. 136).

Searching Many Worlds

Each of Favell’s three series articulates themes of alienation and separation, and the unspoken presence of secrets, both familial and personal. These themes haunt the assumed white, heteronormative past of Favell’s upbringing, suggesting the presence of an unexplained otherness. Favell’s work does not stop at mere revelation, however, but moves forward in the task of imagining positive – if fantastical – role models for herself, and her family. The earliest of the series included in her catalogue, *Longing and Not Belonging*, was produced while Favell was completing her MFA in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The title is a playful contortion of a Georgia O’Keefe show, entitled *Longing and Belonging*, which was taking place in Santa Fe while Favell was working on her MFA. Favell noted the incongruence in the “whole world built up around...her work in the Southwest when there’s all these Native artists who are in the southwest and don’t get the attention that she got” (Favell, 2009). Although she is an admitted admirer of O’Keefe’s work, Favell could not help but notice how the overwhelming response to O’Keefe’s work erased Aboriginal artists in the southwestern United States. Thus, coupled with the physical distance from Favell’s childhood home in Winnipeg, the work contained in *Longing and Not Belonging* is a visual record of the displacement of both Favell and the local Native artists in Santa Fe.

Each work is comprised of a triptych of snapshot images, save for several pieces that contain only two images each, culled from old family archives, presented alongside newer images taken by Favell and the occasional image of a female pop-culture icon. Some of the family photos are relatively recent, taken in colour, through out various stages of Favell's life. Favell and her siblings are present as children, then teens and adults through out the series. Other photos are significantly older, showing family from another era in sepia-toned shots. Plants, especially flowers, many of which do not appear to be native species of Canada, are the subject of many snapshots, along with various landscapes, prairie, desert, snowy winter scenes and what appear to be cityscapes of an unknown urban space in the United Kingdom. The variety of places and faces are testaments to Favell's wide-ranging journey for self. Mixed in this series are various hints, some subtle and others not, of Aboriginal cultural performance. A picture of a family vacation with several members wearing mass-produced kitschy feather headdresses (Figure 8) and a Native woman posing beside a *Geo Tracker* such that the word *Tracker* is framed as though to imbue the woman with the mythical powers of an Indian guide (Figure 9).

Longing and Not Belonging betray the disjuncture that Favell feels between her deep attachment to her home and her family and her burgeoning recognition of her "other" identities as a Métis woman and a lesbian (Kalbfleisch, 2009, p. 206). Favell's use of the family archive here is key in signifying the complexities of longing to belong, so that family images produce what Haldrup and Larsen describe as "a small world of positive extraordinariness" that is both molded by and helps to create "the mélange of the nuclear family" (2003, p. 26). The nuclear family unit, as represented

in popular conceptions of the photo album, functions similarly to the modern nation-state, which constructs group identity through borders, inclusions and exclusions (Wexler, 2005 in Kalbfleisch, 2009, pp. 203-204). However, McAlear contends that Favell's lesbianism, "challenges the heterosexual family unit, requiring a life lived at a distance from the mainstream" (2003, p. 13). Despite this, Favell does not shy away from public representations of her personal self as a queer, Métis woman, although the representations of this aspect of Favell's identity are more implicitly coded in *Longing and Not Belonging*. Favell's conscious repositioning of images from her childhood, home life with those of her "contemporary, adult self" are what challenge the whitewashing, heteronormative tendencies of Western family photo albums and childhood identity, suggesting movement from a "whitewashed" child into a multifaceted adult (Kalbfleisch, 2009, p. 206). Thus, in *Longing and Not Belonging*, Favell refigures the assumedly white, heterosexual status-quo representation of her family's photo archive by juxtaposing images of a family vacation, for example, with pictures from her highly mobile, adult life (figure 8).

All of these "abnormal" classifications set Favell into motion on a physical, spiritual, emotional and cultural journey that would carry her across various spaces and places in search of self. The three series encompassed in her catalogue *I searched many worlds* all point to the healing powers of Favell's ongoing journey through the mental-scapes of self, which parallel her physical journey to lands across the globe. As Kalbfleisch notes, "Favell's *becoming*, her *nomadism* depends on

this journeying. As she moves away from the white, feminine and heterosexual ideal of her childhood home, she in turn is in the process of further becoming *at home*" (2009, p. 205, italics in original). Indeed, for Favell a great curiosity about the possibilities that exist in the world *outside* of her familial home created a constant pull into that world. Favell states, "I didn't mean to [move] but I have. Maybe I did mean to. That's the way the food supply was, followed the buffalo all around" (Favell, 2009). Favell connects her curiosity and need to explore to the early Métis buffalo hunters continual search for sustenance. In her case, however, the sustenance that Favell travels in search of is the emotional, spiritual, and creative nourishment of self. Her travels have led her to explore and incorporate many ways of being, always in conjunction with her link to family and her identity as Métis woman and a lesbian.

Travelling to meet myself: Finding my Métis socks

A brief vignette from my interview with Rosalie Favell

Jessie Short: Ok. You sort of talked about washing the tan off of your skin, but was there anything in your twenties that really prompted you to start searching for this?

Rosalie Favell: It had always been an issue because growing up people would assume that I was Italian or I would pass for other cultures, but I never felt a sense of pride about where I came from, hadn't named it yet. Then, I think I used the term "coming out" as a Métis in part because I came out as a lesbian woman in my early twenties. So I came out there before I addressed issues of race or culture. Partly I was involved with a First Nations woman, so I could see that whole different polarity, you know? I could be a part of a Native family, an Indian family who knew who they were, so that really supported, in a way, my trying to figure out who I was. It was then that this new word "Aboriginal" was being thrown around. So then I could easily be an Aboriginal woman. I was probably an Aboriginal woman before I was a Métis woman, you know? I sort of had to grow into my Métis socks....I'm still working on my outfit (laughs). What do Métis people wear? Well....

JS: They seem to wear Star Trek uniforms, if I recall correctly.

RF: Yes, yes.

JS: I think that's really interesting what you said about coming out because I also came out when I was in high school....

RF: As a Métis?

JS: No, I wasn't ready for that yet. And that was, whatever...since I've started looking into this whole Métis business, it's totally like that [coming out as a lesbian] all over again. I feel like I have to sit people down and say, you know, I have something to tell you.

