

A Geography of Blood

Uncovering the Hidden Histories of Metis¹ People in Canada

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Metis people have generally been left out of the narrative of Canadian history and they have been displaced from their lands in the process of Canadian colonization. As they reclaim their memories of family and culture, fight for their rights in Canadian courts, and achieve political sovereignty, Metis people are writing themselves into the narrative of Canadian history and staking claims to their lands and resources for compensation. This article shows how one family, the Morrisettes, passed their trauma from the failed 1885 Resistance in Batoche, Saskatchewan, to their descendants. As the current generation identifies and traces the intergenerational trauma, family members are starting to heal, tell their stories, and claim their place in Canadian history and their Aboriginal title to Canadian land.

Outre quelques grands événements bien connus, le peuple métis est largement absent de la trame narrative de l'histoire du Canada. Ayant perdu leurs territoires ancestraux au gré des avancées coloniales canadiennes, les Métis purent néanmoins récupérer et affirmer leurs mœurs et histoires familiales à travers les nombreuses luttes au sein du système juridique canadien. Les efforts en vue d'obtenir la reconnaissance de la souveraineté politique de la Nation métisse ont également mené à des engagements décisifs afin de créer une nouvelle production historique, par et pour les Métis. Ce faisant, les Métis s'inscrivent eux-mêmes dans la trame historique du Canada et réclament compensation auprès de l'État pour les terres et ressources expropriées. Notre article explique comment la famille Morrisette a transféré à ses descendants le bouleversement psychologique découlant de la Résistance de 1885. Ce n'est qu'à travers l'identification du bouleversement intergénérationnel et la compréhension de son déroulement que s'opère graduellement la guérison. En faisant part de son vécu, la famille Morrisette se situe dans la longue durée de l'Histoire et continue d'affirmer son titre de propriété aborigène sur le territoire canadien.

Introduction

Metis people in Canada have often been left out of narratives of Canadian history. One of the earliest histories to document the beginnings of Metis nationhood and efforts to secure political sovereignty was *The Métis: Canada's Forgotten People* (Sealey/Lussier 1975). They have been excluded from Canadian historical narratives for three reasons. First, like all Indigenous peoples in Canada, Metis people have been the vanquished in the process of colonization, and ignored by the victors who dominated the construction of public memory. Second, as descendants of both Indig-

1 We choose to use the unaccented "Metis" in this article because it encompasses both French- and English-speaking Metis.

enous peoples and European newcomers, who formed a distinctive culture separate from their ancestors, they have been shunned by both of these groups as outsiders. Third, the way Metis people occupied geographic space and created “place” made it difficult for them to assert and maintain their culture. Through the lens of one Metis family, the Morrisettes, we will explore the Metis’ colonial trauma and resistances throughout generations, and the process of reclaiming their place in Canadian history. The remembering and reclaiming of Metis history is intimately tied with land and landscape.

Historiography and Colonization in Canada

Victors often write the histories that become the collective memory of place. It is no surprise that histories of Canada initially excluded Indigenous peoples. Canadian colonizers believed that Indigenous peoples (the victims of colonization and dispossession) would become extinct. Those that did survive were encouraged to abandon their culture and assimilate (Dickason 1984; Francis 1992). Attitudes towards Indigenous peoples started to change in the 1960s, with the civil rights movement, which extended to Indigenous peoples (in the form of Red Power and the American Indian Movement) and also with the rise of social history, dedicated to giving voice to the voiceless.² Academic books about Indigenous peoples in Canada underscored the shift with names such as *Out of the Background* (Coates/Fisher 1988), *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* (Miller 1989), *Hidden from History* (Annett 2001), and *Hidden in Plain Sight* (Voyageur/Newhouse/Beavon 2005).³ The theme of Indigenous peoples asserting their political and cultural sovereignty has continued in Metis history, illustrated by book titles such as *The People Who Own Themselves* (Devine 2004), *We Know Who We Are* (Harroun Foster 2006), *The Long Journey of a Forgotten People* (Lischke/McNab 2007), *The Free People* (Payment 2009), and “*Métis*” *Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Andersen 2014).

Indigenous peoples are frequently in the news and public consciousness of Canadians, especially with social crises (such as the housing crisis in Attawapiskat⁴ and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission dedicated to documenting travesties of residential schooling⁵) and increasing resistance to colonialism expressed in vigorous ways (such as the Idle No More movement⁶). However, most Canadians

2 On the history of Red Power see Smith/Warrior 1996; Alfred 2005; Krouse/Howard 2009. On the new social history see Johnson 2011; Cross 2006.

