

**RECLAIMING THE RED RIVER:
CREATING MÉTIS CULTURAL SPACES IN WINNIPEG**

by

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Abstract

Urban spaces are an increasingly common indigenous reality, and while urban spaces often involve great social and geographic distances from traditional communities, many urban populations have built vibrant communities in cities. This thesis will examine the creation of Métis cultural spaces in Winnipeg, Manitoba, as a community building strategy. It is situated in thirteen in-depth interviews with Métis community builders conducted in Winnipeg over the Summer of 2008. The Winnipeg Metis community is rhizomatic in makeup, situated not in geographic locations, but in the networks of instantaneous and spontaneous social interaction of community members and institutions—elders, political organizations and governance structures. Rhizomatic space is a form of social organization, which emerges out of everyday social life, and because it is only observable during the brief instances of human interaction, it is nearly invisible to outsiders and thus difficult to colonize. It is also a primary means by which Métis people are reclaiming space in their traditional homeland on the Red River. This paper theorizes an alternative tactic to resistance through a decentered form of political organization, grounded in the community and its organic institutions. It proposes that the everyday creation of social and cultural spaces in urban centres is an effective way to build urban indigenous communities with minimal interference or involvement of the State, and that this develops more or less organically without the need for bureaucratic oversight. The paper concludes that the everyday creation of rhizomatic space is a highly effective means of community building and resistance.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Métis nation is like a sleeping giant, slowly waking from a hundred-year slumber. Most Métis went underground for nearly a century following violent military invasions of our territory by the Canadian State in the 1870s and 1880s. The nation kept quiet because the dispersion of the Métis people allowed the State to refuse recognition of the Métis as a collective entity—a claim that wasn't possible when the Métis were politically and militarily asserting this reality in the nineteenth century.

Only now are Métis realizing our collective potential to reclaim the spaces, identities, and political autonomy taken from us over the past 120 years. This empowerment is due in no small part to the growing awareness of being Métis among Métis people as well as the increasing activism of Métis individuals and political organizations. The Métis nation is, numerically speaking, the largest indigenous nation in the jurisdiction claimed by Canada—in the 2006 Census count, 389 785 people identified themselves as Métis¹, and over two thirds of this number live in urban areas.²

Statistics Canada reports that there has been a substantial increase of people identifying as Métis over the last two decades (nearly doubling since the 1996 Census), and that this can be attributed to an increased identification with the Métis culture and its representative political organizations, as well as high rates of fertility:

¹ This number is based on self-identification and may include many indigenous people who identify as “mixed-blood non-Status” but do not claim to belong to the Métis nation. Métis in this sense is commonly used to access State resources, being non-Status can make this difficult otherwise, so in many cases Métis is used as a catch-all term for individuals seeking state-recognition.

² Statistics Canada, *Métis in Canada: Selected Findings of the 2006 Census*, Linda Gionet, Open-file report in Canadian Social Trends. Ottawa, 2009, 20.

Not all of the growth can be attributed to demographic factors. Increased awareness of Métis issues coming from court cases related to Métis rights, and constitutional discussions, as well as better enumeration of Métis communities have contributed to the increase in the population identifying as Métis.³

Despite this rapid growth of Métis identification and political activism, Métis people also face many challenges unique to our circumstances. Unlike most other indigenous nations, being Métis almost necessarily involves being non-Status. Having been ‘externalized from Indianness’ like other non-Status nations and communities, the Métis nation is left with the responsibility of demonstrating a long-standing and historic relationship with the Canadian State in order to gain access to the same State resources given to Status First Nations.⁴ Additionally, the Métis in Manitoba are also one of the few indigenous nations that have no State-recognized land-base over which they have some measure of governing authority. Métis self-governance faces the same challenge as other indigenous nations: to have the entirety of their traditional land-base recognized. However, unlike officially recognized Indian bands, the Métis in Manitoba lack a smaller, recognized reserve territory in which political authority currently exists, and can work as a starting point for indigenous governance.

In facing all of these challenges, traditional Métis communities are the cornerstones of nation-building efforts and provide the social and cultural resources to develop the potential for community (and national) self-determination. By far the largest Métis community is situated in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Numbering over 40,000 people⁵, Winnipeg is described by one research

³ Statistics Canada, “Métis” under “Aboriginal People of Canada, 2001 Census,” <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/abor/groups2.cfm> (accessed December 30, 2008).

⁴ Bonita Lawrence, *“Real Indians” and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), Page 88.

⁵ Statistics Canada 2009: 21.

participant as “the Métis capital of Canada.”⁶ It can be considered a vibrant home base for Métis people not simply because of the sheer size of the Métis community, but also because it is home to hundreds of community organizations, providing an array of Métis-specific gathering points for Métis people to meet and interact with one another.

Winnipeg is home to the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), the largest and most active Métis political organization in the province and quite possibly Canada; eleven friendship centres that house community events and gatherings as well as provide social services to community members⁷; there are also innumerable smaller and less formally constituted Métis and indigenous community gathering spots that function through the support and participation of local community members. Often these community spaces are created by and through the kinship networks of Métis families within the city. These networks exist without government funding and paid staff, relying instead on direct community initiative and participation.

Urban spaces are an increasingly common Métis reality, and while urban spaces often involve great social and geographic distances from traditional communities, urban Métis have built vibrant communities in the city. This thesis will examine the creation of Métis cultural spaces in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the role of these spaces in community building. The Winnipeg Métis community is rhizomatic in makeup, situated not in specific geographic locations, but in the networks of social interaction of community members and institutions. Rhizomatic space is a form of social organization that emerges out of everyday social life, and because it is only observable during the brief instances of human interaction, it remains hidden from outsiders and those who would colonize it. Using this rhizomatic form of social

⁶ Evan, interview with author, August 14, 2008.

⁷ Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres, “History,” http://mac.mb.ca/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7&Itemid=28 (Accessed December 30, 2008).

organization, Métis are reclaiming space in their traditional homeland on the Red River. It is this form of everyday rhizomatic social organization that leads to the creation of social and cultural spaces in urban centres, and it is an effective way to build urban indigenous communities with minimal interference or involvement of the colonial State. Further, as this thesis will demonstrate, this process develops more or less organically without the need for bureaucratic oversight. The thesis concludes that the everyday creation of rhizomatic space is a highly effective means of community building and resistance.

1.1 Defining Community

The term ‘community’ is an overused and under-defined concept. It is often used to signify a specific group of people in a specific (social) space, who share a common interest or identity. Community in this sense is understood as relational as opposed to geographical.⁸ Situated in person-to-person relationships, communities understood this way, are highly decentered and lack a coherent organizing structure. There is also, Benedict Anderson argues, a modernist tendency to define communities by their bureaucratic administration. In this sense, one’s community is determined by their relationship to their administrators and then reified in the social imagination. Anderson refers to this social formation as *imagined* “because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail, in each the nation is always conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”⁹ Anderson argues that most European-descended nations in the Americas are hardly natural and horizontal, but instead owe their boundaries to the social and geographic

⁸ Graham Crow, "Community." *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Ritzer, George ed. (Blackwell Publishing, 2007).
http://www.blackwellreference.com.proxy.queensu.ca/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781405124331_c_hunk_g97814051243319_ss1-77.

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1991), 7.

borders developed by colonial administrative bureaucracies.¹⁰ This form of community, still alive and well in Canada, tends towards hierarchy—the community is dependent on its relationship to a central body to understand itself.

In this project both understandings will be used to understand the Métis community in Winnipeg, because like all communities, it has tendencies towards both processes. It is a rhizomatic assemblage of Métis people who are interconnected through Métis individuals and spaces, *and* it is also a bureaucratically defined body of people who are the recipient of State-sponsored social services administered via Métis organizations funded to fulfill these tasks. What is the Métis community then? The Métis community can be said to have two opposing impulses. One impulse, harnessed by bureaucratic forces, is to arborescent forms of organization—being visible, coherent, knowable, analyzable. The second impulse is towards the rhizomatic—multidimensional, non-hierarchical, de-centered, incoherent, fluid, hidden.

1.2 The Grid and the Rhizome

A community's arborescent impulse is rooted in the ideal of quantification: translating relationships into a series of points that can be measured and connected on a Grid. The Grid is bounded, having articulated borders that denote an interior and an exterior, which differentiate with as much clarity as possible insiders (community members) and outsiders (Others). Arborescent communities are knowable as their values and variables are rendered visible to those who are designated its managers and overseers. Community representations produced by academics, city planners, policy analysts, census makers and other experts tend to take arborescent form.

¹⁰ Anderson 1991: 52.

Arborescent organization is a method of striation—a process of transformation that turns sporadic and emergent formations into a static Grid capable of being manipulated and controlled. Arborescence is “the most classical and well-reflected, oldest and weariest kind of thought” and it operates on the principle of binary logic: “One that becomes two, then of the two that become four.”¹¹ As the arborescent structure grows, so does its origin, the “One.” The fundamental component of the arborescent structure, or the “root-tree” is that as it grows, so too does its vertical dimension (or hierarchy) become more firmly entrenched. To be known requires that the community’s rhizomes be translated into something that arborescent structures can understand, namely, numbers. Arborescence reduces a community to quantified values as these variables are neat and orderly, and cast aside (scientifically) the ambiguity of everyday life. Without this reductionist impulse, communities would be unintelligible to the root-tree structure and thus unmanageable.

If arborescent representations are how we *know* communities, then, rhizomatic formations are how we *live* communities. How we function as community members requires a different type of representation and a different type of impulse. The *lived* community has a rhizomatic form, which, according to Deleuze and Guattari,

connects any point to any other point, and its traits are necessarily linked to traits of the same nature... The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple... It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather dimensions in motion. It has neither beginning or end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and overflows.¹²

Rhizomes as systems always “in motion” are amenable to the lived experience of community, as it relates to the constant flux of everyday life—changing social relations, changing social spaces,

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 5.

and continual transformations. It has no boundaries as it spreads out to enjoin various community formations, even arborescent ones, to its horizontal expanse across the city.¹³

The rhizomatic community lacks a coherent definition because it is too fluid and fluctuating to define with any coherence. Deleuze and Guattari rely on a series of metaphors to arrive at a formation of rhizomatic definitions. Perhaps the most appropriate metaphor is that of felt production.¹⁴ Unlike fabric, which is woven from intersecting strands of fabric, felt is created by the seemingly random entanglement of individual fibers, a process where there is no weaver of strands, and no central control:

Felt is a supple solid product that proceeds...as an anti-fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers...What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibers. An aggregate of interaction of this kind is no way *homogenous*: it is nevertheless smooth, and contrasts point by point with the space of fabric (it is in principle infinite, open and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor centre; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation).¹⁵

Felt, unlike fabric, is self-producing, its own attraction allows for its formation. Nor are its connections standardized, coherent, or follow a fixed pattern. Like felt, rhizomatic communities are built on the ‘micro-entanglements’ of relationships, a web of human interactions, friendships, and family relations. Rhizomes also shy away from standardizable definitions; those who live in them do not need to define them as these relationships engulf every aspect of their life.

The Winnipeg Métis community is both arborescent and rhizomatic, and these two impulses reproduce and are reliant on one another. Arborescent spaces, while visible and subject

¹² Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 21.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 9.

¹⁴ Felt is also an appropriate metaphor for Métis community given its centrality in the fur trade and in traditional Métis life in general.

¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 475-476.

to more intense State striation and stratification, often protect and support the rhizomes within the community. Simultaneously the rhizomes, as a large and decentralized network, are the foundation on which Arborescent spaces rest. The urban Winnipeg Métis community then, is comprised of these two opposing elements that in their co-existence, constantly transform each other, producing new forms of arborescent organizations and new multidimensional rhizomatic formations. In resisting its opposite, both forms re- and de-striate Métis spaces.

1.3 Building Strong Communities

What makes a Metis community space ‘strong’ differs based on which impulse sets the goals and defines strength. Arborescent impulses drive policy analysts to generate numerical indicators, service targets or other manners of converting perceived experiences into data that can be conceived, manipulated, and managed. Strong arborescent communities are neat and orderly, with conceivable goals, and an identified path to which these goals can be met. They set goals and use quantified indicators to measure these successes. Socio-economic indicators quantify wealth, employment indexes quantify work, and effectiveness is quantified through meeting ‘service’ targets. A strong arborescent community is one that meets its goals. It is also expansive in its striating potential. Arborescence extends in different directions, from its central point, as roots extend from their principle trunk. The arborescent formation extends vertically, in the establishment of clear lines of authority and hierarchy to places of meeting like Métis community centres and adult learning facilities.

Conversely, a strong rhizomatic community is defined by its horizontal connections, and by an inability to be mapped or striated onto the Grid-form of linear logic. This incoherence is not a lack of organization; rather organization is spontaneous and fluid, emerging out of the practicalities of everyday life. Rhizomatic organization is situational and fleeting, as organizations that are too static, striate, becoming arborescent and bureaucratized. Rhizomes are

effective at resisting co-optation and colonization, as they are expansive, transformative and collapsible in order to resist any form of hierarchical impulse that may emerge within the rhizomorphic community. Rhizomes lack institutionalized leaders or single centres of power, but produce situational and temporary authorities, which take the form of elders, grandparents, older cousins, and the like.

1.4 Outline of the Project

This thesis project contains several different lines of thought, which revolve around the two concepts of arborescent and rhizomatic community building. The following chapters will examine the relationship between these forms of organization in different forms of community building; namely in the creation of Métis social spaces, the production of Métis identities, and the practice of Métis community politics. Chapter Two contains an description of the community-based methodology and ethics of research used within this project. It will examine how the information outlined below was gathered and analyzed.

Figure 1.1 is a representation of the relationship between the arborescent and rhizomatic impulses in the Winnipeg Métis community outlined in this project.

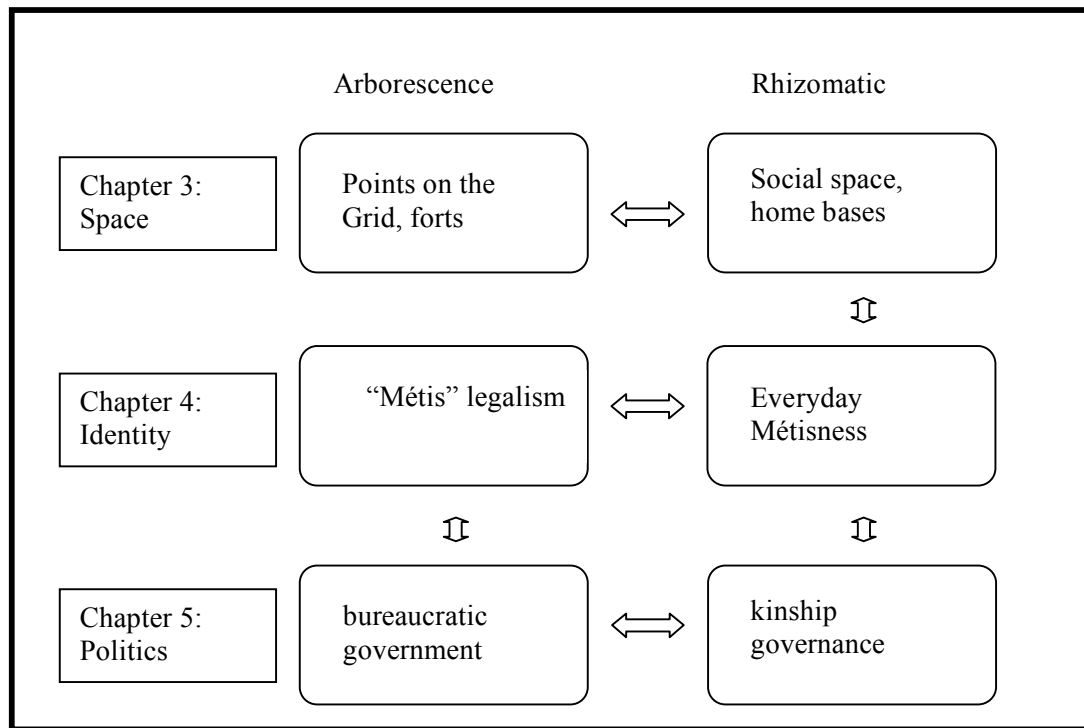


Figure 1.1: Winnipeg Métis Community Model

1.4.1 Space

Chapter Three will examine the relationship between the use of the State’s Grid space as a striating force and the creation of rhizomatic social spaces or *home bases*. These rhizomatic processes can challenge the potential colonizing effects of State-based linear organizations through everyday community interaction. Situated on the boundaries of these two spatial forms are *forts*, which are the spaces that connect the State’s Grid to the *home bases*’ visible manifestation of Métis space, such as the MMF, friendship centres and community agencies.

The Winnipeg Métis community, geographically speaking, is highly decentered; it does not rely exclusively on one space of interaction, such as an ethnic neighbourhood or community centre. Rather it has dispersed network nodes, which form a rhizomatic network of sites of

community relations. Susan Lobo labels these spaces “household gathering spots” that provide “short term or extended housing for many people, health and healing practices and advice, a location for ceremony, emotional and spiritual support, entertainment, and transportation and communication resources. They are also vital spots of linkage with more rural communities and tribal homelands.”¹⁶ Metis space in Winnipeg is not a bounded physical territory like an ethnic neighbourhood or reserve, but a complex, fluid, and fluctuating network of human relationships that constitute a form of social space produced spontaneously and instantaneously through Métis social interaction. This creation of rhizomatic Métis social spaces through everyday community involvement is both reinforced and undermined by arborescent forms of organization, such as the bureaucratic (and often State-sponsored) community agencies. These bureaucratic organizations produce spaces that can be used for community building—like community centres, community housing projects and social service providers—but they tend to produce spaces, or forts, which are almost necessarily visible to the State forces that seek to manage and striate the community for its own colonial ends.

1.4.2 Identity

Chapter Four will examine the relationship between everyday Métis identity and the empty legal-bureaucratic dimension that is produced by community members to deal with each other and the State. Both everyday Métisness and the empty legal dimension of “Métis” are transformative and emergent identity formations, which have the potential to radically alter the lived experience of Métisness. The Métis community in Winnipeg has been fairly successful in forming and articulating its own rhizomatic identities, and has also produced a coherent image of “Métis” that

¹⁶ Susan Lobo, “Urban Clan Mothers: Key Households in Cities.” *American Indian Quarterly* 27 (June 2003), 505.

is presented to outsiders. While this “Métis” identity is nonetheless coherent, no Métis person lives this identity, as it is reflective of legal considerations and bureaucratic interests.