RF: Disclose to them.

JS: And they're like, oh.

RF: But you're already a...

JS: Yeah, exactly. It's funny cause, actually, David Garneau said that as well about coming out as Métis and once you're out of the closet you can't go back in. You can try maybe, but.... I think that's really interesting, the parallels there. And it's difficult too, it's kind of a painful process. My mom's been a really big challenge for me in that she's been very unhappy with me being gay and now very unhappy with Métis. Gay Métis? What?

RF: Double whammy. There's support groups for that. No, just kidding.

JS: I'm gonna start one.

RF: Or your mother should.

The second series of works in Favell's catalogue, *Plain(s) Warrior Artist*, picks up the thread of refiguring her self as a contemporary Métis person. The works in *Plain(s) Warrior Artist* consist of layered, digitally manipulated images in which Favell figures more prominently. *Plain(s) Warrior Artist* is a decidedly more playful series than the more documentary style of *Longing and Not Belonging* (Favell, 2009). The title is a reference to the autobiographical ledger art created by various

Aboriginal persons, mostly warriors and chiefs, who were imprisoned by the US government in the nineteenth century (Berlo and Phillips, 1998, in Ace, 2003, p. 23; Favell, 2009). After extensive exploration into the realms of longing and belonging, Favell has realized that the world of popular culture has little to offer in terms of positive, realistic examples of Aboriginal, let alone, Métis women. Thus Favell decided to turn the camera on herself in order to become the heroic, Métis woman role model for whom she has been searching (Favell, 2009). In *Plain(s) Warrior Artist*, Favell's work takes a decidedly performative turn as she seeks to destabilize the straight, white space of the status quo.

In this context, Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which takes the performance of naturalized gender roles as its starting point, may provide a helpful framework. According to Butler, a subject is "tenuously constituted in time" through the repetition of stylized acts, or performances, which normalize certain behaviours (1999, p. 179). Gender and sexuality, then, are socially and discursively constructed rather than biologically constituted. Performance art draws on these notions of performativity in its construction of a hybrid, multidisciplinary mixture of visual arts and theatre (Dubin, 1992, p. 154). Indeed, as Dubin notes, in-so-far as performance artists make "use [of] resources readily at hand to transmute one thing into another" they question naturalized, binary categories such as public/private, male/female, straight/gay (1992, p. 154). Thus, as Richard Hill writes, "A Cree person is not the opposite of a European person any more than a man is the opposite of a woman" (2008, p. 57). In this context, Favell's personal collections of

family photo albums, pop culture images, and travel snapshots are transmuted into digitally manipulated images that confound the naturalized dichotomies of Indianness/European, femininity/masculinity and heterosexuality/homosexuality.

Indeed, just as our discussion of passing and coming out suggests, the performative aspects of identity disrupt naturalized roles. Kroeger describes how the act of passing “puts us in touch with the wondrous ability each person has to create and recreate the self” (2003, p. 9). According to Kroeger, passing is “subversive and amusingly mischievous,” by subverting the “injustices built into the established social order” (2003, p. 27). However, while passing can be fun and mischievous, Goffman contends that it can also be a necessary tool for survival, in-so-far as passing often involves “...the management of undisclosed discrediting information about the self” (1986, p. 42). Coming out, on the other hand, engages and acknowledges the presence of stigmatized identities, and instead of accepting that stigma, asserts a positive re-evaluation and ownership over those identities.

This analysis of ‘coming out’ is somewhat akin to the decolonizing methodologies of *claiming* and *naming* presented by Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Claiming is an intensive process wherein Indigenous peoples gather the oft-forgotten histories of their “nation, tribe and family” to “establish the legitimacy of claims” to “territories, resources or about past injustices” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 143). Ultimately, claiming is about rewriting histories that affirm and support an Indigenous perspective. Naming, writes Smith, “is about retaining as much control over meanings as possible” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 157). Most people are somewhere between

passing and coming out, in an ongoing process of responding to contextual situations. Although she is “out” as a lesbian woman,¹⁰ Favell can pass as a straight woman just as she can pass as Italian or Greek (Favell, 2009) to those who cannot read the coded messages of otherness. Thus, Favell has had to actively claim and reconstruct a positive identity as a Métis person, and as a lesbian by engaging in creative work through which to create new meanings for herself.

I have always had a certain fondness for the science fiction and fantasy genres of popular culture. However, seeing these genres represented in the work of a contemporary Métis artist is very exciting as it confounds the romanticized, anachronistic portrayals of Aboriginal people that still loom large in contemporary society. Something else also caught my attention in Favell’s work, what Lippard describes as a “coded” message of marginalized sexual and gender identities that “reveal only as much as the viewer can understand” (1999, p. 144). One way of ‘reading’ these images is through the science fiction/fantasy fan base who has an ongoing practice of rendering typically heteronormative plots from series such as *Star Trek* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* in a decidedly queer light through their *slash fiction* rewritings. In slash fiction, fans create alternative, queer readings for well-known sci-fi/fantasy television, film and literature that often sees homosexual match-ups between leading same-sex characters (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 136 in Dhaenens, Van Bauwel, & Biltreyst, 2008, p. 342). The relationship that has been created between characters in some series, such as Captain Kirk and Spock, may not

¹⁰ One of Favell’s early series, *Living Evidence* (1994), documents her relationship, from beginning to end, with a First Nations woman.

be recognized by audiences of the original series (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 136 in Dhaenens et al., 2008, p. 342) while others, such as Xena and Gabrielle, seem actively “coded” as queer by the series producers and slash fiction writers alike.

Favell’s *Opening New Frontiers* (2003) (Figure 10) plays on the implicit queerness of the relationship between Xena and Gabrielle, with specific reference to Favell’s Métis identity. Favell has become Xena, paddling in a boat with Gabrielle in front. There is a look of surprise and excitement on Favell’s face. The phrase “Opening New Frontiers” is scrawled across the bottom of the picture in Favell’s handwriting. Favell is journeying into new territories, literally and figuratively, as a lesbian-identified Métis woman. The women and their boat are set against a painted, moonlit mountain scene, reminiscent of a Group of Seven painting. Favell has subtly altered the outfits that she wears to include arms bands with Métis-style flower beadwork patterns, while Gabrielle dons a birch-bark outfit. They are intrepid pioneers in the land of queer, Métis fantasy.