3 Also see Coates 2000; Hulan 2014: 114–121.

4 For one example see Spence 2013.

5 See the website of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

6 See Idle No More.

do not know the difference between Métis, Inuit, and First Nations (Indians), the three groups of Aboriginal Peoples recognized in the 1982 Canadian Constitution (Government of Canada 1982). As the world begins to recognize the injustices of colonization and to embrace Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, artistic production, and spirituality, the scholarly field of Indigenous studies and history is growing exponentially. Close to fifty journals in the field of Indigenous studies exist, and most publish works of history.⁷ In 2008, the newly formed (NAISA) began hosting annual conferences of thousands of scholars, and created a journal (see Native American and Indigenous Studies Association). For years Aboriginal research has been a “Priority Area” for both the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research,⁸ which has helped universities bolster their curriculum on Indigenous content. At least 140 universities and colleges in the United States and Canada offer Indigenous Studies programs (Nelson 2015). The history of Indigenous peoples in Canada can now be found in most university textbooks on Canadian history and in Canadian history courses. Most history departments have specialized courses in Indigenous history and the rise of Native Studies or Indigenous Studies as a discipline in Canada is well underway (Champagne/Strauss 2002; Kidwell 2005).

Metis history is a different story. No journal is devoted to Metis studies, though one is devoted to Inuit and specialized tribal journals exist for Iroquoians, Anishinaabe, Cherokees, and Hawaiians.⁹ In Canada, Metis studies courses can be found at the universities of Athabasca, Alberta, and Manitoba.¹⁰ The University of Northern

7 The most established are *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* (since 1974), *American Indian Quarterly* (since 1974), *Wicazo Sa Review* (since 1985), and *Journal of Indigenous Studies* (since 1989).

8 See SSHRC program policies: http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/priority_areas-domaines_prioritaires/index-eng.aspx and <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/43630.html> (both accessed March 30, 2015).

9 *Études Inuit Studies* (since 1977), <https://www.etudes-inuit-studies.ulaval.ca/en> (accessed March 30, 2015); *Iroquoia* (since 1965), http://www.iroquoia.org/iroquoia_journal.php (accessed March 30, 2015); *Oshkaabewis Native Journal* (since 1979), <http://www.bemidjistate.edu/airc/oshkaabewis/> (accessed March 30, 2015); *Journal of Cherokee Studies* (since 1976), http://www.cherokeemuseum.org/html/join_journal.html (accessed March 30, 2015); *Hūlilī: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being* (since 2005), <http://www.ksbe.edu/spi/hulili/> (accessed March 30, 2015).

10 Athabasca has one: INST 370 “The Métis” (Athabasca University). Alberta has three courses: two in the Faculty of Native Studies and one in the Department of History and Classics: NS370 “The Métis: The Emergence of a People” (University of Alberta: Native Studies) and NS 372 “Métis Politics” and HIST 460 B1 “Metis Ethnogenesis” (University of Alberta: History). Manitoba has one: NATV 2020 “The Metis of Canada” and NATV 4210 “Seminar in Contemporary and Historical Metis Issues” (University of Manitoba).

British Columbia offers a Certificate in Métis Studies (with four Metis courses on offer, University of Northern British Columbia). All of these courses are in Indigenous studies programs, except for one at Alberta in History and one at Athabasca cross-listed in History. The University of Ottawa offers one Metis course in Geography, cross-listed in Aboriginal Studies.¹¹ We see that Metis studies are slowly making their way into programs in Indigenous studies in Canada, but Metis history courses are rare.

Carolyn Podruchny had to fight hard to create a fourth-year Metis history course in her home department of History at York University (known for its focus on social and cultural history and a dedication to historical justice and political activism).¹² York has two other courses on Metis studies in the Department of Race, Ethnicity, and Indigeneity.¹³ Carolyn's new course, offered for the first time September 2014 to April 2015, was capped at eighteen students, and attracted four Metis students, and one First Nations student. It inspired several students to study their Indigenous family histories and four students to apply to Master's programs to extend their studies of Metis history.

Finding Space In Between

When Indigenous history began to explode in the 1970s, Metis history failed to keep up, mainly because their histories, especially in the 20th century, remained hidden or disowned. Like all Indigenous peoples, Metis people faced tremendous prejudice from non-Indigenous Canadian settlers and were generally excluded from their communities. In addition, although many Metis people lived as neighbours with First Nations kin, they sometimes faced exclusion from these communities as well, especially reserves inhabited by "status" Indians.¹⁴ Growing up northwest of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Metis Elder Maria Campbell explains:

there were our Indian relatives on the nearby reserves. There was never much love lost between Indians and Halfbreeds.¹⁵ They were completely different from us [...]. We all went to the Indian Sundances and special gatherings, but somehow we never fitted in.