Through the same everyday processes of community life that produce rhizomatic community spaces/home bases, the community generates an everyday Métis identity, which is a relational identity formed through interactions with Métis people, Métis culture and varying organic forms of Métisness. Everyday identity is diverse and rhizomatic, and inhabits the fluid social space of the community, constantly in flux to meet the existing needs. But, because everyday identity is inherently complex and grounded in community existence, it is difficult for outsiders to understand or decipher. The MMF and other Métis organizations have produced a coherent, legal-bureaucratic identity, which can be translated into non-Métis terms with greater ease than the more complex everyday Métisness. However, the reliance on legal-bureaucratic forms of identity to generate legal rights granted by the Canadian State has to some degree reversed this relationship, creating a situation where an “empty” legal-bureaucratic identity is transforming the organic everyday identity of the Métis community in Winnipeg.

1.4.3 Politics

The Fifth Chapter will discuss the relationship between governance and government, and the attempts of the State to replace organic governance with a more easily controlled bureaucratic form of self-government. A key aspect to the development of Métis community in Winnipeg is the relationship between bureaucratic *government* organizations such as the MMF and the grassroots systems of *governance* grounded in kinship networks. The MMF, which is understood to be the Métis government has become an important element of the Métis community in Winnipeg, as it provides a Voice for the Métis people, to represent the community to outsiders. According to MMF President David Chartrand, the key strength of Métis government is designed to give Métis people “a local voice” comprised of “over 28 locals in Winnipeg...that gives them a

collective voice, a voice right from the bottom to the top.”¹⁷ Métis government, in its arborescent orientation, embraces forms of narrowing hierarchy. The role of the government structure is to transform Métis voices into *the* Métis Voice and to transmit the Voice up the hierarchical structure of the MMF and in State-Métis relations. The democratic strength of the Métis community, however, lies in its organic forms of governance and its ability to organize itself without centralized authority. Community events, family gatherings, and cultural observances emerge spontaneously from social spaces in response to rhizomatic needs, and to challenge striation of the State and sometimes even Métis government. This local autonomy faces the constant threat of being submerged, as the Canadian State deals only with approved arborescent organizations, which can speak the common bureaucratic language of the State.

1.5 Creating a Good Relationship between Arborescent and Rhizomatic Community Formations

The Métis community of Winnipeg, Manitoba is healthy and vibrant due largely to a compromise struck between arborescent and rhizomatic forms of community building. However, as the arborescent forms of Métis government receive State resources and therefore corresponding State oversight, arborescent forms of community organization have the potential to dismantle grassroots efforts of community building. To ensure healthy Métis community building continues the reinforcement and reinvigoration of rhizomatic impulses may be necessary. Bureaucratic structures, while assisting in the creation of Métis space, identity and governance, are in their nature technical, hierarchical and authoritarian. Increasing reliance on State resources by these organizations establish the State in Métis community building, in spaces where was previously absent. Given the State’s desire to control and subjugate indigenous people, to dispossess and

¹⁷ David Chartrand, interview with author, 22 August 2008.

capitalize indigenous territories and to assimilate/integrate Métis people into the liberal-capitalist mainstream, the centrality of bureaucratic structures in the production of Métis spaces and identities must be seriously questioned. The development of alternative forms of traditional governance, which are highly democratic and participatory, and which develop a strong relationship to the existing Métis self-government structures can ensure that rhizomatic social organizations remains the primary means of Métis social interaction.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes “the term ‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” because research is “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.”¹⁸ Smith lists the numerous reactions to researchers in her Maori community, and to the deterritorialization of indigenous knowledges for use in the academy:

It galls us that western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples’ claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments.¹⁹

This experience with research is near universal, not just in indigenous communities and nations, but in any marginalized community whose knowledge is collected in the name of research. Smith’s intent is not to write-off the research process entirely, but to acknowledge that research is always to some extent parasitic when conducted for academic purposes. With research, traditional or community knowledges are deterritorialized (removed from their original context) and reterritorialized in the academy as Europeanized knowledge—academic knowledge that often

¹⁸ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 1.

¹⁹ Smith 1999: 1.

takes the form of colonial-like relationships.²⁰ This process of deterritorialization-
reterritorialization usually involves significant personal gain for the researcher (degrees, tenure,
publications). Further, authorship reinforces deterritorialization, by reterritorializing indigenous
knowledges as *belonging to* the researcher.

In this process of deterritorializing local knowledges, Cole Harris describes how research
has the tendency to be removed from the indigenous frameworks that produce these knowledges
in the first place. The research process, he writes “tends to be Eurocentric.”²¹ Such scholarship,
especially those projects which involve historical investigation and the (re)definition of
indigenous concepts “privilege the investigation of imperial texts, enunciations, and systems of
signification. In so doing, [they] expose implicit modes of seeing and of understanding that are
held to infuse and validate colonialism.”²² Harris’ point is that indigenous research must work
within indigenous frameworks and respect indigenous knowledges, lest it produce exactly what it
claims to challenge: deterritorialized colonial relations of power.

2.1 The Use of Theory in Research

While it is generally assumed that theory emerges from research data, Michael Burawoy argues
that theory is the central aspect to any form of ethnographic or participant-based research process.
He states that rather than emerging during research, theory is something we bring with us as
researchers (consciously or not) and it is this theory that allows us to “see” the world in a
particular, often specialized, way.²³ The use of theory in research allows the researcher to connect

²⁰ Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 94 (Winter 2004): 165.

²¹ Harris 2004: 166.

²² Harris 2004: 165.

²³ Michael Burawoy, *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations and One Theoretical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2009), xiii.

the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro’ social forces present in everyday life. This occurs in the form of three levels of dialogue. It starts with a,

dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participants, then embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local and extralocal forces that in turn can be comprehended only through a third, expanding dialogue of theory within itself.²⁴

It is this dialogue of theory that makes the other two dialogues intelligible. The dialogue of theory *with itself* allows the multiple accounts of interviews and participant to be read as consistent and coherent. Theory also allows these experiences to be extended outwards using the local experiences of the research participants and the researcher to understand social processes in other times and spaces, especially when dealing with issues of colonialism and domination. For Burawoy, research involves “locating social processes at the site of research...within a field of social forces.”²⁵ Ultimately, theory is essential:

It guides interventions, it constitutes situated knowledges into social processes, and it locates those social processes in their wider context of determination. Moreover, theory is not something stored up in the academy, but itself becomes an intervention into the world it seeks to comprehend.²⁶

The theoretical framework of the researcher, then is important in structuring, not only what is seen, but also how these experiences are linked into broader, non-local forces, in this instance, the Canadian colonial regime. It is this process which connects the politics of everyday Metis life (the dialogue between participant and researcher) to broader colonial social relations reproduced daily by the practices of the State (the dialogue between local and extra-local forces). It is then, the indigenous focused theories of Taiaiake Alfred, Howard Adams, and others that serve as the starting-point for research, combined with the methodological approaches identified above, all of which advocate research that promotes an agenda of self-determination and decolonization. These

²⁴ Burawoy 2009: 20.

²⁵ Burawoy 2009: 51.

theories are utilized because they are politically congruent with the community and researcher, and because each case described in these works can be linked across time and space to research in contemporary Winnipeg²⁷ For example, Howard Adams' description of the creation of verticality in Saskatchewan Métis politics by government funding in the 1960s and 70s generates insight into the struggle of Winnipeg Métis to navigate government oversight today.

With a theoretical framework operating as a starting-point for research, one must develop a theoretical affinity with the community of study and work towards the development of research that fits with the community's goals. Researchers must also acknowledge that the dominant narratives often used to describe a community's goals, (like being recognized as an Aboriginal people by the Government of Canada) may differ from what individual community members may identify as central goals, such as the development and respect for traditional community governance capacities and self-determination. While there is varying thoughts on what constitutes a particular community's goals, researchers tend towards those spaces that fit within their theoretical framework. That is to say, this project does not attempt to be objective, or be an authoritative voice on Métis issues, but rather to identify the various ways of being and acting Métis as identified by community members, and to use these ideas to build a theory of Métis decolonization based on these values.

In line with this way of thinking, Cole Harris advocates developing research methods that take the "actuality and materiality of colonial experience" as given, and use these experiences and their articulation as the starting-point for research, rather than imposing an existing theoretical framework upon them.²⁸ In response to concerns over a theoretical affinity with the community being studied, Jim Silver avoided questionnaires and instead, asked people themselves: "we

²⁶ Burawoy 2009: 55.

²⁷ Burawoy 2009: 49-50.

attempted to uncover the culture's internal perceptions of Aboriginal people's urban experience by asking Aboriginal people themselves." Silver also noted how rarely these internal perceptions expressed at the community level coincide with dominant interpretations of indigeneity.²⁹

What Smith, Silver, Harris, and others call for then is the development of community-centered research. In this model, the ultimate goals of the researcher are the same as the goals of the community participating in research. In the indigenous case, this goal is more often than not a goal of self-determination, autonomy, and decolonization.³⁰ This aspiration can only be obtained by "privileging indigenous values, attitudes and practices" and a "community-based approach" to the conduct and dissemination of research.³¹ Only this level of respect for the community will counter the deterritorializing tendency of research. Community-based research allows community knowledge, inevitably reterritorialized as academic output to stay reflective of indigenous principles, aspirations and ways of being.

In order to live up to the ideals of this model the starting-point for this research project is Métis values and relationships. Central to this project is building an understanding of the relationship between key Métis social values and the practice of Métis spatial production, identity formation and politics. Engaging with Métis culture on its own terms produces theoretical space for a Métis community-based approach. In addition to privileging of Métis knowledges, the next goal is to allow the research participants to determine and speak on the issues of community building of concern to them and their community. The respect for a community's ability to define its own research topic is central to an indigenous community-based research approach.

²⁸ Harris 2004: 167.

²⁹ Jim Silver, *In Their Own Voices: Building Urban Aboriginal Communities* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing 2006), 34.

³⁰ Smith 1999: 116.

³¹ Smith 1999: 125.

With these key values in mind, this chapter will discuss how this research project developed a community-based research approach that privileges Métis knowledges that value self-determination and decolonization within a Métis framework. Examining how research was undertaken in theory and practice, this chapter will discuss the theoretical, methodological and ethical issues that were developed for, and emerged during, the research process.

2.2 Researcher Positionality

I come from a very established Métis family with a history of self-sufficient and autonomous Métis lifeways, even though at times we resist this reality. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, my family was a fairly typical, buffalo-hunting Métis family, who spent part of the year homesteading at St. Boniface and other parts hunting buffalo on the plains. However, following the Canadian invasion of our homeland, my great-great-great grandfather Amable Gaudry, Sr. took scrip in 1875 and moved east to the Fort Frances-Rainy River area, where my family lived as Métis for generations. In the 1940s, my grandfather Cleo Faus Gaudry moved to Sioux Narrows, Ontario and established a successful hunting and fishing camp. It was here that he met my grandmother. Together they had six boys. My father, Jim Gaudry was the second oldest and like all like all my uncles, was raised on the land. They were taught not only how to hunt, fish and trap, but also to guide others. When my father moved south to attend university, he met my mother, who is descended from Scottish and Italian working-class immigrants. They had two children, and we grew up in the suburban town of Ancaster, Ontario, outside of Hamilton. We never learned, like our father to live on the land, and the cultural influence of our Metisness was downplayed, as if it was a historical relic that had ceased to matter.

We grew up outside of the Métis homeland and were never taught to live off the land. My grandfather's generation was the last in my family to speak Michif. While I used to imagine that these gaps in our cultural life excluded us from Métisness, I have come to reject the notion that

being Métis requires one to have been born into a rural (and often poor) Métis community, or that urban Métis are somehow assimilated and Canadianized, as Sealy and Lussier suggest:

Growing up in White communities and attending White schools, learning patterns of work acceptable to Whites, the first generation tended to be bicultural. The second and third generations were unicultural and that culture was Euro-Canadian. They were culturally and educationally assimilated.³²

Métis culture is a resilient thing. It persists in everyday experiences, and we, as urban Métis outside of the homeland, are taught how to be Métis in a different context than those with regular access to the land. These lifeways and values are not always labelled as Métis, but the defining characteristics of autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence, hard work, and family-centered decision-making remain pervasive in all of our lives. Developing an independent work ethic was a central part of my upbringing. Independence is valued because it ensures autonomy and self-sufficiency—meaning that we did not have to rely on anyone but ourselves to survive and with the support of our family we could be successful. These values (which tend towards autonomous forms politics) are easily transmittable in the suburban context where I was raised.

Our experience is by no means unique; in fact, Bonita Lawrence has made similar observations:

Mixed-blood urban Native people may or may not look Native. They may or may not have Indian status. They may or may not have come from a reserve. In many, perhaps most, cases they do not speak their Native language. For many of them, by far the majority of their time is spent surrounded by white people. And yet, mixed-blood urban Native people are Native people for one clear reason: they come from Native families, that is, from families that carry specific histories, Native histories. In urban contexts, where other bonds of identity (language, band,

³² D. Bruce Sealy and Antoine S. Lussier, *The Métis: Canada's Forgotten People*, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1975), 154.

territory, or clan) may no longer apply, family becomes all the more important for grounding a person as Aboriginal.³³

It could even be argued, that given the diasporic nature of the Métis nation, that this experience of familial isolation is a fairly common one, and that many other Métis families have survived this way. Whatever the case, my Métis upbringing and its continual influence in my life drives my autonomous politics, and has instilled in me the notion that self-sufficiency is one of the highest values on which we can judge the strength of individual character as well as the strength of our community. It is this value of self-sufficiency that drives the understanding that while we must always *rely* on the willing participation of family and kin in maintaining our Métis lifeways, we must never develop a *dependency* on anyone, especially the State, or we will lose what it means to be Métis. It is from my upbringing, and reinforced through my research, that concepts like fort and home base (chapter 3), authentic Métisness and “Métis” (chapter 4) and verticality and laterality (chapter 5) emerge. It is the common desire for self-sufficiency, autonomy and independence that produced many productive conversations during research, and it was the realization of common experience and the development of consensus during interviews that drove the research process.

2.2.1 Positionality and the Winnipeg Métis Community

When it comes to the Winnipeg Métis community, I am both an insider and an outsider. Despite being born outside the homeland, I was readily accepted as Métis by almost every person I met. Given that many other Métis families were forced to leave the Red River settlement (both physically and culturally) and have since returned, the appearance of people like me was fairly common. I was seen by many as a Métis ‘returning home’ to Winnipeg. Nevertheless, I was conscious that growing up in Southern Ontario left me with a comparative lack of cultural and

³³ Bonita Lawrence, “*Real Indians*” and *Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and*

spiritual grounding common to many Winnipeg Métis. Many community members were deeply involved in their kinship and family networks that were established generations ago, and it was these types of spaces to which I was always an outsider. This led to the realization that there are, as Smith writes, “multiple ways of being an insider and outsider in indigenous contexts” and there is the need for “constant reflexivity”³⁴ in determining how research is conducted and whom the research is intended for.

The question that must inevitably be asked is ‘for whom am I speaking?’ To which I would answer: ‘me and only me.’ This project is *at its core* a personal project that should be read that way. It is a project written by an ungrounded Métis looking for to take root in a community that is fairly open to my participation as a community member and as a researcher. What occurred to me very early in my participant observation activities is that some ways of belonging—ie. MMF membership, visible displays of Métisness like the sash—are very open to me, while others, arguably the deeper and more important ways of belonging—family, kinship, relationships with elders—are much harder to access from the outside. These relationships could simply not be built over a few months in Winnipeg. It was also very obvious that in certain political circles, there is a constant privileging of these more superficial forms of belonging over the deeper community-based ones. It appeared many times as if Métis political discourse (influenced heavily by the State and its funding requirements) was missing the centrality of community-based forms of belonging.

While I am somewhat critical of these decisions, my criticism is meant only to amplify the voices and concerns of those who dissent from the promotion of these superficial indicators, not to challenge or dismiss the position of organizations like the MMF who work to strengthen

Indigenous Nationhood (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), xv.

³⁴ Smith 1999: 137.

Métis communities. The decision to critique decisions of Métis people was not an easy one, and came about only as I began to realize that in order to truly become a Métis community member I needed to be part of the everyday life of a community, which in many ways seems to be at odds with the current direction of the politics of mainstream Métis organizations. Jeff Corntassel describes this relationship between critic and on-the-ground community builder as one of provocation based on deep respect, and not a relationship where academics have all the answers:

Although some of this material...is deliberately provocative, it is not intended to second guess indigenous leaders who have made or are making daily decisions affecting the futures of their nations. This work attempts to provide deeper insights into the current political terrain and to promote further discussions regarding the degree to which indigenous peoples should participate in the [Canadian] political system, as well as long-term strategies for regenerating indigenous nationhood.³⁵

I hold great respect for those who work on behalf of the Métis nation to reinvigorate our political culture, but I also, like any indigenous youth, have a responsibility to work to renew my relationship with my nation. It is this respect which I provide commentary on alternative approaches to the current State-based solutions offered to us as ‘possible’.

2.3 Methods

2.3.1 Winnipeg as the Site of Research

Winnipeg was selected for several reasons. First, Winnipeg is described as “the Métis capital”³⁶ by several participants. Not only is Winnipeg historically speaking, the major Métis settlement, but it still retains a Métis community that dwarfs all other Métis communities on Turtle Island.

³⁵ Jeff Corntassel, *Forced Federalism: Contemporary Challenges to Indigenous Nationhood*, with Robert C. Witmer, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), xvii.

³⁶ Evan, interview with author, August 14, 2008, Winnipeg, MB.

Interview participants suggested that Winnipeg had upwards of 50 000 Métis people living there,³⁷ and that they are connected through kinship to hundreds or even thousands of people.^{38 39}

Given this large community, and the other large indigenous communities in Winnipeg, there was a general belief that Winnipeg and Manitoba had massive indigenous potential. Kim described Manitoba as “the heart of the Turtle” or the geographic centre where the change happens: “This is known as Turtle Island, we are the heart. In order to change what occurs on the rest of the Island you have to start at the heart, and that’s exactly what is happening. Here at the heart, we have made the most gains”.⁴⁰ Winnipeg was selected because its rapidly growing indigenous population increases the potential for community-driven social change and decolonization, which in many other cities, (like Kingston) may seem a less likely possibility given the much smaller number of indigenous community members.

Finally, Winnipeg was chosen because of the deep personal connection to my family and people. Winnipeg was the birthplace of the Métis nation, and before the Canadian invasion, it was my family’s home. It is the land to which I have the deepest personal connection and thus seemed the logical place to start researching Métis community. Winnipeg was therefore chosen as a site of research given its centrality for Métis people as a place to call home, as a place of social change and reclamation, and for its personal connection to the researcher.

2.3.2 Data Collection

Data was collected over four months of participant observation and from thirteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in Winnipeg, Manitoba, from May to August 2008. Participant

³⁷ While Statistics Canada suggests a higher number, the definition of “Métis” used by Stats Canada is ‘non-Status, mixed-blood’ which is not the same definition used by Métis people in Winnipeg, or by the Métis National Council.