In the piece entitled *Voyageur* (2003) (Figure 11), Favell depicts herself as Captain Kathryn Janeway, of television fame from the Star Trek series *Voyager*. Ace notes that Janeway’s character was the first female lead among the variety of Star Trek series who “defied gender-based protocol, choosing not to be called ‘sir’ or ‘ma’am’, but instead, Captain” (2007, pp. 13-14). With her arms crossed in a defiant posture, Favell as Janeway is neither a sexually available squaw nor a mystical, spiritual goddess. She is a person of her own means. There is, of course, a double-entendre in the title of Favell’s piece, which is hinted at in the sash tied around the

waist of her captain's uniform. Favell is exploring an expressly *Métis* frontier. As she explains: "it just seemed to make sense to be Captain Janeway on the space ship called Voyager, you know, as a Métis, trying to figure out, what do Métis look like?" (Favell, 2009).

In a similar vein, *If only you could have loved me the way that I am* (2003) (Figure 12) questions the influence of physical appearance on identity. Favell's image is based on Frida Kahlo's painting *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940). Dressed in men's clothing, and with short hair, Kahlo's piece questions ideals of feminine beauty (Ace, 2007, p. 14). Favell's interpretation of this piece posits similar questions about gendered and raced notions of beauty and attractiveness as a lesbian and a Métis person (Favell, 2009). Written across the background of the image is a title, which is drawn from a song that Favell learned to play on the piano as a child. As a subtly coded insertion of difference and the desire for acceptance, Favell's Métis hero personae strive to create a space for her existence as a contemporary Métis woman and a lesbian. By reimagining herself as a variety of characters, both fictional and historical, Favell names and claims her complex personhood on her terms.

Image-making/Memory-making

Sjöberg explains that the desire to preserve the memory of "someone or something dead or lost within the present" has contributed greatly to the popularity of photography (2005, p. 68). Yet, the ability of photography to concretize a "mental memory image" of someone or something past has led to a conflation between

photography and memory as a stable archive where the file of some memory remains unchanged (Sjöberg, 2005, pp. 68, 69-70). Thus, as Baen notes, “[p]hotography is commonly understood as a surrogate for memory” (2005, p. 191). The assumed interchangeability between memory and photography often does not acknowledge the multiple narratives with which many photographic images are laden. Thus, the photographic archive of Aboriginal people maintains what Sekula describes as an “unquestioned authority” based on the “illusory neutrality” it is seen to portray (1987, p.118-119 in Payne & Thomas, 2002, p. 114). In the case of historical photographs of Aboriginal peoples by Euro-Americans, Payne notes how the absence of whiteness in ethnographic photography “paradoxically underscores [the] white hegemony” of the “colonial enterprise” that created the photographic archive (in Payne & Thomas, 2002, p. 118).

Memories are affected and influenced by the conditions under which they are recalled, in a process that is intimately linked with the formation of identity, both individual and collective (Eyerman, 2004, pp. 161-163). As Richard Candida Smith notes, “memory exists in an ongoing process of performance and response,” (2002, p. 3). The process of engaging memory through performance is an important part of legitimating identity in the present (Antze and Lambek, 1996 in Eyerman, 2004, p. 162). In this context, photography should not be seen as representative of memory, whether individual or collective, but merely a mnemonic device that provides what Sjöberg describes as “a point of departure for remembrance” (2005, p. 68). Favell’s collections of “travelogue snapshots of people, places, and things,” writes Ace,

function as “mnemonic triggers for storytelling that document the public and private life of this incredibly...complex woman” (2007, p. 13). The *Plain(s) Warrior Artist* series includes images such as *Navigating by our Grandmothers* (2000), which includes pictures of Favell’s maternal and paternal grandmothers and Favell with one of her sisters, sitting astride a horse in the centre of the frame. A herd of buffalo runs across the top of the picture, where a tiny Favell can be seen, trick riding on a pony amidst the herd. Favell and her sister “navigated between worlds...by our grandmothers,” a tricky feat for many contemporary Aboriginal people who must travel the course between the Euro-Canadian dominated world and an Aboriginal world (Favell, 2009).

The third series in Favell’s catalogue, *Belonging*, marks the artists’ newfound confidence that allows her to be comfortable with her incongruous identities. Here, Favell presents entire, unaltered pages from her mother’s photo album (Figure 13). Favell’s incorporation of historical, family photographs into her work provides, as Ace so eloquently states, “living evidence of a mid-20th-century Manitoba Métis family” (2003, p. 27). By journeying across space and time in order to recall memories of absent Aboriginal identities and silenced sexual identity, *Longing and Not Belonging* and *Plain(s) Warrior Artist* invoked the past in the present to consciously alter and establish a creative space for examples of Métis and gender identities in an otherwise “whitewashed” world. Favell is keenly aware of the malleability of memory, using her photographs as mnemonic devices for remembrance and renewal of family relationships and identities. Throughout her

three series of work Favell explores the themes of alienation and separation, and the unspoken presence of absent identities, both familial and personal. Favell's work points to the possibility of reclaiming and expanding her sense of Métisness by rewriting the stereotypical narratives that surround Aboriginal identities. Key to this project is Favell's ability to arrange and/or alter photographs of herself, friends, family, and images from popular culture in such a way so as to present the "complex personhood" and subjectivity of a contemporary Métis woman.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Writing this thesis has been an ongoing process of refinement. Over the three and a half years that I have been working on this project, I have constantly reflected upon my understanding of what it is to be Métis, to be an artist, to be a Métis artist and, finally, to be human. In the second chapter of this thesis, I quote the enigmatic Louis Riel who, it is reported, said that it would be the artists who give the Métis people back their spirit. This quote speaks to me, and to many other Aboriginal people, especially Métis, who are filled with a sense of hope at the possible renewal of self and community that Riel offers in his words. However, since I first came across this quote, over three years ago, I have been faced with the fact that no one can seem to locate the source document said to contain it. The question that many are now asking is, did we make it up?¹¹

¹¹ The statement, again, is: "My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them back their spirit." Garneau notes in a paper, in which he cites Riel's famous quote about Métis artists, that "[t]he original source is not credited here; nor is it cited in any other document that I have found where the quotation is recorded" (2009). Similarly, I have heard two other Métis artists state that they have yet to find a record of this statement by Riel.