11 GEG 3309B/EAS 3301B "Social Landscape of Metis Communities" (University of Ottawa).

12 HIST 4250 "Metis History in North America" (York University (a)).

13 MIST 3310 "Louis Riel and Metis Issues in North America" and HUMA/MIST 4200 "Metis Identities, Families and Issues in Canada" (York University (b)).

14 "Status" Indian is a legal identity of an Aboriginal person in Canada who qualifies under the 1876 Indian Act (comprising complex regulations).

15 "Halfbreed" is an historical term for Metis that is usually pejorative today, but is being reclaimed by some Metis people.

We were always the poor relatives [...]. They laughed and scorned us [...]. They were prejudiced, but because we were kin they came to visit and our people treated them with respect (Campbell 1973: 25).

Many Metis families tried to hide their heritage and pass for either Euro-Canadians or First Nations. Throughout the 20th century people had been shedding their Metis identity for many reasons, but it often boiled down to access to resources. If you could pass for First Nations, it was better to do so because you could try to access treaty rights. If you could pass for Euro-Canadian you avoided racial discrimination. Rick Hardy, the former president of the Métis Association of the Northwest Territories, explained in the mid-1970s that being Metis meant you belonged to neither White nor Indian societies:

White and Indian accepting you on the surface, but rejecting you from the heart and soul [...] for a while we did what we thought was a smart thing: when with the Whites, we were White; when the Indian came, we became Indian, but this could only go on for so long without splitting ourselves apart trying to be two people.¹⁶

It took a great deal of political lobbying to promote Metis as a legitimate political entity and the category of Metis as an Aboriginal people barely made it into the 1982 Canadian constitution (Weinstein 2007: 44–5; Pulla 2013: 417).

But things took a different turn when Metis rights cases went to court. The first recognition of Metis legal rights only came in the 2003 Powley decision. In 1993 in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, father and son Steve and Roddy Powley shot a moose out of season. The Supreme Court of Canada in 2003 recognized that they had an Aboriginal right to hunt and should not be subject to Ontario game laws. The court also laid out the defining criteria for Metis people as self-identification, an ancestral connection to an historic Métis community, and acceptance by a Métis community. The courts also stated that

[t]he term Métis in s. 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 does not encompass all individuals with mixed Indian and European heritage; rather, it refers to distinctive peoples who, in addition to their mixed ancestry, developed their own customs, and recognizable group identity separate from their Indian or Inuit and European forebears (Powley 2003).

More people started to take pride in their Metis heritage and formally claim Metis status. But the terms laid out in the Powley case, which were adopted from the Métis National Council (MNC), exclude many people. The MNC asserts that “The Métis emerged as a distinct people or nation in the historic Northwest during the course of

16 Rick Hardy told this to the Thomas Berger Inquiry (1974–77), Métis and Non-Status Indian Constitutional Review Commission (1981), 7, as cited by Weinstein 2007: 22.

the 18th and 19th centuries. The area is now known as the ‘historic Métis Homeland,’ which includes the 3 Prairie Provinces and extends into Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and the northern United States.” The MNC goes on to imply that Aboriginal title to Metis land only exists where scrip¹⁷ was issued, which was in Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Métis National Council).¹⁸ This message is reinforced in the 2013 case *Manitoba Metis Federation v. Canada*,¹⁹ where the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that the Canadian government cheated Metis people out of the resources they were guaranteed in the 1870 Manitoba Act, which guaranteed land to Metis residents of the area and their children.²⁰ Those recognized as Metis with roots to the Red River settlement in Manitoba will have access to a substantial settlement. The places in which one’s Metis ancestors lived is now of the utmost importance for many Metis people today.

Another recent court case, *Daniels v. Canada*, may further change the landscape for Metis people. The Federal Court of Canada, two rungs below the Supreme Court, has asserted that Metis people can claim federal benefits outlined in the Indian Act.²¹ Metis in this case are not tied to a particular region, but rather the label refers to “the mixed ancestry descendants of the fur trade era” although most will be found west of southern Ontario.²² All of these court cases and political wheelings and dealings have led to an identity crisis for many people. Jesse Thistle is half Metis and half Cree. He cannot legally be both. He considered claiming Indian status to access scholarships. But researching his Metis identity gave him pride and changed his life. Although his mother’s side of the family (the Morrisettes) can trace their lineage to the Red River settlement, his father’s side of the family is based in eastern Ontario, along the Quebec border, in the Temiskaming region, far outside what the MNC denotes as the “Historic Metis Homeland.” At York University Jesse created his own undergraduate program, with Carolyn’s help, to focus on Metis history, to understand all the branches of his own family, as well as to study the ways in which Metis people don’t fit into a standard geography of firmly demarked places. More people

17 Scrip, either as land or money, was offered by the Canadian federal government to Metis families to compensate them for loss of Aboriginal title and for grievances caused by colonialism and dispossession.