³⁸ Jeff, interview with author, August 15, 2008, Winnipeg, MB.

³⁹ Leon, interview with author, August 18, 2008, Winnipeg, MB.

⁴⁰ Kim, interview with author, August 21, 2008, Winnipeg, MB.

observation involved a four-month long internship at the Manitoba Métis Federation, where I worked as a policy analyst. I also attended numerous Métis community activities inside the city, and a few outside. Participant observation only involved those participants who signed consent forms and were conscious that they were participating in this research project. Interviews were conducted with Métis community members and elders using in-depth, open-ended personal interviews that were recorded using audio-recording equipment. To allow participants to structure their interview as they saw fit, open-ended questions were utilized, and subsequent questions followed the paths of conversation that these general questions opened up. According to Barnsley and Ellis open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews “encourage people to talk about their lives and concerns...It’s the down-to-earth questions that let people tell their stories. Asking too many questions makes people divide up their experience. Then it’s easy for researchers to lose the full picture in its complexity.”⁴¹ All participants, with one exception, consented to having their interview recorded. Participation was presumed to be anonymous, and only one participant, MMF President David Chartrand declared his wish to have his name used. All others were assigned pseudonyms.

Interviewees were from a variety of backgrounds and had varying life-experiences. Of the interview participants, eight were men, and five were women; five of the interview participants were under the age of thirty, most of these five people identified themselves as ‘youth’ and seven were older than and one identified as a community elder. Three spoke indigenous languages (Michif, Cree and Saulteaux are their mother tongues⁴²), and all three were grandparents. All interview participants, with only one exception, were at some point, involved the MMF either with a Local or were worked as an MMF employee. All participants considered

⁴¹ Barnsley and Ellis quoted in Jim Silver, *In Their Own Voices: Building Urban Aboriginal Communities* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing 2006), 34.

themselves to be somewhat involved in MMF politics, if not entirely immersed. This involvement with the MMF did not necessarily result in a starry-eyed view of the MMF, as MMF policy is well-discussed and often controversial political topic within the community, and two interviewees had actually left the MMF for disagreements over its political direction. Every interviewee was given the option of reviewing the transcript of his or her interview before it was used for research. Sections they felt did not adequately represent their views were removed. Each participant was offered a \$40 stipend to participate, but every participant refused monetary remuneration.

2.3.3 Participant Observation

Participant observation was utilized in several specific contexts. In my department at the Manitoba Métis Federation, some individuals declined to be interviewed, but consented to participant observation instead. This participation was largely confined to non-work-related discussion to avoid the ethical issues around the confidentiality of current MMF projects. Second, it was used during a Métis family gathering hosted by the MMF in Winnipeg, as a site of close cultural interaction and the relationship between family and politics. Third, participant observation was used as a research method in relation to a Métis educational program that built lateral relationships in the public school system between Métis students and community members. This observation occurred during a workshop for the programs employees, where they discussed the successes and shortcomings of the program.

The use of participant observation was secondary to interviews, and it was used as a method of relating the experiences of interviewees and the experiences of the researcher. Its purpose was primarily for providing deeper context to the interviews. This enhanced my understanding of much of what was being said, by allowing me to overcome the ‘experience gap’

⁴² Some of these transcripts were lightly edited for clarity.

that existed between my experiences as an ungrounded Métis and the grounded experience of Winnipeg Métis community members.

2.4 Conclusion

The methodological goal of this thesis research project was to allow participants to speak on their understanding of the Métis lives, as free as possible from external perceptions regarding their experiences. To facilitate this, an in-depth, semi-structured interview and participant observation process was utilized in accordance with indigenous research methodologies advocated by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Jim Silver et al. and Cole Harris. This approach privileges the *lived experience* of Métis people, which often runs counter to the dominant narratives of indigenous peoples' lives. Winnipeg was chosen, as a central Métis population as well as well-developed community institutions and kinship networks that build and support community structures. The following chapters will examine how this community experience is lived and how Métis people understand their community experience.

Chapter 3

A (Métis) Theory of Space

Métis spaces are complex social phenomena that does not easily fit within the dominant mode of conceiving space. While dominant spaces are considered primarily physical phenomena, Metis spaces are instead often conceived of as social, experiential and rooted in interpersonal relationships—forms of social organization that do not translate easily into the striated space with which the State and its technocrats are most familiar. Rather than conceiving space in its dominant form—as a purely physical phenomenon, or *a container of objects*—Métis space tends to be *experienced* and *created* simultaneously through social interaction. This simultaneous process of living and producing space grounds spatial production in everyday Métis life.

Métis space is often understood to be multidimensional. It can be defined on the one hand, as a cultural location, based on the visible borderland between the community and the State (following one of interview participants, this essay will call this space ‘the *fort*’), and on the other hand, as a relational network, largely hidden from those who do not live in it (like another interviewee, I will refer to as ‘the *home base*’). Both of these types of Métis spaces strive towards autonomy in their respective cultural locations, in that Métisness is unquestioned, unchallenged and, most importantly, *safe* to those who live it.

Métis spaces are produced when Métis community members practice Métis culture. These interactions can create spaces of Métis autonomy. Métis spaces are also essential for the transition of culture by Métis community members (from elders to youth, etc.). This means that Métis cultures and Métis spaces are inherently and intrinsically connected. Since Métis space is vital to the practice of culture and Métis culture is the reason that Métis spaces are created in the first place, these two concepts cannot be separated. For the purposes of this essay they will be

treated as one-in-the-same: *Métis cultural spaces*. Métis cultural spaces are important because they create safe gathering points to communicate culture, but can also be highly subversive to the dominant relations of power. Their very existence is a challenge to the spaces of dominance and colonization which Métis cross into during much of our daily lives.

Métis cultural space is not situated permanently in any one place, but emerges as Métis people gather and interact *as Métis people*. A fundamental principle of this conception of Métis space is its autonomous orientation. Autonomy tends towards the use of traditional indigenous methods of social and political organization, independent of State interference. According to Taiaiake Alfred, rejecting the reproduction of the state-form in indigenous communities is a vital component of autonomous indigenous nationhood. He cautions against relying on statist concepts such as sovereignty, because such concepts accept “the state as their model and...allow indigenous goals to be framed and evaluated according to a ‘statist’ pattern”.⁴³ Reproducing the state-form also reproduces the colonial tendencies of statehood like “coercive force, control of territory, population numbers, international recognition”⁴⁴ and moves away from practices that build strong relationships between people. Building on these notions, Glen Coulthard advises that indigenous communities ‘turn away’ from the politics of (State) recognition and instead embrace a “politics of doing”—an approach that is “self-affirmative” and prefigures “on-the-ground solutions” to colonialism and State encroachment.⁴⁵ Sharon Venne similarly questions the interconnection of sovereignty, recognition and state power. She writes: “For us absolute power is in the Creator and the natural order of all living things; not only in human beings...Our

⁴³ Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2009), 80.

⁴⁴ Alfred 2009: 80.

⁴⁵ Glen Coulthard, “Indigenous Peoples and ‘the politics of recognition’,” *New Socialist* 58 (September-October 2006): 12.

sovereignty is related to our connections to the earth and is inherent.”⁴⁶ Autonomy is thus a relational concept, built on the relations between community-based people, land and the non-human (what I will call *horizontal relations*). Autonomy also contrasts with notions of dependency and the state-form, which rely on relationships of hierarchy and subordination (what I refer to as *vertical relationships*), forgoing the horizontal relationships that build strong autonomous communities. Autonomy produces spaces where Métis people can most freely become Métis, including building an understanding of what Métisness is, without the need for justification or explanation to outsiders. Autonomy is a circular process requiring constant renewal of relationships: autonomous space is necessary for maintaining strong community relations and strong community relations are necessary for the maintenance of autonomous spaces.

This chapter will begin by discussing the dominant conception of space, as a physical, *a priori* phenomenon whose production is closely linked to power and domination. It is suggested that this dominant conception of space is inappropriate for understanding Métis community building in Winnipeg. The second section will then discuss the need to produce our own Métis spaces, independent of what is presented to us. This section will discuss how Métis space as a non-physical phenomenon emerges out of everyday social life, rather than technocratic organization by a central authority. The third section will examine the different forms that Métis spaces take, specifically forts and home bases, and discuss how these varying spaces is being used to build an autonomous Métis community in Winnipeg. The section that follows these discussions will then focus on home bases, forts and their relation to the State, and analyze specifically how Métis spaces can remain independent of the colonial formations that the State

⁴⁶ Quoted in Andrea Smith, “Indigenous Feminism without apology,” *New Socialist* 58 (September-October 2006): 17.

creates. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on visibility and quantification, as a form of colonization, and analyze the benefits of remaining hidden, and thus separate from State institutions.

3.1 The Dominant Conception of Space

The prevailing notion of space is not necessarily consistent with Métis understandings of lived space. Physical space imagines space existing *a priori* to human social interaction, something that can be created, except with a great deal of conscious effort and extensive physical resources. However, conceiving of Métis space in this dominant, physical way is inappropriate for understanding Métis community building in Winnipeg. This physical understanding of space denies the possibility of local spatial production, physical spatial production privileges the State and other colonial institutions. Pre-created physical space is also inconsistent with how many Métis live and create space in Winnipeg and throughout the Métis homeland.

While seemingly abstract, spatial understandings nonetheless play a central role in community politics. David Harvey insists that how we represent and understand space is of vital importance because “it affects how we interpret the world and then act with respect to the world.”⁴⁷ By this, Harvey means that our epistemological starting point has a very real impact both on our conception of reality, and how we live our lives. Simply put, our spatial understanding affects what we are capable of accomplishing in terms of community building. For example, relying on the dominant mode of spatial production limits one’s theoretical understanding of Métis community building and also limits the possibilities of community action.

⁴⁷ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 205.

This dominant mode of conceiving space is clearly illustrated by H.V. Savitch, who identifies four finite dimensions of physical spatial production—on land, underneath it, above it, and across it:

On land cities build residential neighbourhoods, factories and central business districts. Underneath land, cities construct metro systems, underground pathways, and subterranean commercial centres. Above land cities build skyscrapers, skyways, and elevated transit lines. Finally across different terrains, cities set up electronic transmitters, uplink stations, and streets laden with copper of fiber optic lines that conduct billions of information bytes through cyberspace.⁴⁸

Savitch's description of space (and its expansion) relies almost exclusively on physical and capitalistic understandings. According to this logic, space is imagined as an *a priori* physical container that holds objects. This container is a Grid, a series of points connected together to create boxes, which can then be differentiated from other boxes. These segments can be allotted different functions by the centralized authority that oversees this system of physical striation.

This Grid-like spatial formation *reifies* space by imagining it as a preexisting landscape on which the social can act itself out. Those capable of producing space are very few in number because they are required to mobilize a large and diverse array of capital to produce new physical containers like buildings and bridges. Extending physical space is a costly enterprise that requires large amounts of raw materials, as well as technocratic expertise to navigate the bureaucracy responsible for managing the process. Further, using this conception, the production of space is primarily a technique for enhancing commerce, reinforcing the existing relations of power, and the dominant forms of social organization. Conceiving of space in this way limits the privilege of spatial production to a relatively small group of elites—sidelining a much larger group of people from active participation in community building. With the exception of a few organizations such

as the MMF and friendship centres, this form of thinking denies the involvement most Métis people in the production of its own community's spaces.

The result of such a conceptual scheme is the reification of space, creating space as an *object* possessing a 'thing-ness' and thought to be 'objectively there' rather than the product of human social relations. Striation—or the production of boundaries—plays a prominent role in the production of an apparently unchanging spatial landscape, in which communities can adapt to fit, but cannot change. This reification of spatial production makes community building seem difficult or impossible without the support of dominant institutions such as the State.

Métis space, as it is understood in the Métis community, operates with a different logic. Métis space is social space and rejects the notion of pre-existing physical space, and instead sees space as the creation of rhizomatic human social relations.⁴⁹ Contrasted to Savitch's physical space, Métis space can be described as relational and fluid. An example of this Métis understanding of space can be found of this in an unlikely place, the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal decision in *R. v. Laviolette*, which built its understanding of Métis space from the expert testimony of Métis elders and historians. E. Kalenith P.C. J. when trying to determine the "historic rights-bearing community of Green Lake" writes:

[26] Within the larger network, certain fixed settlements developed as trade and transportation hubs. Dr. Tough described these fixed settlements as "nodes as part of a network where you

⁴⁸ H.V. Savitch, *Cities in a Time of Terror: Space, Territory, and Local Resilience* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 95.

⁴⁹ Schmid writes: "it is necessary, first of all to break with the widespread understanding of space imagined as an independent material reality existing 'in itself.' Against such a view, Lefebvre, using the concept of the *production of space*, posits a theory that understands *space* as fundamentally bound up with social reality. It follows that space 'in itself' can never serve as an epistemological starting position. Space does not exist 'in itself'; it is produced." See Christian Schmid "Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space: Towards a three-dimensional dialectic," in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, ed. Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom, and Christian Schmid (New York: Routledge, 2008), 28.

have the need for extensive sort of operations of resources, collecting resources”. (Transcript, pp. 1286-1287). The fixed settlements were connected by a transportation system of river routes, cart trails and portages. Constant movement between the fixed settlements allowed the Metis in the area to develop and maintain significant trade and kinship connections throughout the region and with the larger network of Metis people.

[27] The evidence showed a regional network of relationships in the triangle created in and around the fixed settlements of Lac la Biche, Ile a la Crosse and Green Lake. It also showed that there were strong kinship ties between these three fixed settlements and that the Metis intermarried and moved between these settlements over time. In addition to the fixed settlements, there were many other settlements within and around the three fixed settlements and along the transportation routes that connected them together. The transportation corridor, with its southeasterly hub at Green Lake, was important because it was the access route into the Mackenzie District, a storehouse of plenty and rich in furs.⁵⁰

These communities, of Lac la Biche, Ile a la Crosse and Green Lake formed a Métis social space that spanned a large physical area. As the decision notes, the fur trade and gathering activities played a central role in the creation of this space through the everyday lives of people who live it. French theorist Henri Lefebvre comes to similar conclusions about social space: “space implies, contains and disseminates social relationships—and this despite the fact that a space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things”.⁵¹ Social space is a *self-producing* phenomenon, which is produced by social relations—while acting to both contain and restrain these same relationships—it creates the stage while the actors act out the play. This means that social space is not something that can be contained in a finite physical area, but a phenomenon that generates its own environment *in the process of being produced*.⁵²

⁵⁰ *R. v. Laviolette*, 2005 SKPC 70.

⁵¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 82-83.

⁵² Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 474.

Despite the appearance of physical barriers that demarcate the reified space we come across in our daily lives, social spaces extend through these boundaries, and in many cases operate with little regard for them.⁵³ Lefebvre describes how social spaces extend beyond the physical barriers that seemingly disrupt them:

Visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise...to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity. The space of a room, bedroom, house, or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls...yet still remain fundamentally part of that space. Nor can such spaces be considered empty 'mediums', in the sense of containers distinct from their contents.⁵⁴

Social spaces are therefore not always what we *see* in a physical sense, but what we *experience* in our everyday lives. This form of sociality defies the established physical barriers and transcends these boundaries through social relationships. It is this relational structure that forms the basis of Métis social spaces.

3.2 Producing Our Own Métis Spaces

In terms of decolonizing Métis spaces, we must make a definitive move away from the understanding of space as being pre-determined and built for us by others, and move towards an understanding of space as something created by those who live it. Understanding space in this manner will allow Métis people to play a day-to-day role in the reclaiming of cultural spaces, and limiting the ability of the State to determine how Métis spaces will be used.

Highly critical of the State's involvement in Métis affairs, Howard Adams differentiates bureaucratic spaces produced by the State from lived, on-the-ground Métis spaces created by Métis people. He specifically points out that spaces created outside of lived, on-the-ground

⁵³ See Kim Michelle Lersch, *Space, Time and Crime*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007).

experience are dangerous, colonial and consistently fail to live up to the expectations of Métis people. In *Prison of Grass* he describes the “two distinct levels of operation in a colonial society”, one that operates at the level of “rhetoric, ideals and promises” (and operates within State bureaucracies) where political decisions are made. Here, government officials and the Native elite, existing entirely separate from the lived spaces of the people, define Metis spaces and the forms of interaction that can occur there.⁵⁵ The second level of lived experience is the “actual operation of the system” which Adams defines as the “the daily struggle for existence”.⁵⁶ The lived experience of Métis people is separated from the processes where Métis life is conceived by government and native bureaucrats. In this system, Métis life is defined as problematic and a class of technocrats generates solutions from a distance that further prevent Métis from producing their own space as well as controlling their own lives.⁵⁷ In the production of these government-controlled Métis spaces, the plan for action is detached from the everyday lives of Métis peoples, and problems are “solved” outside of community spaces:

It is common for government officials who have power over the indigenous people to hold elaborate conferences in luxurious hotels and discuss ‘Indian problems’ with the native elite. At such conferences, great promises are made to improve the conditions of the native people. Noble resolutions are passed for important changes and for social action that will result in considerable benefits to the rank-and-file natives. This is the level of promises and rhetoric.⁵⁸

The disjuncture for Adams is the separation between these two spaces: the conceived promises (the rhetoric that forms the theories on how to “help” Métis) and the lived experience perceived by Métis who never see the benefits of the theorized solutions:

⁵⁴ Lefebvre 1991: 87.

⁵⁵ Howard Adams, *Prison of Grass: Canada from the Native Point of View*, 2nd ed. (Calgary, Fifth House, 1989), 64.

⁵⁶ Adams 1989: 64.

⁵⁷ Adams 1989: 64.

The rhetoric and the promised action never get translated into real benefits for the people at the local level. The colonizer cannot understand the needs, frustrations and insecurities of the colonized because he has never been locked as a *life*-member into a reserve or colony, or processed by the ghetto. On the other hand, the native has never had the freedom of the bureaucrat, who has various alternatives in occupational opportunities, or experienced power over others.⁵⁹

Adams' answer to this problem is a reinvigoration of grassroots Métis governance that connects conceived theories to lived experience, so those living as Métis can build their own solutions. The tension between bureaucratic space and everyday lived space shape the different ways space is lived. This proposal is remarkable similar to the goals of many of the Métis community members in Winnipeg, who work towards creating Métis spaces of support and cultural transmission, often independent of State programming.

3.3 Forts and Home Bases: Definitions

During the interview process, two concepts of space emerged that represent different forms of Métis spaces and community building in a very illustrative way. The concepts of 'home bases' and 'forts' are metaphors that represent the complexity described by research participants in a more succinct and playful manner. Both concepts were taken from interviews that describe different forms of Métis space.