Thus I find myself giving careful consideration to the ramifications of questioning the authenticity of Riel's statement. I feel a certain trepidation in disavowing these words, which many have sought to claim as a proud symbol for the reclamation of identity as Métis people. It could well be that Riel made the statement to some person or group of people in 1885 and it was passed on through oral history. As with other groups of Aboriginal peoples, there is a rich culture of intergenerational oral histories amongst Métis communities (Prefontaine & Barkwell, 2006, p. 8). It is possible that the story of Riel's famous words were repeated orally from generation to generation, as a story of resistance to hegemony and of the beauty of resilience, before finally becoming written word. Only now has this phrase resurfaced so powerfully in work of the very Métis artists who are reawakening. Whether or not Riel did make this statement, the fact remains that many Métis people are responding to this call to wake up. It began with notable figures such as Tony Belcourt and Maria Campbell prior to the hundred-year mark and has since gained momentum with many other people who continue to reclaim their Métis ancestry.

Even if the statement were "made up" by someone other than Riel or, perhaps, falsely attributed to Riel, the power of these words remains precisely because so many Métis people have used them as a reference point for renewal. The numerous contemporary Métis people who now cite this particular phrase remind us of the mutability of memory that allowed, for example, Edward Curtis' staged

scenes of “traditional” tribal life to dictate Euro-American expectations of Indian “authenticity” (Thomas in Payne & Thomas, 2002, p. 116). According to Fabian, in this Euro-American paradigm of salvage ethnography, there is no room for hybrid expressions outside of “ ‘real’ or ‘pure’ Aboriginal cultural forms in a mythic precontact past” (1983 in R. B. Phillips, 1998, p. 7). This essentialist view hardly leaves room for the hybrid adaptations of Aboriginal peoples, let alone Métis peoples who proudly claim both their European and Aboriginal ancestry as distinct Aboriginal peoples. It also denies what Eyerman describes as the “...difference between narrated memory and documented history” (2004, p. 160) and privileges the historical documentation by Euro-Americans over Aboriginal methods of oral transmission. The privileging of documented over oral history fails to address the complex ways in which the historical ‘record’ leaves gaps and fissures that can never be completely known – just as memory itself, is a complex and mutable terrain that is never completely ‘know-able.’

It is critical to notice that Métis people are not only repeating Riel’s phrase, but that they are also reinterpreting the words in novel ways to achieve healing. Some traumatic events are so critical in shaping a group/cultural experience that the effects, which last for generations, as described by the notion of “postmemory.” As Marianne Hirsch explains, postmemory suggests the repetition of certain trauma narratives that actually function to produce a unique, but related, traumatization in the generations who follow the actual survivors (2001, p. 8). For the next generation, the trauma is different in its temporal and qualitative aspects, as it is

vicariously experienced in the stories and images of others, yet it produces felt responses and bodily sensations of trauma in subsequent generations in the present (Hirsch, 2001, pp. 9, 15). The narratives and their associated ephemera, such as photographs, stories and written records, become iconic in their near “obsessive” repetition, which can be an important means of connecting generations (Hirsch, 2001, pp. 10, 29). For example, accrediting the above, now quasi-mythical phrase to Louis Riel through ongoing recitation enables Métis people to connect with the trauma of the military actions of the late 19th century, and the latent effects of that trauma in the present.

However, true reconciliation and healing only come about through engagement with and reintegration of past traumas. Hirsch uses the example of comic book artist Art Spiegelman as an example of such integrative work. Spiegelman’s book, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, recreates his father’s survival of the Holocaust and the ensuing trauma of being the child of a Holocaust survivor. Hirsch contends that, far from the repetitive production of the Holocaust narrative and associated images that are compulsively used in popular retellings, Spiegelman translates the photographs

into a new graphic idiom [by which] he unhinges them from the effects of traumatic repetition, without entirely disabling the functions of sense memory that they contain (2001, pp. 30-31).

Spiegelman’s comic book disrupts the compulsive repetition of Holocaust imagery. His work reimagines his father’s stories about the Holocaust, while also examining Spiegelman’s connection to the trauma, one generation removed. Riel’s words speak

to the trauma of military persecution that many Métis suffered and the following decades of systemic oppression of half-breeds. Perhaps then, Métis people have been reciting this phrase as if in a dream for the hundred-year period. Only recently, however, have the Métis awoken to the reality that they must now actively conjure a new memory for community revitalization from Riel's revolutionary insight.

The process of art making is an engagement with this spirit of cultural revitalization, which allows Métis people to articulate perspectives which have historically been silenced or distorted. By interacting with the past through academic research, artwork and story-telling, Métis people such as Belcourt, Garneau, Favell and myself are creating a multiple sense of presence for ourselves, our families and our friends – in a broader public culture. My focus on Métis contemporary visual culture does not set out to restrict the definition of “Métis art,” to a specific genre of “Indian art,” anymore than I have attempted to delineate any unitary notions of Métis identity through my research. Instead, I have used the work of Garneau, Belcourt and Favell to engage with the anxieties that stem from blurring the boundaries and crossing the borders associated with supposedly “pure” cultural categories (Drucker, 2005, p. 145). For it is precisely the distortions in and lack of Métis representation that has left a void in which Métis artists can play with a hybrid range of expressions, combining historically based aesthetics with contemporary experiences and visual forms.

Much of the artwork discussed in this thesis is explicit in using historically-based techniques of visual representation, rendered anew through contemporary

tastes and senses of self. Here the incorporation of historic styles, aesthetics, photographs and other imagery demonstrates how a Métis identity is not simply created from an unbounded, post-modern concept of self, but is defined through traditions of memory-making, effectively bringing the past into the present (Brogan, 1998, p. 4). Creating memories through contemporary traditions is a dynamic *practice* of ongoing renewal. The extensive use of Louis Riel's important, perhaps mythic, words provides just one example of a contemporary tradition that has been taken-up and re-worked. The artists that I interview are, likewise, involved in the process of creating contemporary traditions of Métis visual culture. Belcourt's *Medicines To Help Us* simulates Métis beadwork and the use of floral imagery in acrylic on canvas. Similarly, Garneau uses a pointillist-style of overlaying dots to represent beads, thereby acknowledging his connection to his Métis ancestry in *Evidence (Neal Stonechild)*. Favell also incorporates symbols of Métis material culture in some of her work, such as the *Voyageur* piece in which Favell assumes the identity of Star Trek Voyager Captain Janeway, albeit with the addition of a Métis sash tied around her waist. By utilizing a range of techniques in each of these different genres, the history of Métis communities is being reawakened to live differently in the present.