18 On scrip see Tough/McGregor 2007.

19 *Manitoba Metis Federation Inc v. Canada*, 2013 SCC 14 [2013] 1 S.C.R. 623, <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/12888/index.do> (accessed April 6, 2015).

20 See s. 31, Manitoba Act, 1870, http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Canada/English/ma_1870.html (accessed April 6, 2015).

21 *Daniels v. Canada*, 2013 FC 6 [2013] 2 FCR 268, <http://www.canlii.org/en/ca/fct/doc/2013/2013fc6/2013fc6.html> (accessed April 6, 2013).

22 *Ibid.*, V [93] and [95]. Also see VI B, [124] – [130].

like Jesse are learning about their identities and family histories in a wide variety of geographic contexts.

Occupying Space and Creating Place: A Bloody Process

The Metis emerged as a people on the move. Descended from European fur trading fathers and Indigenous mothers, they often grew up travelling the thousands of kilometers of fur trade routes, moving among far-flung fur trade posts and Indigenous encampments. They learned from their mothers how to travel cyclically to harvest resources from the land (Foster 1994; Van Kirk 1980; Brown 1980). When Metis people married one another and formed distinct communities, they occupied three geographical spaces: one was the space of their ethnogenesis – the waterways and boreal forests of their ancestors, where they continued to work in the fur trade. The second was fertile river valleys, where they settled to farm in long lots fronting the rivers (Ens 1996). But even these farmers did not root themselves to a single place. Many Metis began to travel out onto the plains to hunt bison in the spring and summer. First in small groups or brigades, they eventually created massive hunting parties of a thousand or more people, and developed an intricate social structure with a captain and a long list of rules. As brigades moved farther away from the fertile river valleys chasing the bison, parts of the brigades started wintering on the plains, extending the geographic reach of Metis communities (Macdougall/St-Onge 2013).

What made their occupation of geographic space so interesting is that Metis people maintained close kin ties with their families who were hundreds and even thousands of kilometers away. And they maintained these ties through constant travel. Their places were not contiguous – they did not develop a solid landmass of a homeland. The edges are hard to pin down, and there is no centre (Macdougall/ Podruchny/St-Onge 2012). The metaphor of a geography of blood can be used to represent the connectedness of kin across a vast region. In her award-winning book, *A Geography of Blood*, Candace Savage used the metaphor to underscore the tragedy of Metis history since the failed resistances to Canadian colonialism in the late 19th century (Savage 2012). Focused on understanding the landscape of the small village of Eastend in the Cypress Hills in southern Saskatchewan, Savage shows how the tragic history of Metis dispossession can be uncovered in prairie landscapes, under layers of earth, artifacts, and fossils, as well as in community museums, local stories, and bonds of families. In seeking to uncover the stories from deep time embedded in the striations visible in the hills' cutouts and coulees, she outlines the bloody tale. Many generations of bison hunters came to an abrupt end when Euro-Canadian and American newcomers arrived, whose insatiable demand for meat and hides decimated the millions-strong bison herds, and whose insatiable demand for land

carved up the prairies into neat, uniform squares of property, ready to be ploughed into submission by European refugees. The Indigenous peoples of the Cypress Hills were dispossessed of their livelihood and homes, pushed onto reserves and into farming, and starved almost to extinction themselves.

Savage's book, and the magnificent work of Keith Basso on the storied places of the Western Apache in the American southwest (Basso 1996), inspired Carolyn to try the method of fieldwork for historical research – traveling over the land, bringing students and other scholars with her, and exploring stories embedded in places. For a few years she has been studying the material culture of Metis bison brigades, and travelled to Alberta, Montana, and Idaho following their winter encampments. When Carolyn met Jesse, they decided to employ this method in Saskatchewan while visiting Jesse's mother, aunt, and other relatives, meeting them in Metis country, and taking them along to visit the sites of Metis history. When they travelled across the land, they harvested stories at each locale, and they found that visiting the places jogged historical memories. They discovered that places gave them stories.