3.3.1 Home Bases

Kim describes a 'home base' as the production of a *relational* community space, where Métis feel like they can belong without question. These spaces usually take the form of rhizomes— unseen networks of family and friends that support Métis community members through interconnected personal relationships. According to Kim,

⁵⁸ Adams 1989: 64-65.

⁵⁹ Adam 1989: 65. *Emphasis Added.*

Aboriginal space is a home base. Just like in baseball. You know where your home is, you can come back anytime when you're feeling vulnerable and hurt, just like in your family, you have your home. Same thing...in an Aboriginal space, you know where your home is. Go out...do what you need to do, still hold the same philosophy.⁶⁰

These home bases take many forms, with familial relationships being the most common. Family relationships produce a sense of belonging, and although many parts of the Winnipeg Métis community are not related through blood, kinship relations structure most non-familial interaction. Home bases are built to house this sense of belonging and family or family-like relations are sought out by many community members. Frances, a Métis woman who moved from a rural Métis community to Calgary before moving more permanently to Winnipeg, always sought out a Métis home base to feel comfortable and “thrive” in:

Frances: I just found that I thrive better working with the Aboriginal community. I'm sure the programs I'd do for non-Aboriginal people would have been fine, but it just wasn't where my heart was, so I took a buy-out and left [laughter].

AG: Is there a specific reason you think you thrive in that atmosphere?

*Frances: I think it's the sense of belonging, for me anyway, as soon as I moved to Calgary, the first thing I looked up was the Métis Nation of Alberta, to find out what they had. I got involved with a local, just [because], moving from a small town to a big city you kind of feel alone out there, even if you have family and friends out there. *Being able to connect to your part of the community was the important thing to me and even when I came back here to work for MMF, right away I tried to seek out: where I could take my kids, where we would kind of fit in, type of thing...*my kids were amazed at to see how many people we are actually connected to [in Winnipeg] on my side and their dad's side.⁶¹*

⁶⁰ Kim, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 21, 2008.

⁶¹ Frances, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008. *Emphasis Added.*

Frances' experience is common for many Métis living in the city. Since Métis spaces are not always visible or easily accessible when grounded in interpersonal networks, they must be sought out. Family members, friends and Métis organizations (forts) often allow Métis people to set up their home bases, when new to the city, although those that have lived in the city for generations are often the most embedded. The home base is also a space where Métis community members can discuss political issues that affect more visible Métis spaces, spaces such as Métis organizations. The home base and the family network is the lifeblood of Métis community politics and where political consensus is built. The home base is the starting-point for much community activity.

3.3.2 Forts

Another interviewee, Leon, describes a different element of Métis cultural space, which he termed 'the fort.' Forts differ from the drive to find a home base noted by Frances, and instead are the visible gathering points for Métis activities, the spaces where Métis people congregate. Forts often find their origins in Métis organizations (like the MMF), which can access the resources to occupy more concrete cultural spaces. Because of this visibility, forts serve as the points of intersection between Métis community networks and the State apparatus. Forts are also places where Métis people can seek out other Métis for the purpose of expanding family networks: to meet new people, and very often, seek out the social services provided by Métis organizations to community members. Leon describes how the MMF functions as a fort:

Once...it was suggested to me that the Manitoba Métis Federation has become like a fort. The fort is, or let's say the train of wagons that has been circled, and I'm not saying it's a battle with the outside, it becomes a place where people can congregate, people can talk, people can share experiences and they can network. Our Annual General Assemblies are like that too, where everybody gets to see each other again, you meet

relatives you never knew before, you share experiences between villages and towns, it's a place of work and it's a place of play.⁶²

These spaces can be somewhat temporary or more enduring, but their key component is that they are visible to Métis people, so that they can easily access them, meet there and/or use their resources. The MMF, and the city's friendship centres are the main institutions that produce forts, but non-institutional forts, such as protests and political movements have emerged as well. Forts play an altogether different role than home bases, and this visibility is their key component. Visibility allows the fort to be seen, not just by community members, but by State institutions as well. Given the State's desire to internalize those outside its control, forts become contested sites of community-State interaction.

Forts are important spaces of gathering, where community members can meet and build relationships between themselves, strengthening community ties. Evan, an MMF worker, explains how the MMF Winnipeg Region holds a weekly square dance and potluck at its office, which produces a visible Métis fort:

there's gatherings here, people come in, bring their food, like in the old days, I remember my Dad telling me about [when] they used to get together at who had the biggest barn and everyone used to go there. Square dancing people go there, bring their guitar, their fiddle and create a little ho-down there. Same thing today, people come over, the older people anyways and not so much the younger people... You have a core group of people, you get maybe sixty people at a time, it's a smaller place, it's not that big, sixty would be a good number. You know you get that all the time, people are enjoying themselves... it's an opportunity to meet people, socialize.⁶³

While Métis community is more visible in physical spaces like forts, such as MMF offices or friendship centres, home bases and rhizomes are in many senses more foundational, as forts depend on these networks to produce themselves. Home bases converge at forts to allow for much

⁶² Leon, interview with the author, Winnipeg, MB, August 18, 2008.

larger community gathering spaces. Forts, in turn act as gathering points for a diverse and otherwise scattered network of Métis situated throughout Winnipeg, strengthening rhizomes and creating new home bases throughout the city. Rather than being a competitive process, forts and home bases produce Métis cultural spaces in tandem—although these are spaces of a different pedigree. Both home bases and forts allow culture, politics, language and social knowledges to be communicated, taught and disseminated throughout the community, but forts often find themselves reliant on State resources for their existence (to pay rent, salaries, etc), and thus face recurring challenges to their autonomy. The hidden nature of home bases, however, allow for less vertical integration with the State, and less reliance on the State for their own existence. This creates a powerful democratic and horizontal potential in home bases.

3.4 Métis Home Bases: Spaces of Family and Kinship

Métis home bases are networks of people: family, friends and acquaintances, all of which transcend the boundaries of particular neighbourhoods, towns, regions etc. Central to these community spaces are kinship networks, which forms the backbone of the Winnipeg Métis community. Kinship is a *rhizomatic* formation in the Winnipeg Métis community, where “everybody knows everybody”⁶⁴ and the community is relational, rather than geographically situated.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome is “a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and of a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again.”⁶⁵ Rhizomes are an assemblage of trajectories with no fixed points, they are

⁶³ Evan, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 14, 2008.

⁶⁴ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 20.

transformative in nature and they are continually transforming.⁶⁶ They are horizontal in that they are formations without established hierarchies and fixed centres. Deleuze and Guattari draw the metaphor from biology. Potatoes are rhizomes. They do not produce seeds or a specialized part to produce offspring. Any part of a potato, separated from the whole organism produces a new rhizome, and can grow into an entirely new (and different) potato. But this metaphor doesn't end with plants, "You can never get rid of ants because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed."⁶⁷ The Métis community in Winnipeg (along with many others) has a rhizomatic makeup. There is no single centre but many nodes. It is a network of relations scattered in different densities throughout the territory of the city. According to Charles, the Métis population is organized in a rhizomatic fashion:

[The Métis people] more generally spread out in Winnipeg, I think we have consensus that there's over fifty thousand [Métis] people in Winnipeg. There's no rhyme or reason to where we are, we're scattered between perimeter highways encompassing Winnipeg, there's no 'Little Métis' community.⁶⁸

What draws people together is not a Little Métis neighbourhood, but familial, social and cultural connections:

when people from my family are here that's always the connection, that's the one thing that Métis people have, a very strong link and when you meet somebody often the first thing that's done is finding your connection you have to that person, a family connection. So when you know you have that connection already, its like a bond you have.⁶⁹

Family, as a core value of Métisness, is a recurring theme in almost every interview, as it is a vital part of the rhizomatic community. Despite the common portrayal of the family as a tree

⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7-8.

⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 9.

⁶⁸ Charles, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 14, 2008.

⁶⁹ Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 29, 2008.

(arborescence), with a vertical formation of matriarchs and patriarchs, the most common form of relation within the Winnipeg Métis familial rhizome is the *cousin*. A cousin is a relation by horizontal degree, (first cousin, second cousin, etc.) rather than a vertical one (lines of descent). Since cousins are horizontally connected, hierarchical relationships are less likely to develop, as they tend to with parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. During the interview process, I realized I was related to many of the people I was interviewing and almost always one of their close friends. Because most of us are related as cousins, rather than from a single common ancestor, there is no centre to many of these family relationships, only overlapping kinship associations. These forms of kinship bring people outside of immediate family social networks and into the extended family, establishing the larger community as a family-like model.

When threatened from the outside, Métis family and community home bases provide protection and support. Métis home bases are sites of safety and sites of autonomy, where family and culture can be practiced, affirmed and transformed to meet new needs. Helen notes that these invisible home bases kept the Métis people strong during its long years of marginality and exile:

you have your elders, and you have your matriarchs, it's very much about family. I actually learned this from a professor, and I can see the similarities because it's not like my family sat me down and told me about Métis history, you know it's just something that you kind of grew up on [...] In university I took 'The History of the Métis Nation' and the professor went into how it was very much the family unit that kept the collective of the Métis Nation together at Red River, and how you had the grandmothers and then the elders and you had the after-church meetings and all that.⁷⁰

Although home bases are rarely discussed explicitly, there is nonetheless an intimate knowledge of their existence; it is the Métis autonomy in home bases that allows the culture to prosper. The same protection function that family provided in the nineteenth century, still exists at Red River

⁷⁰ Helen, interview with the author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

today, where the family unit provides a home base which allows individuals to feel a sense of strength as Métis, along with a strong bond to other Métis people:

AG: Is family important to you? I've heard you talk about your kids throughout the interview.

Frances: Hugely. Hugely important. This weekend, me and my sister and brother were talking about family and how important it is and my sister and brother were, I guess, more fortunate than I [was]. I mean it was my own choice to leave [Northern Manitoba], but when they had their kids my mom and dad were around to help out, so if they needed a babysitter, their kids have never been in a daycare. Mine grew up in daycare. So I think that's the huge difference between having that family close by as opposed to being twelve hours away. But it was interesting to have that talk, I said 'well I never had that opportunity' it would have been nice, I could have saved huge amounts of money and also my kids would have had more[...]family knowledge. They love going back home now, my boys are almost nineteen, one just turned eighteen yesterday, and they sat all weekend with my dad talking about his past and him coming over from Germany and stuff like that. They were just 'that was so cool Mom' and I was like 'really?' [laughter...]my Dad's quite the character so he embellished quite a few of the stories, but they were able to connect with him like that and he loves it. He's 71 now, of course he thinks he's really old, but he's not, but for him it was nice to kind of sit back and watch him and my brother, and my boys all sitting there having like guy time, right? So it was pretty neat. And my dad is, he's German, but he's actually my step-dad, but he was, I hate to use the term, but a wannabe Métis, like he would try and cook bannock [laughter] he was best friends with my grandpa as well and my grandpa taught him a lot about trapping and fishing and stuff like that. I find it really interesting to see all that. In my family it's natural but for an outsider looking in, they would have went 'what?' [laughter] you know that kind of thing? Family is really important to me and that's probably why I moved back here, I know it's why I moved back here. It's good now, but when I made the move the first year I was like 'ugh god why am I in Winnipeg?' But it's worked out Ok, I've got a lot of really good friends here and I enjoy doing what I do here at MMF, working with the community and helping people, kind of thing, so it all worked out good.⁷¹

⁷¹ Frances, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

While many different factors exist in Winnipeg today, the network of families form the basis of community organization, and community governance. They also are important in passing down “family knowledge”—traditional Métis skills, but also knowledge of relations and family (who you are related to), and how to access these family spaces.

Even the geographic boundaries imposed on the Métis community by this research project—the city limits of Winnipeg—are problematic because the community kinship networks allow them to extend far beyond that. The community is comprised, not just of Métis in a finite geographical area, but by those relations that come in contact, from time to time, with Winnipeg and the people that call the city home. For example, Marcel, a Métis living in Winnipeg, meets his family regularly at their home base several hours outside the city, to sustain the cultural space that his parents made for his family:

AG: Do you still retain close ties with friends and family outside of Winnipeg?

Marcel: That’s the most important thing to Métis people. It’s the most important thing to me. Now I visit my family about every two, two-and-a-half weeks, they’re two and a half hours out of the city, my parents left me their house, they’ve passed on but I use it as a cottage now, about three-quarters of my family’s there and we get out and have fun. We have barbeques, get-togethers and visits, so we maintain the family ties.⁷²

Marcel and his family establish their home base outside of the city, where they can interact, be a family, and be Métis. For Marcel, Métis space is where Métis people are. Fitting with the traditional Métis nomadism, many other interviewees expressed similar experiences with extended kinship networks that structured their relations not just in the city, but far beyond it as well. Leon cautions us against presuming such simple boundaries in Métis communities:

⁷² Marcel, interview with the author, Winnipeg, MB, July 31, 2008.

I can't tell you where [the Métis community] crosses the boundaries of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, how it flows down into the States and Ontario and elsewhere, but what I can say is that the families in Winnipeg are intimately connected amongst themselves as well as those people outside the boundaries of Winnipeg. So when you talk about the Winnipeg community, of course there are types of experience that are urban as opposed to rural, but to say that the community itself is different in other respects, with those outside of Winnipeg, I think would be leading us towards conclusions where you artificially put a boundary, a Berlin Wall so to speak, that separate a group of people from one side and the other.⁷³

Given the flexible nature of the Métis community in Winnipeg and the surrounding area, it is not surprising that the community's more visible articulations share a similar fluid and decentralized structure.

3.5 The Production of Forts

While home bases are an important space for retaining Métis culture and connection to family, there is still a need to engage with the outside social system, especially given its will to colonize indigenous communities.⁷⁴ This engagement has been disruptive to Métis communities in the past, so forts are an attempt to engage with the colonial system on Métis terms. Forts exist on the frontier, creating a buffer between Métis families and the colonial system of the State. Their dual purpose is to build public spaces of gathering for Métis families to build connections within the wider community, as well as to communicate with the State to safeguard Métis interests. The production of these Métis forts in Winnipeg has been highly successful in the first instance, but less successful in its dealings with the colonial State.

Since Métis families are organized horizontally and rhizomatically as a decentered network of relations, and given the centrality of family in Métis social life, it is logical that Métis

⁷³ Leon, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 18, 2008.

⁷⁴ See Adams 1989, Alfred 2009.

community building takes a similar form. Like kinship networks, Métis social relations have never been confined to a finite geographical area. Grounded in Métis traditional lifeways, Leon notes the tendency of Métis communities to nomadic and rhizomorphic:

Leon: [The Métis] started out in the Sault Ste. Marie area and they worked their way down into Wisconsin and slowly worked their way also into the Rainy River area, Rainy Lake area and moved its way back down into Pembina and from there it moved its way up to St. Francis Xavier, St. Norbert, St. Boniface, out to Turtle Mountain and sucked back here like the waves on a beach, right and the pebbles going in and then it goes back out again and it goes into the Cypress Hills and then it flows back and eventually it stays in the Cypress Hills and it moves off this way. And then, not its tail but its strength in the Sault Ste. Marie area isn't there anymore and it has a little bit in the Rainy River-Fort Francis area and it's a little bit strong in the Pembina Highway, but its real strength is in the North, into Manitoba and Saskatchewan, those boundaries are artificial, like the idea that the way the Cartesian world looks at land and looks at people is not the way the Métis has looked at it, I guess that's why you say it's nomadic.

AG: ...smooth space...

Leon: ...smooth space, ya. As opposed to, have you ever seen the movie Tron? Those things are always on a grid right.

AG: It can't function outside the grid.

Leon: Whereas the Métis, I don't think we've had a lot of respect for grids.

AG: Well it was the Grid that caused the big disagreement in the beginning.

Leon: Actually that's very good, the putting of the grid, the clash of the two.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Leon, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 21, 2008.

The Métis, historically speaking, were Grid-adverse, demonstrated most obviously in 1869 when several Métis homesteaders caught Canadian Surveyors who were busy striating a Grid on the Métis homeland, a territory which the Métis had established and striated themselves generations before. This event triggered the creation of the autonomous Métis Provisional Government of 1869-1870, the creation of the Métis-majority province of Manitoba.⁷⁶ The Canadian Grid was only salvaged by a military invasion of the Métis nation and by exiling the Métis-organized Provisional Government. This new Grid was to stretch across the entire Western half of the continent on both sides of the border and organize the vast territory into neat and uniform squares to be allotted almost exclusively to white settlers. The Métis response to this invasion was anything but Grid-like, but reasserted a Métis way of producing space based on family land holdings and cyclical occupation that was rarely written down.⁷⁷

This tradition of resisting Grid-like organizations was and remains central to Métis ways of life. Historically speaking, Métis families were nomadic and Métis produced their own space by living their lives in accordance with their culture:

we did have nodes in that network or in that space, there were these nodes, these gravitational locations and those were the settlements and the settlements might be empty at some times of the year and there would be summer camps, or even winter camps and those would be empty for part of the year. So as people were moving through the prairies, but they were also, there's these nuclei, if you take the amoeba analogy, even though it's all moving around, there's still some spots in there that are more or less solid, that are focused.⁷⁸

Métis space has always been flexible as a result of the nomadism characteristic of Métis families, communities and individuals. In the contemporary context, these ways of life carry over to Métis

⁷⁶ Duke Redbird, *We Are Métis: A Métis View of the Development of A Native Canadian People*. (Willowdale, ON: Ontario Métis and Non-Status Indian Association, 1980), 20.

⁷⁷ See Redbird 1980: 20.

⁷⁸ Leon, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 21, 2008.

community organizing. When building Métis spaces in Winnipeg, the MMF opted to create fort spaces with the capacity to accommodate this form of social organization. For example, the core spaces of Métis government politics in Winnipeg, MMF locals, allow individuals to join based on family and social relations—who you know and are comfortable with—rather than enforcing local membership by geographic territory:

I've lived in 25 places since I've been an adult. To me if I would have had to transfer from one local to another, that would have been a little crazy I think, there might be some rationale to not having geographic boundaries within the city limits. However, at the same time, if people aren't able to identify with a group and they stay with their group that's way over on the other side of the city just to be a part of the group then sometimes they are not even involved as much. People move around a lot, there is movement within regions, its hard to track the people and that is one of our biggest problems in terms of population and knowing in terms of statistics who we are. One of our biggest problems is membership. Huge issues.⁷⁹

Jurisdictional boundaries—whether these are the geographic boundaries of the city, or the administrative boundaries of the MMF—do not stand up well to the flows of Métis interaction and everyday life. While forts may provide temporary gathering points, the bulk of Métis cultural space is situated in off-the-Grid rhizomatic home bases. Rooted in networks of relations, the everyday interaction of Métis culminates in what Susan Lobo refers to as “household gathering spots” where community members provide “a location for ceremony, emotional and spiritual support, entertainment, and transportation and communication resources.”⁸⁰ Home bases are underground spaces of cultural interaction and are so naturalized and everyday that they often go unnoticed, even though they remain a vital part of community and nation building in Winnipeg. In these unregulated and unseen social spaces, in everyday life, there are always new connections being made: new individuals meet, fall out of touch, rekindle old friendships, come together for

⁷⁹ Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 29, 2008.

festivals, visit family, have a holiday dinner. With these intersections of social interaction, social space is made temporarily perceptible to the senses, and lived experience can be conceived, if only temporarily. Rhizomatic cultural space then is only temporarily visible, it spends much of its time, like rhizomes in biology—potatoes, crab grass and bamboo—underground. Forts however, as visible spaces are responsible for interacting with State organizations, and spend much of their time interacting with the State.