As a Métis person born and raised in Alberta, but now living and writing my thesis in southern Ontario, I have come to realize the importance of the physical landscape in shaping my sense of identity. My experiences as a person of Ukrainian, Métis and German descent have been tempered by the geography in which I spent

the majority of my life, the prairie landscape of western Canada. For Aboriginal people, the land is an ever-present force in shaping a multi-faceted identity, as expressed through what Bennett describes as the sometimes overt, sometimes subliminal “language of sensation and affect” (2005, p. 2). The act of claiming to be “from” a certain place denotes certain geographic, socio-economic and temporal realities that influence how I interact with others, both within and outside of the context of that place. Yet, there is also a more subtle sense of belonging to a place that I can *feel* more accurately than I can describe. The sensation of belonging to a people and a place is explored through the visual imagery of Belcourt, Garneau, and Favell, as well as many other Métis artists, but the full importance of the land for Métis people is not overtly investigated in my thesis.

Although I have not explicitly explored the Métis connection to the land in my writing, it is always present, acting as the backdrop and the foreground to the stories that Métis people tell about themselves. As Louis Owens notes of mixed-blood Native American writer Louise Erdrich, for Native peoples, “the construction of a reality...begins, always, with the land...[p]eople and places are inseparable” (2000, p. 54). These stories of Métis identity, of making art, are always grounded in the context of the land. Thus, Garneau’s comic book landscapes portray both the western Frontier of Euro-North American imagination and the Western landscape in which his great Grandfather, Laurent Garneau, found himself embattled alongside Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont. Belcourt incorporates the landscape of the “Métis homeland” by including a variety of plants found across geographic space stretching

from Ontario to British Columbia. These plants, and many others, are imbued with healing properties and allied with Métis spiritual beliefs that have been passed down through generations (Richardson, 2007). Rosalie Favell's extensive use of her family's photo albums often include glimpses of the Manitoba Inter-lakes landscape where Favell was raised and which she still calls home. Thus while I have not explored this area in detail, the land remains as important for Métis peoples as it is for our First Nations cousins, and is an important area for future research on contemporary Métis visual culture.

The work presented in my thesis demonstrates a multifaceted conception of contemporary Métis visual culture as interpreted by Belcourt, Garneau, and Favell and myself. The work created by these Métis artists is a visual expression and exploration of each artist's connection to their Métis ancestors in the present. The events of the past do not change, but how we remember them and interpret them in the present is always in flux. By engaging with the past, especially for those of us whose families have denied their Métis ancestry, Métis peoples create a presence for themselves as part of a contemporary, Aboriginal Canada. We name and claim ourselves as Métis peoples, and we represent ourselves politically, as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith explains, "as a form of voice and expression" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 150). My contribution to this representation has been to reflect on and assess the critical and imaginative work of Métis artists in re-fashioning the Métis imagination, while also including autoethnographic reflections throughout this work, which map my own changing understanding of what it means to be a Métis person. Thus art,

analysis and autoethnography have each played an important role in allowing me to re-remember a self that was formerly silenced – and provide space for Métis culture and awareness to breathe.

The end of all of this exploration is really only the beginning. Through breaking the cycle of silence I have moved well past the initial painful stages of anger, fear and trepidation to an active recognition and claiming of Métis ancestry for myself and others in my own rendition of Hirsch's aforementioned integrative process. Some people are more open than others, and this is to be expected. The process of actively exploring the impacts of colonization as an Aboriginal person is not to be taken lightly, and I understand why some people, such as my paternal grandfather, may have chosen to silence their Aboriginal identities rather than deal with ongoing, overt racism. Being from what is ultimately a mixed-race family, of Métis and European heritage, it is interesting to observe the dynamics of systemic racism being perpetuated through interpersonal relationships. Comments made by my mother and maternal grandparents reinforce stereotypes of Native people as lazy, anachronistic and inauthentically Native. Here too, however, my non-Aboriginal family has made great strides. Not long ago, when I began curating a show of contemporary Aboriginal art, my mother suggested that I consider looking at the difference between urban and rural Aboriginal peoples since I have lived in both settings, she implied, as an Aboriginal person. I was stunned and overjoyed by my mother's growing acceptance of my identity as a Métis person.