Reclaiming Morrisette Family History

Jesse is a descendant of the Metis family of Morrisette on his mother's side, and the Metis family of Mackenzie on his father's. Although both family histories have shaped Jesse's life profoundly, here we explore the story of his mother's family. In 1979 Jesse's maternal grandfather, Jeremie Morrisette, sent Jesse and his two brothers away from their mother in Saskatchewan to live with their father in Toronto. Jesse was only three years old, and his brothers four and five. Jesse's mother was very young, and grandfather Jeremie thought the children would be better off with their father, who he did not realize was an addict. After being stranded alone in a downtown apartment, begging anyone for food, the children were taken into custody by the Catholic Children's Aid Society. Jesse's brothers, who remember these terrible months, have to this day never told Jesse what happened next, but Jesse's father's parents found them and raised them as their own. The only thing Jesse remembers from his early years is his maternal grandfather's parting words: "Don't tell them you're Metis or they'll hang you." This chilling message, he was to later learn, referred to the experience of their cousin, Metis leader Louis Riel, who was hung by the Canadian government in 1885, they say for murder, but really because he led two resistances against the colonial efforts of Canada in the northwest – a semi-successful one in Manitoba, and a tragic failure in Saskatchewan. Even though 94 years had passed since Riel was hung, Jesse's grandfather was still petrified of following in Riel's footsteps.

Jesse's life became a ripple in an ocean of trauma that has crippled his family since 1885. Jesse spent many homeless years addicted and trapped in a revolving door of crime and incarceration. Eventually he got clean, and found his way to university. His lifeline was trying to understand his place in the world, his personal history, how he ended up in his situation. His first year as an undergraduate student was tough. He exhaustively worked the twelve steps of Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous (AA) trying to stay sober, but he could not rid himself of his inner rage that had been with him since childhood. His experience in his new history courses gave him the idea to combine AA's principles with historic research. AA requires that addicts compile a moral inventory, and understand, accept, and forgive their own past behavior (Wilson/Smith 2002: 59). Jesse decided he needed to do this for his whole family, past and present. By his second year of university, he started compiling his family's genealogy, and retrofit a moral inventory on it. He was astounded by the results: he could clearly see a long history of intergenerational trauma. It helped him forgive his parents for abandoning him, and forgive his grandparents for losing faith in his parents. And he starting looking back even further.

Intergenerational trauma is borne out of collective moments of extreme physical, social, and cultural violence. For the Metis this began in the 1869/70 resistance to Canadian colonization in the Red River settlement in Manitoba, and reaches its zenith in 1885 during the resistance at Batoche, Saskatchewan, when the Canadian government sent 5,000 troops to squash 400 Metis and Cree freedom fighters. Those who witnessed the terrible battles in which Metis men, women, and children were slaughtered and homes and villages looted and burned became the carrier generation for this trauma, and they passed it on to their offspring (Novak/Rodseth 2006: 10). In her ground-breaking work with the Lakota, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart has shown that intergenerational trauma becomes cumulative over the generations, and assumes a collective quality that is passed down (Yellow Horse Brave Heart 1998: 288). We see this for the Metis in general, and the Morrisette family in particular.

The ten witnesses of extreme trauma at Batoche include Jesse's great-grandfather, St. Pierre, a nine-year-old junior reconnaissance and munitions envoy. St. Pierre's mother and father, Philomene Berard and Francois Arcand, both fought at Batoche.²³ Thirteen-year-old Cecile Montour, Jesse's great-grandmother, watched two of her first cousins die in 1885, and after the conflict watched her father, Abraham Montour, apprehended and taken to Regina for prosecution. Cecile's mother, Marie Page, was also a Batoche veteran.²⁴ Jesse's great-grandfather Geordie Morrisette

23 Interview, Jesse Thistle & Carolyn Podruchny with Yvonne Richer-Morrisette & Blanche Morrisette, Poundmaker Reserve, Saskatchewan, June 21, 2013.

24 Interview, Jesse Thistle & Carolyn Podruchny with Yvonne Richer-Morrisette & Blanche Morrisette, Wanuskewin, Saskatchewan, June 22, 2013.

never spoke of his role at Batoche but surely fought and suffered throughout his life from battle trauma.²⁵ His wife, Marianne Morrisette nee Ledoux, was Louis Riel's cousin, cook, friend, and part of his close inner circle.²⁶ Marianne fought alongside her father Joseph Ledoux – a member of Phillip Garnot's Metis squadron – and her mother, Isabelle Mistawasis-Belanger, made bullets with her daughter Marianne as early as 1883 and cooked for the warriors at Batoche.²⁷ The large majority of these participants' nuclear, extended, and fictive kin fought at Batoche.