3.6 Forts: Interacting with the Grid

The Métis community in Winnipeg lacks an overly permanent or concrete structure outside of the MMF, the community is a horizontal entity: relational and situational with no hierarchical or central organization. The State, however, has a concrete and enduring vertical structure that it attempts to integrate into the Métis community. The vertical structure, which I call *the Grid*, is a bureaucratic formation made up of a series of fixed points connected and intersected, forming a coherent structure that compartmentalizes space in order to determine what occurs within it. The Grid is a hierarchically organized system of control. The most obvious example of the Grid's effect on space is any 'rationally planned' city and the grid formed in city blocks, where intersecting streets produce defined blocks of residential and commercial spaces. There are other less physical Grid-spaces that are produced, such as information flows and processes of policy formation.

Neither is the Grid confined to compartmentalizing space on the small scale of city blocks; it is expansive and contains rural townships, regions, lines of longitude and latitude, even mapping the universe through astronomic striation. The Grid's goal is to order reality by breaking a large body into smaller parts and managing each section individually to maximize the

⁸⁰ Lobo 2003: 505.

effectiveness of striation. A bureaucratic manager oversees each section of the Grid; another manager of a larger space in turn oversees this manager, and so on. The Grid is inherently hierarchical, and based on general control of abstract spaces. Deleuze and Guattari write “the more regular the intersection, the tighter the striation.”⁸¹ Perfect and ideal striation then, would be expressed in perfect Griding—vertical organization of every city block, every family and every individual. The Grid is the primary organizing principle of the State, and the form of organization used to interact with Métis political organizations. The State uses the Grid to map the Métis community, and to convert it into more manageable forms than home bases would allow.

The un-accomplishable end-goal of the Grid is to internalize everything, so that nothing functions outside of the State’s rational order. The rationale of the Grid is to render all visible, and distrust that which cannot be seen. Lefebvre’s notion of the *illusion of transparency* is rooted in the State’s obsession with rendering all visible: “[a]nything hidden or dissimulated—and hence dangerous—is antagonistic to transparency, under [the State’s] reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from that mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates.”⁸² The Grid sees outside spaces as dangerous, and the internal as transparent and safe, it engages in tactics of internalization, making visible and knowable the outside by bringing it into its gaze. The State has been particularly interested in internalizing indigenous nations and governance systems as part of its colonial project, given that indigenous nations form the biggest threat to the internalization of all bodies within Canada’s claimed jurisdiction. The very existence of indigenous nations reminds the Canadian State of its failure to internalize us and make us proud Canadian citizens.

⁸¹ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 488.

⁸² Lefebvre 1991: 28.

While the presence of the Grid and the State often signals colonization of Métis spaces, forts exist as sites where the Métis community can engage with the State on its own terms. Therefore, forts are always contested spaces, on the frontier that divides the Grid and rhizomatic Métis community. The visibility of forts is useful as a way to attract new members and to obtain State resources. However, this visibility also makes the fort a target for State colonization, and forts (especially the MMF and friendship centres) must constantly be conscious of attempts to internalize these frontier spaces. Forts, in their nature, are points on the Grid, yet they remain the all-important gateway to the less visible rhizomes and home bases that form the foundation of Métis community.

The meeting of the State and the Métis community at the fort makes it a contested space, where Métis community interests and desires confront the State's obsessive need to control and capture. The construction of the Grid relies almost entirely on the fixation of Grid-points onto any visible Métis space, meaning that other hidden spaces often escape the gaze that illuminates their presence and puts them on the Grid. These other hidden spaces are rooted in rhizomes away from the prying eyes of the State. Undiscovered home base networks cannot be internalized, because they cannot be seen or conceived by the State. It is here where most transformative possibility exists, under the Grid's conception of space lies other hidden spaces that create new possibilities, outside the control and gaze of the State.⁸³

3.7 Quantification and the Production of Verticality

Those systems that cannot be internalized, like kinship networks and traditional governance structures, are often replaced with new organizations that can be. Forts that struggle against being co-opted, often find themselves replaced by State institutions with greater funding, or through

⁸³ These new potentialities are discussed in detail in chapters four and five.

long-term engagement with the State may even find themselves absorbed into the Grid entirely. The effects of this absorption can be seen in the way that Métis community is conceptualized, primarily in terms of quantity, rather than relationality. Increasingly the community is being seen, not as encompassing a qualitative understanding of kinship connections, but instead an abstract population, measured in numbers. Many research participants described the community in this way:

Métis community, it's relatively small, that being said, there's over forty-five thousand in Winnipeg, when I say small, it's got an almost small-town mentality. It's a community unto itself within the city of Winnipeg, it seems like everybody knows everybody.⁸⁴

We have over twenty thousand members of the Federation in Winnipeg, really and we're divided into locals here and in Winnipeg.⁸⁵

The quantification of Métis community tended to be more common from those participants who worked in Métis government (MMF and friendship centres), as these organizations are directly linked into the Grid in their daily operation, and are part of the vertical structure of organizations overseen by the State.⁸⁶ Striation through quantification is a necessary part of vertical organization of bureaucracies and Grids, as it allows complex and rhizomatic phenomena to be converted into a contained, finite object that can be manipulated from a distance. Quantification also generates visible and knowable subjects, by converting them into objects—transforming a *Métis community* into a *Métis population*. Populations, as Chris Andersen notes, are easier to map than communities, and allow the objectification of Métis people to be more easily absorbed into

⁸⁴ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

⁸⁵ Charles, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 14, 2008.

⁸⁶ Although interestingly, these expressions still ground those quantifications in rhizomes—Jeff comments that “everybody knows everybody” and Charles points to the nomadic tendency of Métis people and communities.

the State's vision of its population. Andersen argues that the Census does not merely reproduce reality, but shapes it through the production of "political rationalities" that arrange "social relations across time and distance and erasing illegibility by establishing social equivalences between individual citizens within nation-states."⁸⁷ This newly quantified data that is rendered coherent then "assumes a fundamentally important role in the formation of policy decisions affecting all faces of the lives of Canadian citizens."⁸⁸ Data collection is central to conceiving of a group of people, and is the precursor to the bureaucratic management of such populations.

The technology of mapping in the colonial process is a powerful tactic of translation that allows the conceptualization of an unfamiliar space in ways that can be understood by the State, situating it on the Grid.⁸⁹ Maps, according to Cole Harris, convert "indigenous ways of knowing and recording space" into "an abstract geometrical space containing only what [dominant] data collections and predilections inclined them to put there."⁹⁰ Mapping is also utilized in chronicling social space, although different non-geometric tactics are utilized. *The Map*, like the Grid, uses quantification to render visible indigenous people it cannot otherwise 'see' or conceptualize. The State's ability to count Métis people allows it to build a vertical structure, using Grid techniques to enable technocrats "essentially without local knowledge to make decisions about localities."⁹¹ These techniques begin with information gathering and the quantification of the lived experience of Métis people. Following quantification 'responsibilities of reporting' ensure that this collected data is accessible to the vertical structure of the Grid and that it generally has an upward

⁸⁷ Chris Andersen, "From Nation to Population: the racialization of 'Métis' in the Canadian census," *Nations and Nationalism* 14 (Spring 2008): 357.

⁸⁸ Andersen 2008: 356.

⁸⁹ Harris 2004: 175.

⁹⁰ Harris 2004: 175-176

⁹¹ Harris 2004: 176.

trajectory. This newly visible data allows the State to access and ‘see’ the rhizomes previously outside its gaze and striate previously invisible Métis cultural space.

The logic of quantification, as a form of converting lived experience into bureaucratic variables, is rooted fundamentally in Grid logic. Quantification is a necessary component of the survival of any fort, on the borderland between rhizomes and Grid. Most forts are dependent on State resources, and must learn to speak its language, converting its membership and their activities into something readable by Grid managers. Enumeration and Database collection becomes a central process of any fort that wishes to retain the resources to remain a public gathering place for Métis in Winnipeg. The MMF, for example, has a Database and Enumeration Office that collects information for Federation and State audiences:

The Manitoba Métis Federation maintains a database of its membership, which is updated on a daily basis by the Database Clerk at the Home Office... Arising from that basic need of membership tracking, the TSN department is researching the development of a provincial registry to link with other provincial organizations and the Métis National Council. Harvester cards are another aspect of the vital statistics effort related to the Métis population, which are rooted in this research. The Post Powley environment in Canada highlights the need of the Manitoba Métis people to “step forward and be counted”, *as employment and training opportunities will be based in part on Aboriginal identity and the rights of indigenous peoples.*⁹²

The enumeration of Métis people, and the services they use, is directly linked to State funding, since the State controls the amount of money given to Métis organizations based on State-determined performance goals, this structure determines what activities State resources can be used for. This form of vertical accountability leaves the State with the ability to structure the activities undertaken at the visible Métis gathering points. Forts, which include social service

⁹² Manitoba Métis Federation, Inc. “Tripartite Self-Government Negotiations Departmental Report to the 37th Annual General Meeting,” (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation 2005). *Emphasis Added.*

providers aside from more informal gathering places, are inserted into the Grid's vertical structure and overseen by State technocrats. Managed in vertical format, these Métis spaces become part of the Grid, even form a *Grid within a Grid*, and are susceptible to the State's involvement in its daily activities. The Human Resource Development and Training Department functions on such a model:

Every month each LMB [Local Management Board] office submits an export of their statistical information from Contact IV to the PMB [Provincial Management Board]. The PMB office uploads this information through the Internet based program (Data Gateway), to HRDC [Human Resources and Skills Development Canada]. This information is processed and the outcome of the uploaded data is reported back to the MMF through the Aboriginal Relations Office website. The MMF also collects this data manually and tracks the employment outcomes.⁹³

This takes the form of a Grid within the Grid, where the vertical structure of the State is extended, into the internal functioning of the Métis community's forts. Where internal governance processes must struggle against State involvement in its organizations, where the borderland of Métis space organized as a rhizome, must confront the Grid's desire to striate it and then co-opt it or else replace it with a new entirely State-reliant space. The fort, when dealing with the State adopts a primarily defensive position and it is careful with who it lets into its walls. Despite its distrust of the State, the fort is in a constant process of information exchange with the State.

For example, The Métis Human Resources Development Agreement (MHRDA) signed by the MMF with the Canadian State extends the Grid into the MMF fort. The agreement requires large amounts of personal information of community members be shared with the State of Métis and other indigenous people who use the service:

⁹³ Manitoba Métis Federation, Inc. *36th Annual General Assembly Program: 'Building the Métis Nation: Strength, Struggle, Success'*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation, 2004), 43-44.

The Organization [MMF] will provide to Canada upon request, all or any of the following information, on a per-client basis, for use by Canada in *monitoring, assessing and evaluating* the effectiveness of the assistance provided under the Agreement...:

- name;
- social insurance number;
- address;
- date of birth;
- gender (where available as self-identified information);
- Aboriginal status (status Indian, non-status Indian, Inuit or Métis);
- marital status;
- number of dependents; [...]⁹⁴

The communication of this type of information is presented as a form of accountability, where the Métis community has a responsibility to Canadian citizens to share its ‘vital statistics.’ Métis Harvesting Policy has a responsibility to report its information to ‘All Manitobans’ and states so in its policy flyer: “This initiative is transparent and information is shared with all Manitoba stakeholders.”⁹⁵ Accountability here is understood as a relationship to State bureaucracies rather than to the Métis community itself. As this example demonstrates, forts occupy a precarious position on the frontier of colonialism and home bases, and are the front lines in the defence of Métis community spaces’ autonomy. Forts, and indeed anything that engages with the State, must address these issues and work to maintain autonomy in the face of the Grid and its desire to internalize. The Métis community faces a number of these struggles in various forms, several of which will be detailed in the next two chapters. One thing, however, stays constant—the overriding concern for the strength of horizontal relations between family, friends and Métis organizations.

⁹⁴ Manitoba Métis Federation, Inc., Métis Human Resources Development Agreement (MHRDA). *Aboriginal Human Resources Contribution Agreement 2005*. c. 1, s. 5. p. 58. *Emphasis Added.*

⁹⁵ Manitoba Métis Federation Inc., “Métis Harvesting Rights—Protecting Our Traditions.” (Winnipeg, Manitoba Métis Federation, 2008).

3.8 Conclusion

Métis cultural space in Winnipeg is produced spontaneously through everyday Métis interaction. But its production results in different forms depending on how the space is perceived, conceived and lived. Spaces that rely on primarily on State resources produce striated Grid forms, which tend towards vertical organization. Spaces that emerge from everyday lived experiences, and are largely free from the dominance of conception, tend to take rhizomatic forms that are horizontal and transformative.

These spaces take the form of Métis home bases and Métis forts. While home bases are hidden, and rhizomatic, forts tend towards visibility and are situated on the borderland between the rhizomes and the Grid. These two forces make the Grid a contested space where different forms of organization lead to a partial immersion of the fort into the State's system of Grid organization. The ultimate goal of Métis forts is to generate autonomy within the Métis community, and the following two chapters will examine how effective these processes are. The next chapter will examine identity space, and the role of articulated/unarticulated identity in producing rhizomatic/striated Métis identities. It will also examine the different relations to Métis community that they create. The chapter following 'identity' will examine the relationship between grassroots, rhizomatic governance and the Grid-like relationship between the State and existing Métis government organizations. Similar to the preceding chapters it will also examine the different forms that communities take when utilizing these different approaches.

Chapter 4

Identity

There is an important distinction, one that is often conflated, between the terms signifying Métis *as a culture* and Métis *as a legal category*. While the legal concept “Métis”⁹⁶ is *presented* as the logical companion of cultural Métisness, they have different origins and distinct meanings.

“Métis” as a legal term is a relatively new phenomenon emerging in its current form in the 1980s as a result of the inclusion of “Métis” in Section 35(2) of the Constitution Act of 1982.⁹⁷ Before this, the Métis experience was influenced to a large degree by its non-legality and our exclusion from official recognition as an indigenous people.⁹⁸ This constitutional recognition occurred largely as a result of intense political pressure by the Métis political organizations. Section 35 reads:

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

(2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit, and *Metis* peoples of Canada.⁹⁹

This constitutional definition has been reinforced and further lineated by several judicial decisions regarding Métis hunting rights (notably *R v. Powley*,¹⁰⁰ *R v. Lavolette*,¹⁰¹ *R v. Blais*¹⁰²)

⁹⁶ In this chapter “Métis” *with quotation marks* will refer specifically to the *official* production of Métis identity. Many authors use scare quotes to denote problematic phrases or concepts, this is not my intent. Using “Métis” in quotation marks is borrowed from the MMF Constitution, which defines “Métis” in quotations. The presumed intent of the MMF is to situate the definition within an existing body of legal literature and precedence. This is my intent in using the term “Métis” as well.

⁹⁷ John Weinstein, *Quiet Revolution West: The Rebirth of Métis Nationalism*. (Brighton: MA: Fifth House, 2007), 61.

⁹⁸ Lawrence 2004: 26.

⁹⁹ Government of Canada, *Constitution Act of 1982*, part 2, section 35. *Emphasis Added*.

¹⁰⁰ Supreme Court of Canada, *R. v. Powley*, 2 S.C.R. 207, 2003 SCC 43.

along with various common law holdovers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁰³ For example, in 2003 the Supreme Court defined “Métis” in its *R. v. Powley* decision, therefore “clarifying” the existing constitutional definition in a very specific fashion:

The 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. A Métis community is a group of Métis with a distinctive collective identity, living together in the same geographical area and sharing a common way of life. *The purpose of s. 35 is to protect practices that were historically important features of these distinctive communities and that persist in the present day as integral elements of their Métis culture.*¹⁰⁴

While this definition seems broad enough, the Court is careful to reserve for itself the responsibility to act as the final arbiter of the *historical features* deemed *important*, and thus which activities today are “integral elements of Métis culture”. The Court further defines Métis identity as something that must be “objectively verifiable” in order to retain the “constitutional guarantee” of Métis rights:

The verification of a claimant’s membership in the relevant contemporary community is crucial, since individuals are only entitled to exercise Métis aboriginal rights by virtue of their ancestral connection to and current membership in a Métis community. Self-identification, ancestral connection, and community acceptance are factors which define Métis identity for the purpose of claiming Métis rights under s. 35. *Absent formal identification, courts will have to ascertain Métis identity*

¹⁰¹ Saskatchewan Court of Appeal, *R. v. Laviolette*, 2005 SKPC 70.

¹⁰² Supreme Court of Canada *R. v. Blais*, 2 S.C.R. 236, 2003 SCC 44.

¹⁰³ The intent of this chapter is not to discuss the current state of linear “Métis” identity as defined by the courts, as this is discussed in much detail elsewhere. For a detailed analysis and discussion on defining “Métis” in Canadian common law, see Paul L.A.H. Chartrand, ed., *Who are Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples? Recognition, Definition and Jurisdiction* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ Supreme Court of Canada, *R. v. Powley*, 2 S.C.R. 207, 2003 SCC 43.

on a case-by-case basis taking into account the value of community self-definition, the need for the process of identification to be objectively verifiable and the purpose of the constitutional guarantee.¹⁰⁵

This officially authorized “Métis” identity is based on legal reasoning, rather than cultural practice. It is defined as a solution to a legal conundrum, presented in a debate between two (or more) oppositional parties, and mediated over by a largely non-indigenous judiciary practicing and entirely non-indigenous form of law. In both the *Constitution Act* and *Powley* definitions of “Métis”, the legal identity is defined *in relation to* the Canadian State, in terms of the rights granted/recognized by State authorities. In these definitions, there is only a superficial understanding of the relations *between* Métis people and *between* Métis communities, which would constitute a more grounded and indigenous approach to defining who is Métis and what is a Métis community.