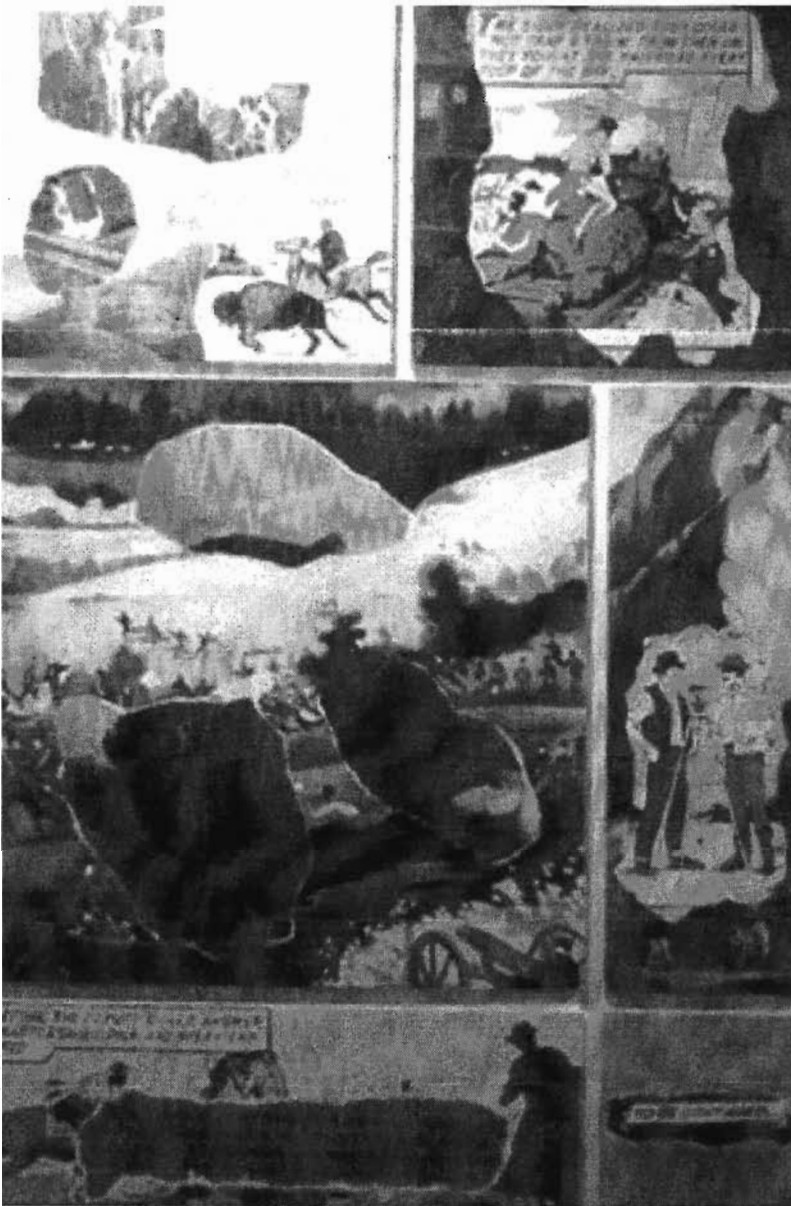
My mother's growing acceptance has provided me with the space to work through the process of acknowledging and reclaiming my Métis ancestry. In addition to the progress that my mother has made, my father has also expanded his own sense of self-awareness as a Métis man. When I first began the research for this thesis, my father was supportive but no longer claimed a Métis identity. Over the past several years, however, my father has come to reassert himself as a Métis person in conversation with me, which provides me with an incredible sense of happiness and wholeness. I am reminded of Favell's hopeful words during our interview: "You're just starting your journey...Eventually you'll encompass all of it" (Favell, 2009). My academic work has led me to the understanding that I am a whole person who cannot be divided into parts, wholly Métis and European. My mother's ability to move past the mêlée of systemic racism, which would construct Aboriginal peoples as one easily definable group that is diametrically opposed to people of Western European origin gives me hope for other non-Native people, who might also open themselves to acknowledging the complexity of Aboriginal peoples in this country. My father's open recognition of a heretofore-buried aspect of himself provides evidence of the possibility to regain a complex personhood as a contemporary Aboriginal person. This is travel in a full circle, from surreptitious comments to silence to naming and claiming, and now on to a path of creating.



1. Christi Belcourt, *Bloodletting (does that make you more comfortable with who I am?)*, 2008. Acrylic on Canvas (Courtesy of the artist)



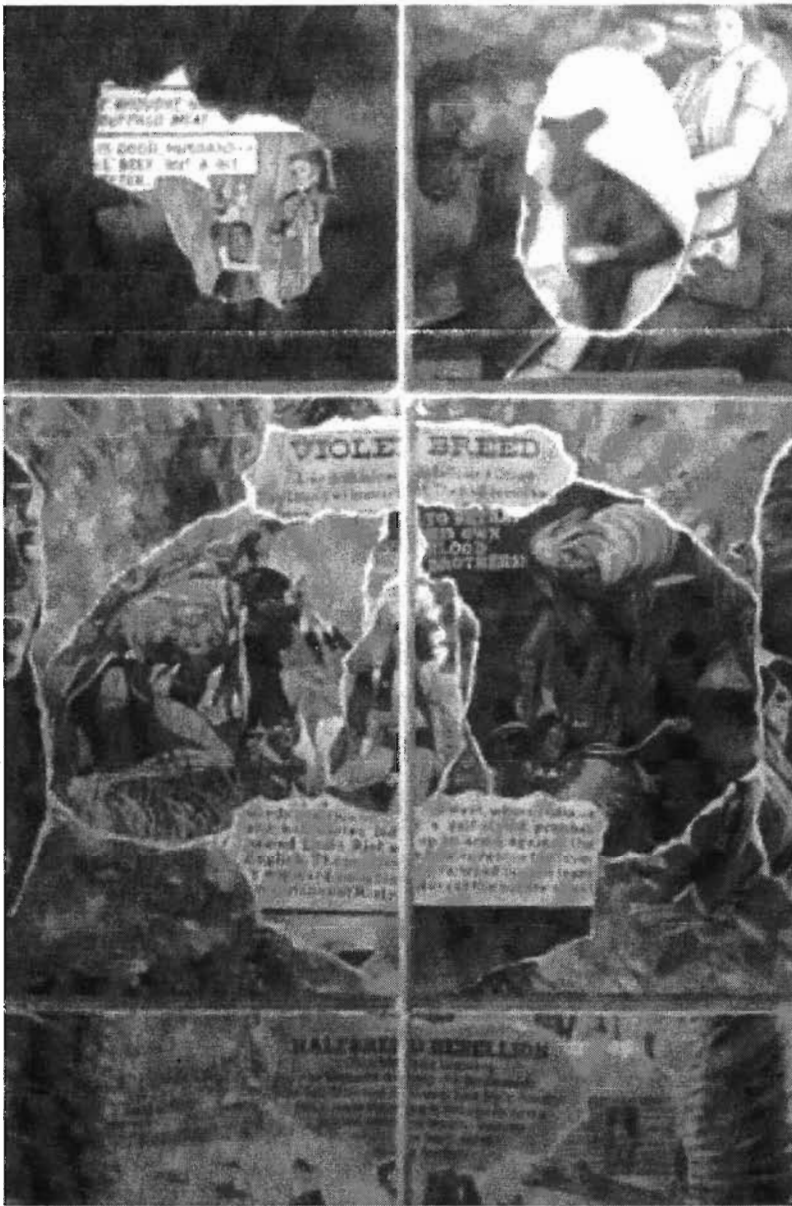
2. Christi Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us*, 2007. Acrylic on Canvas (Courtesy of the artist)