In summer 2014, Jesse travelled to Saskatchewan without Carolyn, and discovered a whole new layer of historical memories. Even though Jesse's family loves Carolyn and has adopted her as a relative, she still represents the colonizing institution of the university. What Jesse learned without Carolyn as an intimidating presence gave them both a new appreciation about why Metis people had been hidden from history. Jesse asked his uncle Louis Arcand directly if it was difficult to speak with his father or his older kin about Batoche or if they collectively suffered from trauma throughout their lives. He bluntly replied:

[T]hey [only] talked about it between each other [...] [St. Pierre] was a rebel fighter [...]. Oh he fought against the government and he fought everything [...] they were just a bunch of fighting people, they fought [the government] all the time.²⁸

Bernadette Berrone nee Morrisette (the oldest of Jesse's mother's siblings) – and a generation (twenty years) older than Jesse's mother and aunt Yvonne – recalls how St. Pierre, his brothers, and other veterans of Batoche always tried to avoid talking about 1885 during the 1930s with their children:

[T]hose people [who fought in 1885] wouldn't talk around the kids [...]. My Dad and all them and they would say "GO, GO PLAY OUTSIDE, this is not your place." [T]hey were trying to shield us. We couldn't [listen] when I was younger [...]. [T]hey started to talk about it a generation later [...]. But they were still so afraid in my time [40 years after

25 Interview, Connie Regnier with Alexina Newman, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, July 20, 1982, The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture: Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research, [http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/00990.Newman,Alexina%20\(Connie%20Regnier\).pdf](http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/00990.Newman,Alexina%20(Connie%20Regnier).pdf) (accessed April 6, 2015).

26 John Cuthand, "A Descendant of Riel" *New Breed* (January 1976: 4–5), 5, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/04224.1976%20January.pdf> (accessed April 6, 2015) and "Morcette, Mrs. George cousin of Riel near 101 mark" *Leader Post* [Regina, Saskatchewan newspaper] (October 27, 1960), 3.

27 Interview, Jesse Thistle & Carolyn Podruchny with Yvonne Richer-Morrisette & Blanche Morrisette, Poundmaker Reserve, Saskatchewan, June 21, 2013.

28 Interview, Jesse Thistle, Blanche Morrisette & Yvonne Richer-Morrisette with Louis Arcand, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2014.

the resistance] [...] [and] it affected me, I remember when I went back in 1971 and took upgrading school to upgrade my education, they were asking questions about that [the Rebellion] and I didn't really want to answer [...]. I was afraid you see, I think that's why we were taught to talk the pocket language [...]. To avoid that [talking about the Resistance] [...]. Oh no, I didn't hear nothing. [Bernadette says with her hands up like if she was being questioned by police].²⁹

This was the first we had heard of a “pocket language.” Revealing how Jesse's Metis relatives kept their histories secret marked a step of their trust in Jesse, and their realization that it is time to reveal their pasts. The society of secrecy might be slowly opening up. Jesse's cousin Maria Campbell – Geordie's and Marianne's grand-niece – talks about how the pocket language was used to confound and confuse authorities and keep the Metis silent. She explains:

[When] cases came up in court [at the house of a local Park valley Resident] no evidence could be given. The half-breeds needed interpreters so if an English-French interpreter was called they would say that they talked only in Cree and when a Cree speaker was brought in it was vice versa. By the time the stories were translated, they were so mixed up that the case was closed (Campbell 1973: 69).

Jesse had heard the story of how Jesse's great-grandmother Marianne Ledoux nee Morrisette was scared to speak with media.³⁰ In 1960 Marianne went to see the rope that had hung her cousin Louis Riel at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) barracks in Regina. In a 1976 article in *New Breed* magazine John Cuthand relates:

[Marianne] who lived to be one hundred and seven years old, cooked for Riel in the Metis Camp at Batoche and at one time visited the R.C.M.P barracks in Regina to see the rope that hung her cousin Riel. Upon being shown the rope she immediately handed it to an accompanying R.C.M.P officer and said, 'Since you hung my cousin you might as well hang me too.' The flabbergasted [sic] R.C.M.P officer had nothing to say. This was said by a spry one hundred and one year old 'militant' (Cuthand 1976: 5).

Despite Marianne's mustered bravado that caught media attention, Marianne's granddaughter and live-in caretaker for twenty-eight years, Martha Smith, captures the real fear her grandmother carried throughout her life in Marianne's reaction to an invitation she received to be on CBC television after her visit in Regina:

29 Interview, Jesse Thistle, Blanche Morrisette & Yvonne Richer-Morrisette with Bernadette Berrone, Debden, Saskatchewan, June 21, 2014.