The Métis political organizations have also played an active role in the shaping the legal definition of “Métis”. They have acted as interveners in Supreme Court Cases and in the production and dissemination of knowledges that assist in the striation of “Métis” as a legal Aboriginal identity.¹⁰⁶ The legal recognition of “Métis” by the Canadian State has resulted in access to considerable political capital, capital that allows these organizations to obtain “Métis”-specific funding and a “Métis”-specific rights relationship with State bureaucracies. “Métis” recognition has produced many tangible results in terms of bureaucratic spatial production, such as State-sponsored social services, political devolution of service provision, a boom in membership in Métis political organizations. However, official recognition also serves to contain the dynamic and rhizomatic Métisness of Winnipeg within a highly static legal category that is primarily determined by State officials. This State-based definition can transform the perception

¹⁰⁵ *ibid. Emphasis Added.*

of Métisness into something less organic and less grounded in Métis culture. Joe Sawchuk argues that static “Métis” identity produces similar problems to the homogenizing effects of Status Indian identity:

The Métis organizations, after intensive lobbying to have the category “Métis” recognized in the constitution, now find themselves in the same position as that of Indians. That is, they now must live with the consequences of an overarching classification, one that is no more appropriate for them than it is for “Indians”. The Métis have local, regional, and cultural variations which militate against their being considered a unified whole. To date there has been little government recognition of this disparity.¹⁰⁷

“Metis” as a legal category is problematic, not because of the political advantages it has produced, but because it fails to recognize the diversity of a fundamentally hybrid, and fluid formation of Metis identities. The danger is not in itself the existence of a legal “Métisness.” This is a practical (and probably necessary) linear *performance* for the State apparatus. A performance communicates Métisness in bureaucratic language as a coherent category for State use. A unitary “Métis” identity category is a useful tool, but it can also be highly problematic. The problem is that a “Métis” legal identity has been given such conceptual currency that it can be elevated to hegemonic status in everyday life, making forms of Métisness that differ with the “Métis” legalism seem inaccurate, inauthentic, or worse, *invented*.

This contemporary fixation on legal identities can cause us to lose sight of the grassroots, everyday identities that give rise to indigenous nations. These identities are the *social* and *cultural* dimensions of Metis communities, the everyday aspects of indigenous existence, and form the *lifeways* of Metis people. Like the production of social space described in the previous

¹⁰⁶ See Weinstein 2007, especially chapters 5-9.

¹⁰⁷ Joe Sawchuk, “Negotiating an Identity: Métis Political Organizations, the Canadian Government, and Competing Concepts of Aboriginality,” *American Indian Quarterly* 24 (Summer 2000), 73.

chapter, the creation of everyday Métis identity is a process of spatial production produced by the regular and mundane interaction of Métis people. This form of identity is highly emergent, fluid, and situational. Based in community action, it is distinct from the legal form of “Métis” identity as it does not rely on any definition for coherence, but is based on the free communication flows between Métis people in Métis social spaces.

Everyday life is the grounding for Métis community, a grounding that is fundamentally incoherent to bureaucratic organizations. Life is simply too complex and too diverse to be understood in simplified bureaucratic legal definitions. The diversity and fluidity of everyday life stands in constant opposition to static legal identities that striate and lineate the experiences of being Métis. It is the interaction between these two modes of identity production that this chapter will explore.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to re-conceptualize Métisness as a process of everyday life, arising from the *relationships between Métis people*, rather than between Métis individuals and a bureaucratic body. Métisness is grounded in spaces unseen by outsiders, where Métisness is hegemonic—it does not need to be defined, so can remain unspoken—and therefore identity in these spaces is understood as indefinable and rather unproblematic. Outside of bureaucratic spaces, there is little need for a definition of Métisness, as it just *lived*, and it is in these spaces where research participants feel most comfortable and at home. The “Métis” legal identity is however, still useful as a tool to *protect and enhance* everyday Métis identity, to improve the conditions in which Métis people live, and to generate spaces where everyday Métisness can be expressed freely.

This chapter is not meant to detract from the important role of visibility and Métis bureaucratic spaces. Given the struggle of the Métis people to have our organizations recognized (and funded) by the State as *the* Metis Voice and representative, the Manitoba Métis Federation

has become quite adept at structuring a Métis identity that appears similar to “Métis” legalities, and thus is accepted by the State *as* Métis. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, Métis identities as experienced *on the ground* are not as static or coherent as policy or academic studies would like them to be.

4.1 Definitions: “Métis” Legalisms and Métis Multiplicities

The Manitoba Métis Federation is an incorporated body with a specifically Metis membership. It provides Métis-focused social services to Métis people in Manitoba. As the political body for Manitoba Métis people, it has used its relationship with the State to produce an increasingly refined definition of “Métis” identity to fulfill its service provision and representative responsibilities. It currently defines “Métis” in a striated and legalistic manner. According to the MMF Constitution,

- (a) “Métis” means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation.
- (b) “Historic Métis Nation” means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland;
- (c) “Historic Métis Nation Homeland” means the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-Breeds as they were then known;
- (d) “Métis Nation’ means the Aboriginal people descended from the Historic Métis Nation, which is now comprised of all Métis Nation citizens and is one of the “aboriginal peoples of Canada” within s.35 of the Constitution Act of 1982;

(e) “Distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples” means distinct for cultural and nationhood purposes.¹⁰⁸

The role of these definitions is to produce an enclosed space of Métis identity. The boundaries of such an identity is the essential component of its definition. What is defined are the *boundaries* or the dividing lines between who is in and out. The result is a clear interior comprised of members, along with a clear exterior comprised of non-member outsiders; such definitions produce a bureaucratic clarity that obscures the messiness of the multiple ways of belonging to the community in everyday life.

Academics and intellectuals frequently produce similarly striated Metis identity spaces, presenting very specified and well-articulated definitions of “Métis” usually aimed at non-indigenous audiences, such as policy- and lawmakers alongside (of course) social scientists. The academic drive present in such descriptions motivates us to systematically define our concepts and to transform dynamic human processes into *objects with borders*. From the beginning of our academic training, we are socialized into striated, bureaucratic understandings of community formations. This drives us to ‘clean up’ everyday Métisness into something that can be contained by a paragraph, rather than reveling in the messiness of life. It is as though the Western academic tradition has a fear of rhizomes, a fear of disorder that denies the more complicated and indefinable forms of Métisness grounded in everyday experience. In order to be taken seriously and to be considered for publication, we must act as if Metis identity was some form of *checklist*.

A representative definition states:

Red River Métis collectively created, borrowed, and combined elements to form a distinctive culture and lifestyle separate from both their Euro-Canadian and First Nations neighbours, including a new language, form of land tenure, laws, a

¹⁰⁸ Manitoba Métis Federation Inc. *Manitoba Métis Federation Constitution* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation, September 11, 2007), p. 22.

distinctive form of dress, music, a national flag, and, in 1869-1870, distinctive political institutions.¹⁰⁹

There are two main features of any “Métis” checklist-identity. The first feature is the reliance on *cultural markers* that produce a series of seemingly objective identity traits that can be listed and compared against *real-life* Métis subjects.¹¹⁰ These cultural markers typically include a national anthem, music, and a Métis flag and are used as objective qualifiers of Métis nationhood, used in legalistic endeavours to prove the objective existence of a “historic” Métis nation, rather than the everyday processes that create a *contemporary* Métis nation here-and-now.

The second key feature of bureaucratic “Métis” identity relies on the separateness of Métis from both “Euro-Canadian” and “First Nations” cultures. Such definitions belie the nomadic approach to identity that many Métis people have.¹¹¹ These boundaries, especially between Métis and other indigenous peoples, were quite porous, fluctuating and at times non-existent.¹¹² For example, Paul Chartrand describes the smooth *back and forth* of Métis political affiliations made possible by the hybridity of Métisness:

The close relations between Métis and First Nations people in the past were evident in many ways. *Some people would live in one community and then with another.* The Métis leader Gabriel Dumont spent time living with the Turtle Mountain Chippewa not long before the famous battles on the Saskatchewan River in 1885. Those who belonged were not always those who were born into the people or the nation.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Andersen 2008: 350.

¹¹⁰ See Joe Sawchuk, *The Métis of Manitoba: Reformulation of an Ethnic Identity*, (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1978): 10. He discusses the problems of using so-called objective cultural markers in defining Métis, who are often difficult to differentiate (especially in Northern Manitoba) from their “Indian” relatives and neighbours.

¹¹¹ These definitions also rely on the idea that the identity categories of “First Nations” and “Euro-Canadian” are unitary and unproblematic, despite the obvious internal diversity.

¹¹² Lawrence 2004: 26.

¹¹³ Paul Chartrand, “Niw_hk_m_kanak (“All My Relations”): Métis-First Nations Relations. *National Centre for First Nations Governance* (June, 2007).

http://www.fngovernance.org/research/paul_chartrand.pdf, 6. *Emphasis Added.*

Nicole St-Onge notes similar identity nomadism characteristic of Métis people during economic ‘lean times’ in nineteenth century St. Laurent, Manitoba, when many hunting and trapping Métis joined indigenous communities in order to ensure their survival:

With the complete failure and poor returns in the bison hunts, Métis coming up from the southern parishes may well have been living an uncharacteristically hand-to-mouth existence in 1867 and 1868. The...Freemen Métis, led a life similar to that of the Saulteaux trapping segment and perhaps, to an outsider would have appeared as one and the same. The fact that a longtime resident of the Red River Settlement, with a Métis wife, would label [in correspondence with the clergy]...these groups of Métis as ‘Indian’ points once again to these people’s fluid socio-economic position, especially in times of stress.¹¹⁴

These more fluid forms of Métisness are problematic for State bureaucracies because they rely on Métis relationships rather than State-oriented definitions. An approach to Métisness that is situated in Métis relationships is preferable to Métis people because it leaves the power to determine community membership in the decentered Métis community rather than the centralized State. Because it is only capable of understanding power and control, the State conceives of the “Métis” legal identity as a relation between *indigenous individuals and the State*, rather than as *connections between Métis people*.

Given this, it is not at all surprising that when describing *their* Métis identity, very few participants mentioned the State at all.¹¹⁵ Most saw being Métis as something arising out of their relations with Métis people. One participant, Blanche, remarks that her Métisness was so natural as to remain unspoken and unlabeled. She couldn’t even define being Métis until leaving the unquestioned Métis space of her rural community, as there was no real need to:

¹¹⁴ Nicole St-Onge, *Saint Laurent, Manitoba: Evolving Métis Identities, 1850-1914*. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 25.

¹¹⁵ See Lawrence 2004, Chapter 11: Indian Status and Entitlements. Lawrence finds that in Toronto, there is a contradictory tendency to reject State categories such as Status as authentic

Where I grew up all of that was around me and I didn't have to look for Métis, *I didn't actually know what Métis was, until I came to work at the MMF*. That's kind of silly to say, but *I lived Métis*, my dad hunted, we ate off the land, I didn't realize the way I grew up was very Métis because I didn't know what Métis was. Was Métis about the song and dance? Not just, *it's a way of life, it's a way of being*.¹¹⁶

In her hometown Blanche's Métisness was hegemonic. It defied the need for explanation because Métis space was everywhere. This understanding of Métisness as "a way of life" defies the easy categorization that the State requires; it is a part of the infinite complexity and multidimensionality of everyday life, which does not easily lend itself to legal-bureaucratic striation. However, in the current intellectual and political climate, simply stating 'being Métis is a way of life' seems to be an unsatisfactory definition to scholars, politicians and bureaucrats. But when defining socio-cultural Métisness and being Métis in everyday experience, 'Métis as a way of life' is as broad and inclusive of an understanding as the people that created it. It is this *lived Métisness* that grounds this study and grounds the experiences of Métis people in Winnipeg.

4.1.1 Lived Métisness and Resistance

According to Deleuze and Guattari identity is a *multiplicity*. With rhizomatic multiplicities there is no central authority that organizes its connections, nor does it require an official institution like the State apparatus to authorize its existence. Instead rhizomes emerge organically and horizontally, created by those who are situated in the community social network. Because rhizomes are decentered, they are very difficult to visualize, let alone control, harness, or dismantle. Despite efforts of the State to stratify indigenous identities along racial, legal, Status-based, and class lines, the naturally occurring multiplicities of everyday existence continue to undermine attempts at stratifying everyday Métisness. Located in the everyday multidimensional

markers of indigeneity. Nonetheless, Status still remains a powerful signifier of indigeneity, and when possessed often satisfies community requirements for authenticity.

space of the Métis community is the potential for Métis people to seize back from the State the power to striate indigenous spaces, and define Métisness on our own terms. Deleuze and Guattari write:

A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. You can never get rid of ants because they form an animal rhizome that can be rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed... You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject—anything you like.¹¹⁷

Despite the willingness of the State to striate and re-striate legal “Métis” categories, first as “Half-breeds” (non-Indians receiving scrip rather than treaty), then as “ordinary Euro-Canadians” (individuals with no special status recognized by the State), and now “Métis” (an Aboriginal people with State-based Aboriginal rights), Métis actions have undermined and transformed these externally-manufactured categories of striation whenever faced with identities that deny Métis realities.

These experiences of everyday life undermine the legal-bureaucratic categories created by the State in two ways. First, bureaucratic categories of “Métisness” are created at considerable distance from the lived human experiences that give rise to these everyday understandings of Métisness. Since the origin of socio-cultural identity is in everyday life, bureaucracy can merely mimic the spontaneous productions of Métis identity at the community level by creating categories that contain several broad characteristics common to many people. Secondly, bureaucracy seeks to finalize identity categories, to define *for-all-time* what it means to be Métis. But since everyday Métisness has been, and continues to be highly flexible and forever in flux, bureaucracy must constantly re-striate its definitions to address changing meanings of Métisness

¹¹⁶ Blanche, interview by author, Winnipeg, MB, July 29, 2008. *Emphasis added.*

arising from an evolving everyday existence. In many cases, legal and bureaucratic “Métisness” is perpetually behind the times, unable to keep pace with everyday life, making it seem, at times, lacking in real-life applicability.

Increasingly, Métis intellectuals seem to have been countering the bureaucratic stratification of Métisness with a more everyday approach to Métis identity. Paul Chartrand defines being Métis by the everyday relationships with other Métis people that generates nationhood, rather than the inverse assertion of the legal recognition of Métisness by the Canadian State that generates the possibility of Métis nationhood:

Being Métis is not so much about who you are as an individual as it is about having kin or family relationships within a Métis community. It is not so much about your individual ancestry as it is about sharing in the common heritage of the people to which you belong. I simply want to point out that the story of how my people came to be is not merely a story about individual ancestry. It is a unique story of one people, but all peoples came into being the same way: by common political action and, in time, a common remembering of a shared history.”¹¹⁸

As Chartrand points out Métis identity emerges from interaction with Métis people. Métisness is a cultural process, not the product of some form of ‘racial’ hybridity or any identification with a Métis or pan-Aboriginal bureaucracy. Nor is ‘racial’ hybridity by any means an exclusive feature of Métis people. Chris Andersen reminds us that “biological, cultural, and linguistic ‘mixedness’ constitute a social fact for *all* Aboriginal people, First Nations included, who reside in the Canadian nation-state”.¹¹⁹ What makes Métis people a distinct rhizomatic community are our kinship bonds families and our identification *as* Métis people, connected through kinship and culture to a nation that emerged during the fur trade era and was subsequently repressed, denied, and then striated by the Canadian State over the past century and a half. In this sense, who is

¹¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 9.

¹¹⁸ Chartrand 2007: 8.

Métis is defined more or less as *those who are accepted as Métis* through everyday interaction and involvement within the Métis community.¹²⁰ Claiming that Métisness is multiple is not to open it up to the pure relativism that some would allow.¹²¹ Métis is not (and never has been) a catchall term for mixed-blood indigenous people lacking Indian Status. Métis people are the inheritors of a hybrid cultural legacy and are defined both culturally (as this chapter will cover) and as the lone-inheritors of a long political legacy (as will be discussed in the next chapter) that twice refused to be treated as anything less than a nation, and was twice silenced only through the overwhelming and unrestricted use of State and settler violence. Using such relativism would rob the Métis people of the right to determine their own existence and striate their own boundaries. It would also rely on State-manufactured identities, such as “Status Indian” and “non-Status Indian” to determine who is Metis, categories that are historically irrelevant to defining who is Métis. Smooth Métis identity is, like the social space that produces it, network-based. It is reaffirmed daily through interaction with Métis community members in Métis social spaces. It is nearly impossible to see, and equally impossible to define, as smooth Métis identity is situational and fluid. It can be simply thought of as Blanche described it: “*I lived Métis.*”¹²²

Much has been written about the role of the State and the legal-bureaucratic apparatus used to colonize indigenous forms of identity creation. Joe Sawchuk argues, “[i]n its relationship with Native peoples, the nation-state often creates or defines aboriginal identities for its own use. These necessarily distort, and may have little to do with peoples’ understanding or perception of

¹¹⁹ Andersen 2008: 353. *Emphasis added.*

¹²⁰ This is opposed to “is accepted by the Métis Nation” which is included in the official definition of Métis in the MMF constitution. In the case of the MMF constitution “Métis community” means the MMF bureaucratic citizenship arm. While this is a valid form of Métisness, it is a striated form of Métisness, not a smooth or everyday form of Métisness.

¹²¹ For a movement towards a relativist approach of Métis identity that opens up the identifier “Métis” to non-Status people see Sawchuk 2000.

¹²² Blanche, interview with author, July 29, 2008. *Emphasis Added*

themselves.”¹²³ These identity distortions are indeed useful to the State (and settler society in general) as they aid in the dispossession of indigenous territories necessary for colonial settlement and expansion. Bonita Lawrence notes that “bodies of law defining and controlling Indianness have for years disrupted older indigenous ways of identifying the self in relation not only to collective identity”.¹²⁴ The use of State striation of “Métisness” has caused some Métis thinkers to wonder if the State thinks that the Métis exist as a nation at all. Chris Andersen argues that in the State’s “discursive context ‘Métis’ is neither a nation nor a culture but rather, is tantamount to a polite, characteristically Canadian administrative categorization for indigenous individuals for whom Indian and Northern Affairs Canada refuses to claim responsibility.”¹²⁵ This process of stratification has rendered the State’s legal-bureaucratic category “Métis” somewhat ineffectual in terms of everyday cultural meaning:

Like the category “Indian”, which homogenizes identities of dozens of distinct Indigenous nations in Canada, the category “Métis” currently encapsulates not only the different historical experiences of being mixed-blood that existed under the fur trade but also the tremendous differences that exist among *contemporary* Métis. These different groups range from northern nonstatus Cree speaking people who still live in historic Métis communities...to those whose ancestors are Métis but speak only English and have been urban for decades.¹²⁶

“Métis” as a legal-bureaucratic definition is imposed predominantly from the outside the Métis nation and Métis people are given very little input on how that definition has come to be.