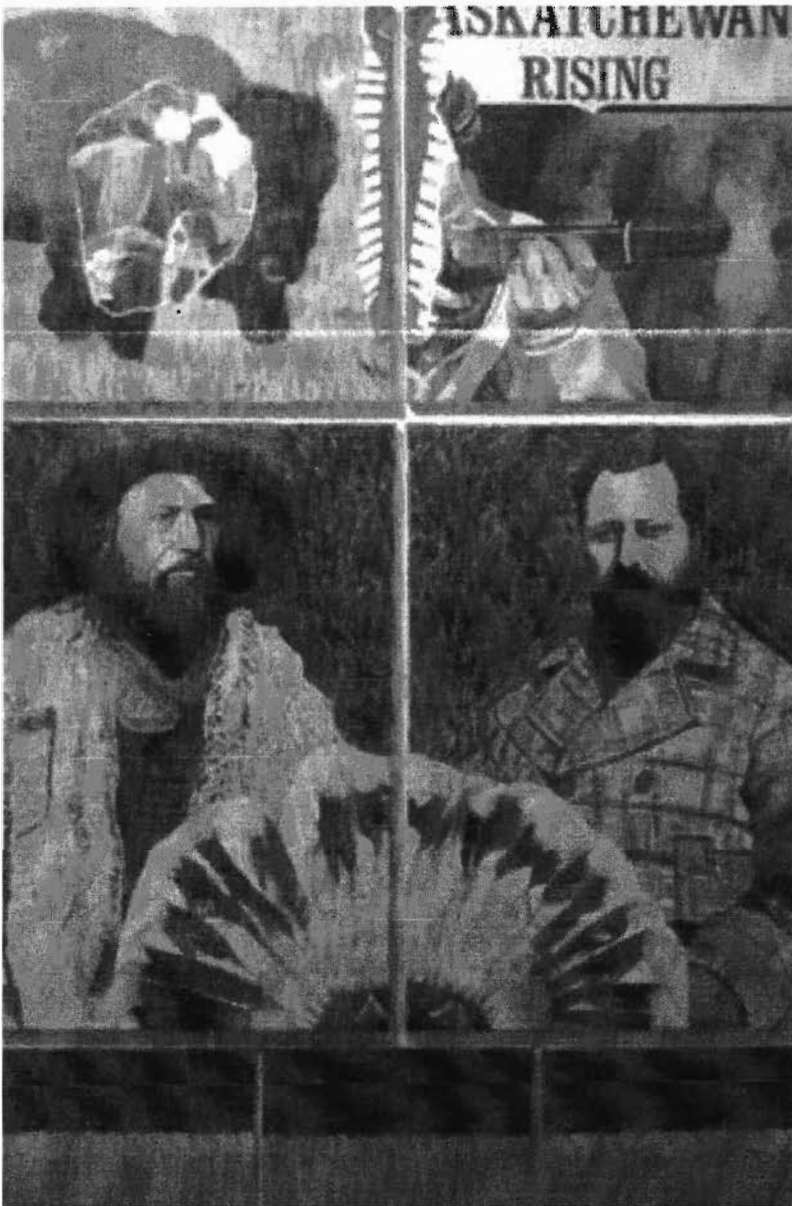
3. David Garneau, *How the West Was....(page four)*, 1998. Oil on canvas. (Courtesy of the artist)



4. David Garneau, *How the West Was....(page one)*, 1998. Oil on canvas. (Courtesy of the artist)



5. David Garneau, *How the West Was... (page seven)*, 1998. Oil on canvas. (Courtesy of the artist)



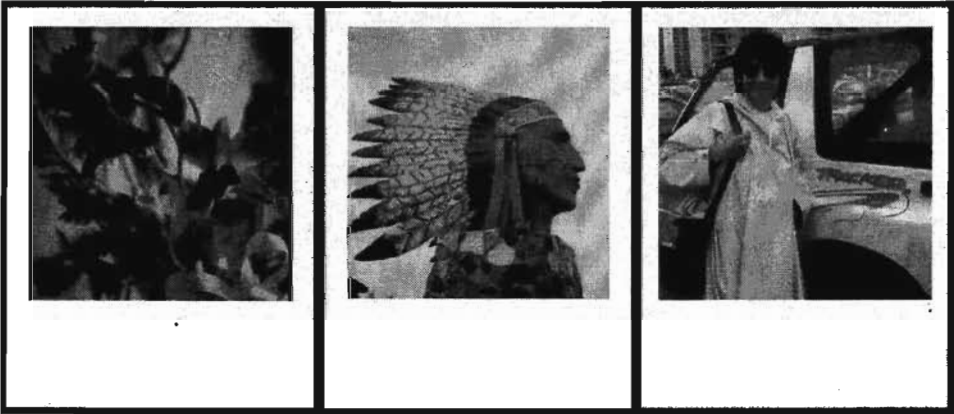
6. David Garneau, *How the West Was... (page eight)*, 1998. Oil on canvas. (Courtesy of the artist)