30 Interview, Jesse Thistle and Carolyn Podruchny with Martha Smith, Park Valley, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2013.

They came to the house to put her [Marianne] on the show 'Front Page Challenge' after they saw her in the [newspaper] *The Leader Post*. That was a show on CBC. She refused to go on the show because she said 'They hung Cousin Riel they are not going to hang me too.' So she would not go.³¹

Martha taught us how sincerely many Metis feared being executed as had their relative Riel. Alcide Morrisette, Jesse's mother's oldest brother, explained the same sentiment to Jesse in summer 2014:

Kokum [Grandmother] was afraid to talk about the rebellion [...] because she knew everything, she was an inquisitive, smart person. [The authorities] would ask her a question and instead, if she revealed what she knew, then they would find out she was a talker, or someone who knew stuff, so she would always give an elusive answer instead [...]. So she avoided from saying the right thing because they would know, [and she felt] they would capture her and put her in jail [...]. That's how she withheld information to get away [...]. Yes, she was a very smart old lady, she was – yes.³²

Confirming Marianne's traumatic silence, Martha Smith underscores why Marianne was reluctant to talk: "She didn't speak of the rebellion that was taboo. Mom and her would speak, but with us young people – No."³³ Leonard Smith, Martha's husband and Marianne's grandson-in-law, articulates Marianne's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by highlighting the paranoia she suffered until she died: "She was always worried that they were gonna get her. Cause they hung a lot of her relatives and people that she knew, so she always thought that they was looking for her too. She was always scared."³⁴ Vital Morrisette, Marianne's running mate, according to Alcide, was likewise traumatized for life as he never did move away from his hiding spot, and throughout his childhood Alcide remembers it being nearly impossible to get his great-uncle or grandmother to talk about Batoche:

White Fish Lake and that's where they built their shacks [...]. [Vital] was back down there in the bush. Where you couldn't drive in there, all you could do is ride a horse [...]. That's where he lived. Oh he lived there for quite a while. As long as I knew him [...]. Yeah and that's 70 years ago now that I was told this stuff. Well I learnt how to talk and I was always

31 Interview, Jesse Thistle and Carolyn Podruchny with Martha Smith, Park Valley, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2013.

32 Interview, Jesse Thistle, Blanche Morrisette & Yvonne Richer-Morrisette with Alcide Morrisette & Paulette Morrisette, Beardy's Reservation, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2014.

33 Interview, Jesse Thistle and Carolyn Podruchny with Martha Smith, Park Valley, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2013.

34 Interview, Jesse Thistle and Carolyn Podruchny with Leonard Smith, Park Valley, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2013.

questioning, and I'd ask my grandma and la police [...]. You couldn't get no stories out of them.³⁵

Ed Ledoux also talks about a fear of government reprisals and silence that dominated his family for years after Batoche. Part of their strategy for hiding was to say they had originally come from the United States (and not the Muskeg Lake and Mistawasis reserves), which divided kin and has confused historical researchers ever since.³⁶

In an interview ninety-one years after the Northwest Resistance ended, Alexina cast off the culture of silence by broadcasting her fears, despite the risk: "The ones who fought for their people they're the ones who get shot. I don't care if they come and shoot me. I'm 63 years old [...] so I'll talk to the last that's all!" (Cuthand 1976: 5) Her brother Jeremie Morrisette chose to keep silent about the Morrisette role at Batoche, and passed his PTSD to his children. Among their testimonies, rattled with anxiety, perhaps his sons Leo's and Alcide's are the most compelling. Leo's trauma was revealed to us almost by accident when he was routinely asked if he could play fiddle. He responded:

No. I tried [playing the] fiddle [but can't]. I have too much emotional trauma in my life I just can't, I don't have much to do with music at all [...]. [I carry trauma from my childhood] and seeing how they screwed up all the time it was just too much [...].³⁷

Just as compelling is Alcide's admission. He had been diagnosed with terminal cancer in December 2013. When Jesse interviewed him at his home in June 2014, Jesse asked him why he was finally sharing with outsiders. He quietly responded: "I am old enough now if they know, for them to see [...] I'm not scared anymore; I'm too old to be scared."³⁸ We expect that thousands more accounts of the trauma of Batoche and its aftermath exist as they were passed down *en masse* to Metis descendants (Eyerman 2004: 162).