Sawchuk considers this to be somewhat ironic, because currently, the “very process of declaring oneself to be ‘Métis’ (or ‘Indian’ or ‘Inuit’) means taking on aspects of identity and otherness that

¹²³ Sawchuk 2000: 73.

¹²⁴ Lawrence 2004: 1.

¹²⁵ Andersen 2008: 362.

¹²⁶ Lawrence 2004: 84.

have been defined by the dominant society.”¹²⁷ The question that arises then is: how do we, as Métis people, reclaim “Métis” from the State, *and* prevent legal and bureaucratic classification of Métis cultural life in general.

4.2 The Empty Dimension of “Métis” Legalism

Like social space, everyday Metisness can be thought of as a form of non-physical space. It exists in rhizomatic social networks, emerging out of everyday human existence and interaction. Like Deleuze and Guattari, this project is interested in the “operations of striation and smoothing” and specifically their “passages or combinations: how the forces at work within a space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces.”¹²⁸ The relationship between the smooth and the striated—between everyday and legal identities—is not a relationship where one comes to dominate the other, rather the two can co-exist. Everyday Métis identity, as smooth and rhizomorphic, exists in everyday life and forms the common cultural language that allows the Winnipeg Métis community to interact *as* Métis people. It is highly flexible, it is spontaneous and it is seen only in the social relationships of its members.

Legal “Métis” identity is a highly striated “empty dimension” of Métisness, which has as its origin, not everyday interaction, but bureaucratic discipline and management. Its empty one-dimensionality presents a monolithic and monopolistic “Métisness”—a coherent depiction of the Métis archetype, to which everyone can be generalized, but to which *no one actually belongs*. Or as Deleuze and Guattari write, “the notion of unity appears only when there is a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier...Unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary

¹²⁷ Sawchuk 2000: 73.

¹²⁸ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 500.

to that of the system considered.”¹²⁹ Unity of the multiplicity of Metisness, in the form of legal identity, is fused by colonial power dynamics, where the diversity of Métis identities is transformed into a single concept of “Métis” through State institutions and those who must deal with them.

However, when dealing with the State, the Métis rhizome often presents this empty dimension *as* the multiplicity *in its entirety*, concealing most aspects of everyday Metisness from State view, preventing in many cases, the striation and colonization that often accompanies this gaze. To put it simply, Métis political organizations and this empty dimension (the “Métis” legal formation) are visible and thus striated by the State, *but in so doing allows (however unintentionally) other, more vital and vibrant dimensions of everyday Metisness to remain as multiplicities and to preserve the inherent diversity of Métisness.* In short, the empty dimension works to prevent as much as possible the spill-over of State identity striation into everyday life.

During the interview process, the tension between everyday and bureaucratic Métis identities was a common theme. Many participants had difficulty defining Métisness in any concrete way. Most participants pointed to an everyday understanding of their Métisness as a grounding feature, and many explicitly challenged bureaucratic notions of “Métis” using their everyday identities.

Inevitably the question arises over the possibility (and desire) of generating unity between everyday Métisness and “Métis” as a legal category. While many government technicians would likely suggest a dialectical synthesis, or something like: ‘the “Métis” legal category should more accurately reflect everyday Métis identities’, these arguments could easily destroy the political autonomy generated through the existence of un-synthesizable categories and independent rhizomatic formations. Unification of these two identities in the current colonial

¹²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 8.

climate could be disastrous. The autonomy of everyday Metisness is only feasible with the invisibility generated by the incoherence of Métisness to outsiders. It allows Métisness to be structured and re-structured with little-to-no involvement (and hence interference) by the Canadian State. It is the *visibility* of legal identity that propels it into a bureaucratic space where it is infinitely striated and re-striated by State forces. This separated legal striation, leaves the rhizome free from the State's bureaucratic striation impulse and free to produce its own formation of Métis identities.

4.3 Being Métis in Winnipeg

After discussing the personal experiences of being Métis in interviews, it was apparent that Métis identity is much more complex than 'straight-forward' legal-administrative definitions usually allow for. In everyday life, Metisness is in constant flux, but *unlike* many other identities it *openly* embraces this hybridity—in being derived from many different cultures—as a fundamental founding feature of Métis life. This acknowledgement makes the multiplicity of Metisness more apparent than in other identity formations. ("Canadian," for example, desires "recognition of a system of official identity categories"¹³⁰ that define "Canadian" in specific, State-defined terms. Motivated by a persistent fear over the ambiguity of 'being Canadian' and wanting it settled once-and-for-all, "Canadian" nationalists persistently demonstrate an impulse towards striation rather than hybridity). While it was generally accepted that Métisness had standard and official forms, official identity categories were not the primary means by which Métis participants saw themselves. Many other forms of Métisness emerged in interviews in response to basic, everyday requirements of life in Winnipeg and within other Métis communities.

¹³⁰ Richard J.F Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 4.

4.3.1 'I Lived Métis': Everyday Life

Since Métis identities are multiple and their boundaries imaginable¹³¹, there was a variety of understandings of Métisness among the research participants. During the interview process, several different bureaucratic understandings of “Métisness” were used to quickly describe Métis identity and culture, but these definitions are subsequently undermined by seemingly contradictory everyday experiences of the interviewees. Many of the participants relied on these bureaucratic definitions of “Métisness” to briefly or succinctly summarize how they saw their own everyday Métisness. But when describing in detail the experiences associated with living Métis in Winnipeg, rhizomatic everyday explanations quickly undermined the checklist-type account initially used to describe their identities and experiences.

In its most bureaucratic form, legal “Métisness” makes a hard and fast distinction between Métis and “First Nations”¹³² people. Yet in exploring the difference between being Métis and being First Nations, many participants saw similarities in Métis and First Nations cultures, undermining this presumed divide. Helen, a Métis student at a Winnipeg-based university, found it difficult to articulate a concrete cultural boundary between the lived experience of being Métis and being First Nations:

Definitely the difference is there, but its funny, its really hard to tell. My partner, who is First Nation, his dad speaks his language and he commercial fishes, but you could say that's Métis. But he's very strong First Nations, but I see it as strong Métis, so they are very similar, I mean, you can see the similarities, I see them more myself in First Nation culture than I do in French culture, just from my Métis identity.¹³³

¹³¹ See Andersen 2008: 385.

¹³² In many interviews “First Nations” was a general category used to differentiate the Métis nation from other indigenous nations.

¹³³ Helen, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

The difference it seems is not so much in culture, but in the social networks (rhizome) to which one belongs. What seems to differentiate Métis and First Nations cultures in Winnipeg is not the content of the culture as much as the networks to which they belong.

Similarly, another participant, Blanche, argues that there is much in the way of cross-over between Métis and First Nation cultures, she states that “we all like bannock”, but feels that much of the differentiation is influenced by a need for the Métis people to differentiate themselves to generate a sense of nationhood *and* a specific nation-based relationship with the Canadian State:

I didn't realize the divisiveness that there was until I actually came here [to the MMF]. Before I came here I was a teacher and we teach all kids about Aboriginal programming and acceptance and understanding each other. When I came here, one of the things I really had a hard time with was the whole dividing the whole distance between the Métis and First Nation and I didn't understand why it was like that. Partly it is because the Métis need to stand up for themselves and see themselves as distinct people *in order to have their voice heard*.¹³⁴

She “still struggles” whether it is necessary of dividing Métis and First Nations in order to have a distinct voice:

in some ways I think ‘yes’ because I see the movement the MMF has made here. And in other ways I think ‘no’ because I think of myself as a teacher within a classroom teaching kids, you don't go up to a student and ask if they're Métis or are they First Nation. And if they were would it matter? What we teach them about the values of life are all the same ultimately and how to be a better person, its all the same kind of thing that we teach, any student. So is being distinct important? Are we distinct? Yes. Is it important? Yes. But, are there times when we need to not be as distinct and need to work together? Yes.¹³⁵

The concept of a ‘distinct Métis voice’ arose in many of the interviews, usually referring to the need for Métis people to be able to articulate their own interests and to be *heard* by the dominant

¹³⁴ Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 29, 2008. *Emphasis Added*.

¹³⁵ Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 29, 2008.

culture and the State. The Métis ‘Voice’ in many ways is related to the articulation of the “Métis” empty dimension by the Métis political organizations. The Voice of “Métisness” is tasked with representing the infinite dimensions of Métisness as a one-dimensional identity that is accessible to those without direct experience with everyday Métisness. The Métis Voice presents “Métisness” to the State, so that the complexities with which the participants wrestled, does not limit the resources available to the Métis political organizations. The production of Voice and “Métis” identity is thus a key responsibility of Métis government. At the community level, the MMF’s Voice has been instrumental in expanding the scope of the Métis rhizome and bringing Métis outsiders into the fold:

the MMF has provided a platform for many people to acknowledge that being Métis is OK. They have done a lot of work in providing positive experiences for people and its not just the post-Powley things, its not just about the money right? To me I think it’s seeing the MMF, seeing the people in a positive light. We never saw that in the sixties and seventies, or the eighties[...]Now we are seeing things happening like Louis Riel Day being called Louis Riel Day, it was a huge thing for Métis people, a very positive thing. And I think the MMF has done a really good job in providing a positive way of seeing the Métis.¹³⁶

Marcel points to a specific MMF-funded program aimed at increasing the awareness of the Métis people and pride in being Métis:

we had a flag campaign, there are Métis flags being flown across the province, you can see them at homes and people are proud to say they are Métis. Just this summer at one of the longest and most successful country outdoor festivals in Dauphin, one of the reports coming in from the reporter was saying that the campground was full of Métis flags, just flying at the campground, that would have been unseen a few years ago. And now people are proudly flying their Métis flag and saying, ya

¹³⁶ Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 29, 2008.

this is who we are as a people and here we are. There is more awareness here of who the Métis people are.¹³⁷

However, this striated dimension of Métisness is viewed by some as (at least partially) problematic. Many newly incorporated Métis individuals with little exposure to the depth of everyday Métis identity can also assume that the empty “Métis” dimension is representative of the entire multiplicity. These ‘new arrivals’ are also seen as less attracted to the Métis community itself, than to the benefits and special rights (education funding, hunting, fishing, employment equity, etc.) that the empty legal dimension can provide. After all it is the legal definition of “Métis” that these State granted/recognized rights are attached to, rather than the community itself. Some interviewees saw many new MMF members as those there to exploit the benefits of being “Métis” while being unaware of the *responsibility* of grassroots community membership:

Evan: that’s a concept I don’t really care for: “Proud to be Métis”, a lot of people are pushing it, I take a different approach that ‘don’t be ashamed to be Métis’, that’s my thought on that. This was my thought process[...]you know, somebody said to you ‘are you Métis’ and I said ‘yes I am’ to me that person is stronger than one who is pushing the proudness cause, usually the people pushing the proudness are more superficial. And they’re superficial in their whole attitudes, you know, they’re the ones who take advantage of what they are or what they can get.

AG: *Rather than just being Métis they have to perform “the Metis”?*

Evan: Ya a lot of people out there are pushing the flag, pushing this and pushing that, but when the time comes to push or shove, they’re not around.¹³⁸

The construction of a legally-defined, empty dimension can encourage outside individuals to join the community, yet it can also stimulate the growth of an empty dimension of Métisness *for its*

¹³⁷ Marcel, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 31, 2008.

¹³⁸ Evan, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 14, 2008.

own sake and fill this dimension with “superficial”¹³⁹ identities that rely on external definitions for the purpose of State-based administration of “Métis” special privileges. Helen is annoyed with those who use the legal “Métis” identity for its educational privileges, but often fail to be involved with Métis people *as* Métis, or have little involvement with the Winnipeg Métis community:

I’m super critical of a lot of them[...]I see it a lot at university where a lot of them are, and it offends me because I knew people in my community, who live in the bunks and it is reserve-type living and they are Métis and people call them First Nations and they get so offended, not because its an insult to be First Nations or whatever, but because they are so strong Métis and they have nothing, you know. And then I came here to school and I just saw how easily people are like ‘ya I’m Métis so I come to school, ya, ya, ya,’ and a lot of them[...]went to high school leadership things in the city where I was the only Métis there that I knew of, and there was another First Nations guy, we were the only ones that identified as Aboriginal, and then I go to university and at an awards ceremony for a bursary, it turns out that three of them sitting in that crowd with me were Métis. And I was like ‘kind of weird, I see you at the scholarship ceremony and then don’t [see you elsewhere], how come you didn’t stand up and announce it at the little leadership convention there?’¹⁴⁰

Since the legalist “Métis” identity has produced tangible financial benefits to acknowledging Métisness, at least in a legal sense, many individuals have come forward and get an MMF membership card to procure “Métis” rights. These rights, however, do not necessarily produce committed community members. This can cause frustration with community builders and activists. Blanche, a Métis educator and an active local member has consistently struggled with Winnipeg-based Métis people who,

sign up to get a Métis card and then you don’t see them again. In our local we have 350 people that are members, of those 350 we have a handful of people that come out and volunteer for

¹³⁹ Evan, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 14, 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Helen, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

different activities, or even attend different activities. And, at the same time, there are people, who we know are attending those activities who are our members, but they don't come specifically because they are our members.¹⁴¹

She contrasts this urban phenomenon to her experiences with MMF membership in her rural Manitoba home community:

back home, when they have Métis days, and whether you [are a MMF member or not, you come out] I never became a member until I was like thirty-something years old, right, because I just attended, I was part of the group. You don't have to have a card to be part of the group. *Here [in Winnipeg] you sort of have to have a card to be part of the group.* Not so there[...]it's much different here in the city than back home.¹⁴²

It appears that the Winnipeg Métis community places more emphasis on legal striations in determining who belongs to the community than rural equivalents. The importance of the 'Métis card' as a symbol of participation and belonging was emphasized by many participants, seemed to be a requirement for *political* membership in the community, unlike its more practical uses (the provision of social services) in rural locations. The centrality of MMF membership in Winnipeg community building most likely results from two specific traits in the Métis community there: First, because of the highly dispersed nature of the Winnipeg Metis community, MMF activities and spaces are important points of gathering—network nodes—in the Métis community and MMF membership gains access to these events, many of which are put on by MMF Locals. Helen notes an important differentiation between pan-Aboriginal programming and Manitoba Métis Federation programs and events, which are more diverse than simple social service provision. MMF membership involves a political element as well. While some Métis people are involved with many of the,

¹⁴¹ Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 29, 2008. *Emphasis Added.*

¹⁴² Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 29, 2008.

Aboriginal programs in the North End and stuff like that, I'd say the ones you do have together that politically identify as Manitoba Métis Federation members, those are a community, I think, of themselves. The MMF membership, I mean we all come together at AGAs and a lot of people are from Winnipeg. The Winnipeg Region is very involved and it's pretty massive, and that's very much a community.¹⁴³

Since MMF is above all, a political organization, many of the Métis events it sponsors have an overtly political element alongside the everyday activities of the community. Since the MMF remains a pivotal network node in the Métis rhizome, membership and its political responsibilities retain a central importance in Métis community life.

The second element of Métisness that is immediately visible is the correlation between Métis membership and State-sponsored resources for community building. Jeff, a Métis community-builder who works at one of Winnipeg's friendship centres, notes that the official separation between Métis, non-Status Natives, and Treaty Indians, has less to do with culture than money. This distinction,

all has to do with money. And if you have Indians as part of your organization, where your primary goal is to service Métis people, the government will not pay[...]and membership is based on the numbers and government funding and all that stuff.¹⁴⁴

Increased membership results in increased State funding, which in turn produces more sites of Métis activities and services to further increase the potential for involving Métis people in Métis programs. Membership in a Métis organization can increase involvement by assisting new members in feeling like a part of the community, even if only through the 'superficiality' of a 'Métis card'. But, since the MMF's membership is structured to a degree by government legal definition, it necessarily exteriorizes people from the legal category "Métis" who would otherwise be (socio-culturally speaking) connected to the community.

¹⁴³ Helen, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

Alice who is Métis (in both the cultural and legal sense) has two children who have Indian Status from their father, but because they are legally-speaking Treaty Indians, they are barred from MMF membership. Due to this ineligibility, they (and others like them) are excluded from some of the community's events, including many of the more political activities associated with Métis self-government such as Annual General Assemblies and MMF Local meetings—a key part of the community's political organization. Alice struggled when asked if she would define Métis as a legal or cultural identity:

Alice: I would say a cultural identity, but at the same time it's a political identity as well because there is so much controversy over treaty, Métis and how they fall and what they get.

AG: It's really complicated eh?

Alice: It is, it is. And it's hard to make the decision too if your parents are going to be treaty or they are going to be Métis. You have to decide at some point. And not knowing much about the Métis and [knowing] the benefits of being treaty... My kids are treaty.

AG: If your kids are treaty, does that automatically exclude them from MMF membership? Could they do both?

Alice: No they can't do both. As far as I know, they would have to take themselves off the Band they are currently with, but then they have dropped their treaty status.¹⁴⁵

Leon notes that this can be difficult for families where some members are Treaty Indians and others are Metis, because it is a government definition of Indianness (and non-Indianness) that spills over into everyday life:

It [Métisness] is one of those qualitative as opposed to quantitative dimensions. The thing about money is easy to deal with, right, you just say 'you can only take from one pot of

¹⁴⁴ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Alice, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 12, 2008.

money', but there's emotional types of strings that are strung here, and that's when it gets into the nationalism and the politics and the family issues.¹⁴⁶

Leon goes on to say: "in practice, what is done is exclude them [Métis with Status] from being able to *fully participate* in Métis affairs."¹⁴⁷ As Métis people who have Status are thus denied membership in their community's affairs, the connection between State definition of "Métis" identity, MMF political and social activities, and everyday Métisness becomes quite visible. Despite an acknowledgment by many that Métis cards and legal Métis recognition *should* count for little in the Métis community, "Métis" legalisms continue to play a role in striated the Métis community, creating artificial boundaries and affecting the political structures which separate some Métis people from 'full participation' in community life.

4.3.2 Outside of the Manitoba Métis Federation, Outside of Striated Identity Spaces

While the MMF plays an important role in Métis community and identity building, many non-MMF organizations have similar responsibilities as key spaces of interaction and gathering in the Winnipeg Métis community. Métisness has an organic quality that seems to be most freely expressed in grassroots community organizations that are furthest away from State forces of striation.