7. David Garneau, *Evidence (Neal Stonechild)*, 2006. Acrylic on canvas. (Courtesy of the artist)



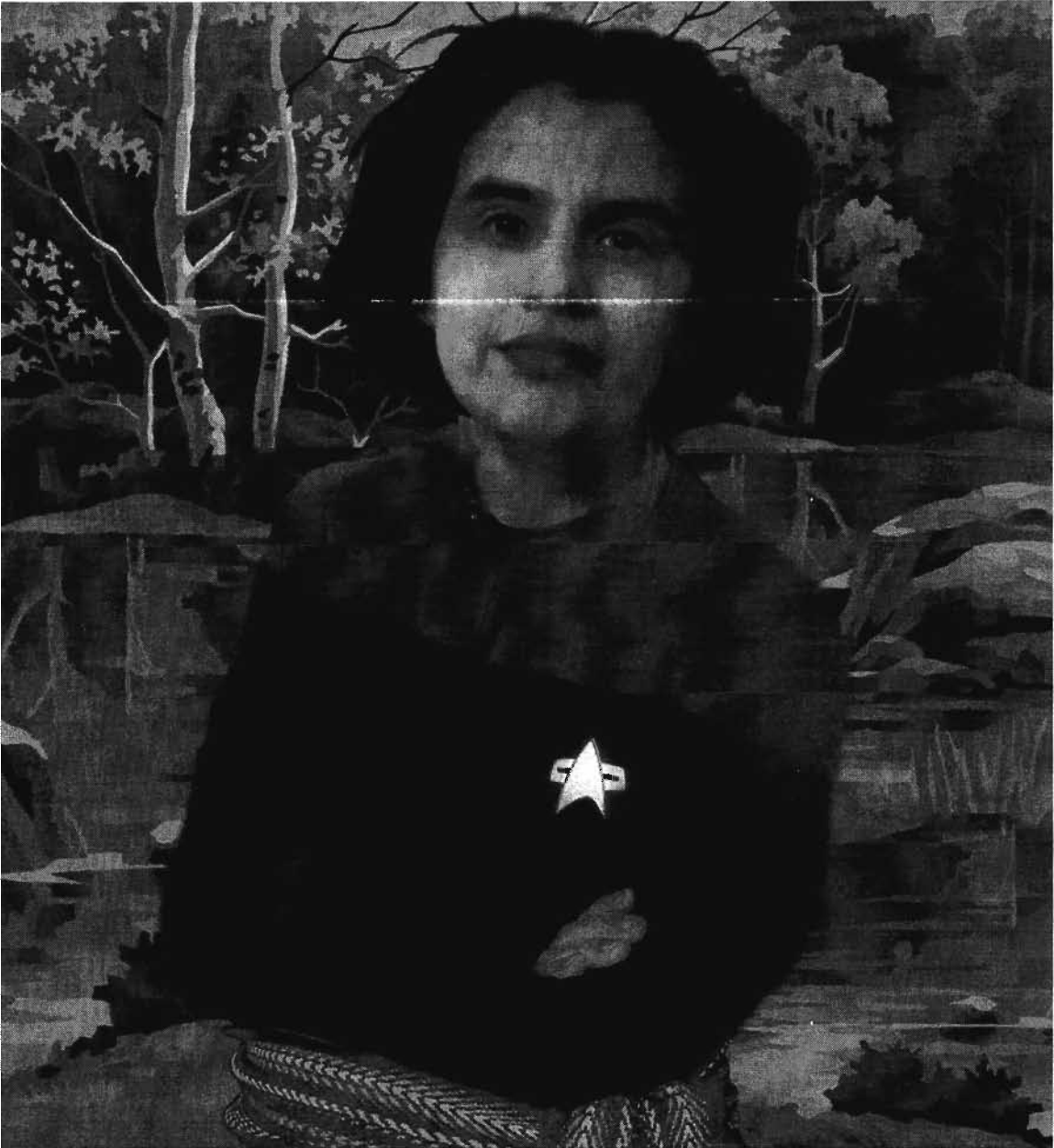
8. Rosalie Favell, *Untitled, Longing and Not Belonging Series*, 1999. (Courtesy of the artist)



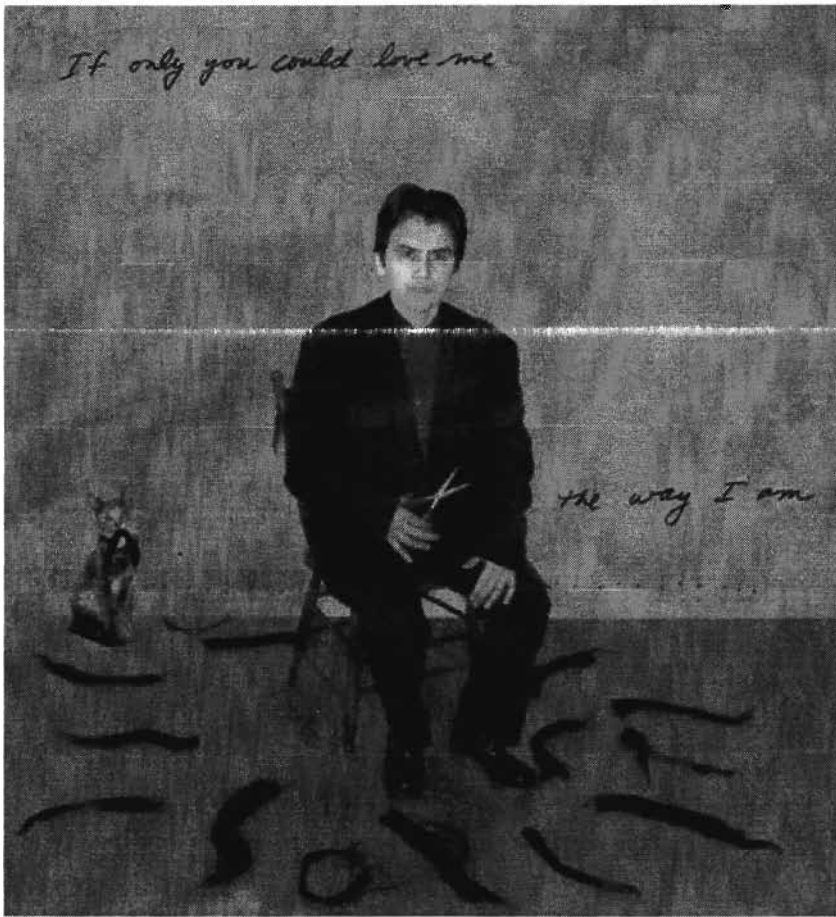
9. Rosalie Favell, *Untitled, Longing and Not Belonging Series*, 1999. (Courtesy of the artist)



10. Rosalie Favell, *Opening New Frontiers*, *Plain(s) Warrior Artist Series*, 2003.
(Courtesy of the artist)



11. Rosalie Favell, *Voyageur, Plain(s) Warrior Artist Series*, 2003. (Courtesy of the artist)



12. Rosalie Favell, *If only you could have loved me the way that I am, Plain(s) Warrior Artist Series*, 2003. (Courtesy of the artist)



13. Rosalie Favell, *Untitled, Belonging Series*, 2003. (Courtesy of the artist)

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