The execution of Louis Riel and the collapse of the 1885 Resistance marked a significant blow to Metis sovereignty in the northwest. The ten Morrisette witnesses of the downfall of their nation would be haunted by the collective trauma for the rest of their lives. Those who survived rarely spoke of the ordeal and their pain. Their subsequent dispossessions, demoralization, and substance abuses are eloquently

35 Interview, Jesse Thistle, Blanche Morrisette & Yvonne Richer-Morrisette with Alcide Morrisette & Paulette Morrisette, Beardsy's Reservation, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2014.

36 Interview, Jesse Thistle & Blanche Morrisette and Ed Ledoux, Mistawasis Reservation, Saskatchewan, July 2, 2014.

37 Interview, Jesse Thistle, Blanche Morrisette & Yvonne Richer-Morrisette with Leo Morrisette, Wrixson, Saskatchewan, June 25, 2014.

38 Interview, Jesse Thistle, Blanche Morrisette & Yvonne Richer-Morrisette with Alcide Morrisette & Paulette Morrisette, Beardsy's Reservation, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2014.

detailed in Maria Campbell's powerful memoir *Half-breed* (Campbell 1973: 7–12). Various levels of government actively scattered Metis families so that they could not rely on kin networks (Dickason/Newbigging 2010: 225). These directed dispersal efforts forced some Metis to change their names; others fled south to Montana, north to the Mackenzie River area, and even as far east as Abitibi, Ontario; and a few hid among relatives in nearby reserves. Some of them were able to return to the area after a generation or two, take homesteads, or live along road allowances (Campbell 1973: 7–12). The unlucky ones ended up on forced labour camps, ironically called “experimental farms.”³⁹ The effects were widespread and clear: the cohesive Metis carrier group could not adequately grieve the trauma of 1885 and most, if not all, lost their homes and resources, and eventually their pride and dignity (Dickason/Newbigging 2010: 225). Martha Smith explains the effects of this one-two punch:

[T]he Métis were not allowed to have a lot of stuff after the rebellion. It was kind of like they weren't allowed anything. [They lost the] road-houses or whatever the stopping houses, the stopping places, that after the rebellion that was taken away from them [...] before [that] they were the storeowners. They were the ones who were among the rivers [...]. They were the wealthy ones that provided for the immigrants and provided for everything, they were the store keepers and when that was all gone then all they became the labor force for the incoming immigrants and the homesteaders.⁴⁰

Financially limited in almost every way, within one generation Metis people lost their wealth, prestige, social standing, and respect. Yvonne Richer-Morrisette recounts the near-caste milieu she faced growing up:

Michifs [term for French-descended Metis] were at the very bottom and then you had the Half-Breeds, then you had the Indians, then white immigrants, then French whites, and then English. In all of the social ladders the Michifs were the ones that were looked down upon the most. We had the biggest oppression. I think – in all – because you had it from everywhere [...]. When we were going to school we didn't want anybody to know where we lived or that we were Michif.⁴¹

This was the highly stratified and fearful world that Jeremie Morrisette and Nancy Arcand had inherited from their carrier parents, and which they bequeathed to their children, and this was the world that Jesse was born into in 1976. Within three years

39 Personal communications, Nicholas Vrooman, outside the remains of a forced labour camp near Lebret, Saskatchewan, June 19, 2013, and Maria Campbell, St. Louis, Saskatchewan, June 25, 2013. Also see Barron 1990.

40 Interview, Jesse Thistle and Carolyn Podruchny with Martha Smith, Park Valley, Saskatchewan, June 23, 2013.

41 Interview, Jesse Thistle and Carolyn Podruchny with Yvonne Richer-Morrisette and Blanche Morrisette, Wanuskewin, Saskatchewan, June 22, 2013.

of his birth the bonds of *wahkootowin* (Macdougall 2010: 129), helping each other in a good way, that had woven the Morrisette Sash together for over 250 years finally unraveled and Jesse and his brothers, along with many other cousins, were placed into adoption. The Morrisette family was crushed under the weight of so many unresolved traumatic years.

Conclusion

By looking at historiography, community and not belonging, creating space and place, and the example of the Morrisette family reclaiming their voice and place in Canadian history, we have shown that Metis people are coming out of the woodwork, standing up, speaking out, and taking their place as part of Canadian history and society. It is a difficult, bloody process, with people being hurt along the way and others jostling for positions of power and profit, especially in a shifting landscape of land and rights claims, but justice is prevailing. It takes Metis people themselves to stand up and tell their histories. They need to do this to bring it out of the background. The more individual Metis people that tell their stories, the more we can all learn about how Metis people created places for themselves in the land that became Canada, and the more they will secure a place for themselves in Canada's history. They are no longer the forgotten people.

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