Friendship centres and other indigenous community organizations rely to a large degree on State funding to operate, however, they function *without* the reliance on identity striation that is central to MMF membership and political activities. Utilizing an explicitly pan-Aboriginal approach to community building, friendship centres and other community organizations do not require specific nation-based membership in order to provide services, and function much more akin to the undifferentiated involvement of Blanche's rural Métis community where everyone

¹⁴⁶ Leon, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 18, 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Leon, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 18, 2008. *Emphasis Added.*

participates in community events regardless of bureaucratic membership concerns. At one community centre, a family of East African refugees (considered to be active community members) was welcomed into the everyday social network of the centre because there is an understanding of social need as a lived experience which can lead to cultural solidarity with other indigenous families.¹⁴⁸ Jeff, a friendship centre worker, differentiates the friendship centre from the MMF by how identity is used to provide services to indigenous people:

everything that goes through the MMF has to be Métis-specific and they have their own criterion as to how they determine 'Métis' and who is eligible and who isn't eligible, but [...] our doors are just open. It doesn't matter, *our focus is more on an economic class, as opposed to an ethnic class*, it's just anybody who needs the help is going to get it when they come to the Friendship Centre. We don't even keep track of who is Métis, who is Status and non-Status. You know, sometimes you don't know, but in general you know who's Métis and who's not, generally just through knowing the people, the community is so small everyone knows everybody. But you know we don't, we don't even look at what you are.¹⁴⁹

Friendship centres and other non-nation-affiliated social service providers embrace a form of pan-Aboriginalism that includes many Métis community members. As a result pan-Aboriginal organizations and social services, like the MMF form important network nodes, as the intersections of Métis interaction. Working as community supports and meeting centres for social and cultural events, these otherwise bureaucratically organized spaces function as part of the Métis community.

The MMF, friendship centres, community centres and other services that can be considered *officially constituted organizations* are the most visible Métis spaces in Winnipeg, but they are *not* the most foundational. The key Métis spaces continue to be the most smooth and rhizomatic spaces of interaction, where Métis people come together as a result of kinship, daily

¹⁴⁸ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

activity, or in many cases, pure coincidence. What makes such a vibrant Métis community in Winnipeg is the number of chance sites of interaction where individuals can find community, and *live Métis* without having to search far-and-wide for these spaces.

4.3.3 Finding Métis Community in Winnipeg

One key element to the Winnipeg Métis community's development is the ability of community members to function rhizomatically—without central administration and without any sort of hierarchical oversight. Most, if not all, participants when asked how they found connections in the Métis community-rhizome, they identified their family first and then their friends as the initial starting points for Métis interaction, which led later to involvement in formal community organizations, such as the Manitoba Métis Federation. A recurrent theme in all the interviews is the unarticulated attraction to Métis people and culture, feeling 'at home' with other Métis people, regardless of the space. Helen, when initially leaving her small home community in northern Manitoba for university in Winnipeg,

moved in with a friend of mine who was going to school[...]she was Métis from Duck Bay, and we lived together and we were both Métis girls, kind of bushed, or whatever, we tried out different schools and things like that together. There'd be like a group people that I'd hang out with for a bit and they never got our jokes or so when we did find those people, who liked to joke with us and things like that, as we got to know each other, we found out they're Métis too. And that was mostly through Aboriginal student groups, a lot of them were Métis and you don't really go and ask people if they're Métis or whatever, but sometimes you do and that's ok. It just turned out a lot of them were Métis and they weren't hard to find.¹⁵⁰

Many participants noted that they were drawn to other Métis people, for complex reasons that frequently escaped explanation. Many found Métis community in spaces and places where they

¹⁴⁹ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008. *Emphasis Added.*

¹⁵⁰ Helen, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

were not required to explain or justify their Métisness or Métis experiences. Helen's desire to find friends who understood her sense of humour is likely related to understanding and accepting each other's Métisness without the impracticalities of explaining why certain Metis individuals do what they do. In atmospheres where an indigenous culture is marginalized by hegemonic forms of whiteness (like workspaces, universities and all but a few State schools), finding a safe place where you are understood and where your friends have common experiences is a high priority.

Jeff, in coming to terms with his Métisness, found that cultural differences among Métis people can be very large, but he could find common ground in the shared sense of being perpetually in-between other identities. He defines his Métisness as *a feeling of not fitting in*, and how he finds community in these feelings of being in-between cultures:

when I started to learn about the culture and the people and really that's exactly what I was feeling at that time, was what the Métis had been feeling for hundreds of years already. So I was able to identify with that, and as I identified more, and as I learnt more, the people that at one time I just thought were Indian, were Métis and I'd find a lot of the white people I thought were just white were Métis, so I was able to identify and we were able to click that way[...]And may that's why the Métis people are so tied together and are strong together and stick together and they really cherish and hold dear that Métis identity, is because that's what they have.¹⁵¹

In contrast to Jeff's experiences of being a perpetual outsider, Kim, a community educator working at a Winnipeg university, relates her Métisness, not to a being between cultures, but being able to belong in both:

I consider myself a Métis person, but I have chosen the traditional ways, spiritual ways of the First Nation people. I don't accept the Roman Catholic Church because I feel that's all a form of colonization. And I really can relate to the traditional ways[of the First Nations cultures...]So that's why I say it's kind of a personal thing, you could even, if people want to go more in

¹⁵¹ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

depth, they could go more in depth with that too. Because there's First Nations people who, if you want to go through actual blood count, which I know they do in the States, to identify whether you are First Nations or not which is kind of [shruggles shoulders]...and for me I'd have a real high blood count as opposed to maybe another person who has less blood count. So I guess it depends on you and how you identify yourself. Sometimes I use the word Aboriginal, but that's just a generic term that's used by a lot of people. I guess for me personally, I prefer to work together than separate and divide.¹⁵²

Finding Métis community was an important priority for every Métis person interviewed, these spaces where an unarticulated Métisness went unquestioned made *living Métis* possible for the participants. Being able to share common experiences, in the forms of jokes or talk of struggle, allowed for the relationship building that makes strong rhizomes. These relationships, while assisted from time-to-time by formal Métis organizations, did not rely on them for their existence; rather these relationships form the basis for collective Métis action (as the next chapter will demonstrate).

4.3.4 Passing

While every Métis participant experienced a desire to *live Métis* with other Métis people, there were also moments in every participant's daily lives, where they sought to avoid being associated with their Métis identity, in order to separate themselves from potential negative effects of Métisness, particularly racism. Cathy Richardson defines passing as "presenting oneself as either White or First Nations in order to escape being socially ostracized. In colonial society, possessing dark skin has lead to various form of discrimination and positioning of the 'other,' while light skin has concealed an invisible 'Métis-ness'".¹⁵³ Passing, which can occasionally disrupt Métis community building, is nonetheless a necessary survival mechanism for many Métis families.

¹⁵² Kim, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 21, 2008.

¹⁵³ Cathy Richardson, "Métis Identity Creation and Tactical Responses to Oppression and Racism," *Variations* 2 (2006): 61.

Appearing to be a non-Métis person may safeguard individuals from physical and symbolic violence, not to mention, social exclusion.

Frances, who grew up in a northern Manitoba community, often felt an impulse to pass as either White or First Nations, rather than face the exclusion and violence that Métisness could be associated with:

Growing up in The Pas was harsh actually, cause I mean being Métis there was, when I was in high school, it was not a good thing. I was picked on by the First Nations kids because I wasn't brown enough, and I was picked on by the non-Aboriginal kids cause I wasn't white enough. So, a lot of school-yard scraps [laughter].¹⁵⁴

However, moving to Winnipeg, where Métis people were not only more visible, but more socially and politically active, helped Frances become more comfortable with her Métisness and to identify openly as Métis:

It's funny thinking about that now, because you don't see that much now, I mean in the city because Winnipeg is such a multicultural city and when I first moved here, seeing this many Métis people all the time was different than [other western cities] where you could drive for a long time and not see another Métis family coming along in a car[...]. Moving here was interesting, I was like 'wow', I know statistically Winnipeg has a large Aboriginal population, but it just didn't register until I actually got here and I was like 'wow'. Every second car is someone who is of some type of Aboriginal descent, so it's kind of interesting.¹⁵⁵

However, despite Winnipeg's diverse character and large number of indigenous people, many urban spaces, especially suburban spaces, are still hostile environments to Métis people.

Gabrielle, a Métis woman in her late twenties, only found out she was Métis recently. She

¹⁵⁴ Frances, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

¹⁵⁵ Frances, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

acknowledges that her parent's decision to pay little attention their Métisness may have protected her from social marginalization:

actually all my friends know that I'm Métis now, but if I would have told them years ago when we were just kids and just hanging around, guarantee you I would have been picked on. *For sure.*¹⁵⁶

Jeff also grew up in a situation where his parents never stressed, or even acknowledged their Métisness:

I grew up not even knowing I was Métis, because it was never talked about, it was never spoken, it was never even thought about, it was never 'you're white', it was never 'you're anything else', it was just 'you're [Jeff]'. And that's how my family grew up. They didn't really think about it or put too much behind being what you are [...] you're only goal is to be a productive member of society.¹⁵⁷

Gabrielle, describes the stereotypes of Métis people in her "upper-middle class, white collar" suburb, with many wealthy "French" families:

granted, all of them are probably Métis, none of them will ever admit to being Métis, you get this kind of point of view that the Métis population is one-sided politically where they take their own culture and turn it into self-governance when no other culture does that[...]And I guess, more on the non-political side, you get a point of view where its more of a laid-back, lazy, 'everything should be given to me, handouts'...you know? It's just not something that you were taught, it's not something you were preached, or something that you said, but its something that you picked up on and its just something that travels with you the whole time.¹⁵⁸

Passing is a common experience, and a practical survival tool. It allows Métis people to temporarily de-territorialize themselves from Métisness to temporarily assume another (safer) identity. Some Métis people pass on a more permanent basis (like Gabrielle's "French")

¹⁵⁶ Gabrielle, interview with author, Winnipeg, August 7, 2008.

¹⁵⁷ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

neighbours), to the point where their Métisness slips from familial consciousness. This does not mean that passing Métis do not *live Métis*. Gabrielle later realized that most of the friends that would have teased her turned out to be Métis as well, some of whom now work for Métis political organizations.¹⁵⁹ *Living Métis* as it is fundamentally intangible, does not necessarily require an acknowledgment that one lives in Métis social and cultural spaces, only that one (knowingly or not) participates in the Métis community, with other Métis people, even if it is just one's own family.

4.4 Conclusion

Métisness is a multiplicity. It has many dimensions that are fluid and fluctuating. It also has an empty dimension that protects the multiplicity from outside control and interference. Métisness, as experienced by the interview participants, differed from the expressions of the empty "Métis" legal identity expressed by the State and Métis organizations seeking to utilize it for its advantages. Rather an organic and everyday understanding of Métisness emerged that was sustained by relations between Métis people and grounded in a rhizomorphic community in Winnipeg. Lived Métisness, or Metisness experienced in everyday life, often defied explanation, but was nonetheless articulated as the common definition of an authentic Métisness, relevant to the lives of Métis people. While the empty legal dimension remains an important and relevant political tool for Métis empowerment, it is still an identity that is problematic if seen as the grounding force of Métis identity. While there is no need to dismantle legal "Métis" identities, their use should be limited to bureaucratic relationships between Métis organizations and the State, leaving the rhizome free to function as daily life requires.

¹⁵⁸ Gabrielle, interview with author, Winnipeg, August 7, 2008.

¹⁵⁹ Gabrielle, interview with author, Winnipeg, August 7, 2008.

Chapter 5

Politics

It is obvious to anyone involved in grassroots indigenous communities that the Canadian State is uncomfortable with indigenous politics outside of its gaze, and that it is outright terrified of politics that challenge the existing order of things. The State is nervous because autonomous indigenous politics holds the key to indigenous decolonization and existence outside of State structures. Indigenous politics plays a significant role in shaping how we as indigenous peoples live our lives with one another, how we conduct ourselves, and what we believe ourselves capable of. It is because of this reality that Taiaiake Alfred argues that politics has a special role in the process of decolonization:

The transformation will begin inside each one of us as personal change, but decolonization will become a reality only when we...commit to a movement based on an *ethical* and *political* vision and consciously reject the colonial postures of weak submission, victimry and raging violence. It is a political vision and solution that will be capable of altering power relations and rearranging forces that shape our lives. Politics is the force that channels the social, cultural and economic powers and makes them imminent in our lives.¹⁶⁰

How politics is put into practice is a major determinant of its transformative potential, and as Alfred notes above, certain types of “colonial postures” (submission, victimry, etc.) may actually undermine the power of indigenous politics to transform individuals and communities into self-sufficient entities, instead increasing our reliance on the State. Rather, he argues that the way we practice politics affects what decolonized individuals and communities will look like after the struggle.¹⁶¹ Alfred proposes that there are two general pathways that indigenous communities may travel in terms of political organization. One, a decidedly Europeanized path which leads to

¹⁶⁰ Alfred 2005: 20.

the assimilation of indigenous communities, and the other, an indigenous pathway rooted in the teachings of our ancestors, a path that can revive the strengths that our communities once possessed. He writes:

In choosing between revitalizing indigenous forms of government and maintaining the European forms imposed on them, Native communities have a choice between two radically different kinds of social organization: One based on the authority of the good, and the other on coercion and authoritarianism.¹⁶²

It is indigenous systems that offer a liberatory potential, because at their core they rely upon the direct democratic contribution of all individuals: “There is no coercive authority, and decision-making is collective. Leaders rely on their persuasive abilities to achieve a consensus that respects the autonomy of individuals, each of whom is free to dissent from, and remain unaffected by, the collective decision.”¹⁶³ These traditional principles of governance remain an important part of indigenous communities, and in this case, remain a central organizing principle among Métis. There remains a strong grassroots understanding of governance in Métis communities despite the State’s alternating ploys of incentivizing assimilation and outright repression, which work to keep these emergent indigenous forms of lateral governance marginal in comparison to hierarchical forms of State-sponsored self-government.

5.1 Defining Governance

Alfred’s description of the two pathways of indigenous politics is similar to the forms of social organization put forward by Deleuze and Guattari. Arborescent and rhizomatic social formations roughly transcribe to the European and indigenous forms of political organization, described by Alfred. However, since non-hierarchical European politics are prevalent in social theory and

¹⁶¹ Alfred 2005: 131.

¹⁶² Alfred 2009: 49.

¹⁶³ Alfred 2009: 49.

praxis, and contemporary mainstream indigenous politics often tends towards hierarchy (as will be discussed below) I prefer to use the terms *government* and *governance*, in lieu of the cultural signifiers used by Alfred.

In terms of this thesis, *government* describes a hierarchical and representative organization, one that is highly institutionalized, usually with an expansive bureaucratic element at its core. Governments utilize an arborescent form of organization with an identifiable centre from which its directives flow downwards. Communication is largely one-way with only minor feedback returned from those component parts outside the centre that receive their marching orders from the top. In the contemporary indigenous case government institutions are more often than not a State-situated hierarchy, or what I refer to as a *vertical structure*. In the Deleuzian sense, governments constitute a “unifiable object in the sense that [their] boundaries can be clearly defined and their parts connected according to an invariant principle of unity. They embody the principles of organisation found in modern bureaucracies” as well as “in all the central social mechanisms of power.”¹⁶⁴ These forms of government (or self-government as it is commonly called in indigenous politics) are associated with the organizations that build vertical relationships with the State, organizations such as the MMF, Friendship Centres, and other Aboriginal organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, and self-governing communities like the Nisga’a and the Inuit in Nunavut. While aspiring to self-government, many of the resources required for such an enterprise are ultimately sought from the State, meaning that paradoxically relations of dependency on the colonial State are necessary to realize this form of self-government.

Contrary to this manifestation of self-government is community-based *governance*, which relies not on the institutions and apparatus referred to as a government, but instead on the

processes of everyday politics in one's immediate community. In a Deleuzian sense, these communities are "non-unifiable" and in a constant state of flux and transformation.¹⁶⁵ These forms of governance, far beyond institutions, inhabit the everyday lives of those community members who actively engage with friends and family members. From the non-institutionalized and natural authority of elders' leadership, to the provocation of youth who challenge the existing community order, and even the communication networks which community members pass important information about other people—so often labelled 'gossip'—in order to keep balance, these everyday acts form the basis for lateral community governance and are rooted in a dense rhizomatic network of relationships. Lateral community governance systems organically produce the rules and norms for interaction, alongside movements of the community in creating and realizing political and social goals. The community-based governance of the Métis community in Winnipeg is made possible through the lateral and non-hierarchical relationships between individuals, and the high density of kinship and familial relationships within the city. This is the true basis of community building and the origin of the more visible aspects of the Métis community, like forts and institutions of self-government.

While rhetoric of community accountability is a recurrent theme, community members continually discussed an increasing divide between the goals and aspirations of the Métis government (the MMF specifically) and the experiences and desires of community members outside of the organization. This chapter will therefore discuss the interaction of Métis government and governance, both at a general theoretical level, and in its practical manifestations as described by research participants. The first section of this chapter will discuss the development of Métis government as a solution to issues facing Métis people who require a body

¹⁶⁴ Patton 2000: 43.

¹⁶⁵ Patton 2000: 42.

to represent their interests to the Canadian State. It will also examine how Métis organizations can be ‘captured’ by the State through the institutionalization of vertical relations, and single-direction policy flows. The second section will discuss the building of urban indigenous communities, and the development of lateral relationships in the Winnipeg Métis community. This section will also demonstrate the relations of laterality present in traditional forms of Métis political organization, specifically in the family governance systems of the community. The third and final section will examine the Métis buffalo hunt model of the nineteenth century, its potential to reproduce community and national governance based on lateral relationships between Métis people, and its tendency to exist independent of the State.

5.2 Métis Government

5.2.1 The Origins of Métis Self-Government

The Métis nation faces two unique challenges in terms of reclaiming autonomy, and Métis political institutions have evolved as a result of these challenges. These challenges consist of first, the denial of a recognized land base; and second, the exclusion of Métis from the category of indigeneity, which allows the State to deal with Métis people as individuals rather than as a collective entity. These specific circumstances led to conditions that produced Métis government as it is today. Specifically, the goal of Métis self-government institutions is the production of a Métis Voice that can represent Métis interests and issues to the State and work to create a more just relationship between Canada, Manitoba and the Métis nation.

One recurring theme of Métis government is the need for a Métis land base in Manitoba. Traditionally speaking, the Métis nation holds a shared land base at Red River with our Cree, Ojibwe and Saukteaux relations. The Métis relationship with this homeland goes to our very origins—the Red River settlement is our nation’s birthplace. However, after the formation of

Manitoba in 1870, the Government of Canada used its resources to flood the Métis province with white settlers and used the scrip process to legalize the dispossession of Métis lands.¹⁶⁶ The Métis parishes along the Red and Assiniboine River were overtaken by a new white settlement: Winnipeg. As a result of overt racism, violence and legalized dispossession, many Métis moved west and north, and a smaller number moved east. However, some Métis stayed in Winnipeg, inhabiting our traditional homeland since the birth of the nation.

Despite our long-standing relationship with this territory and the widespread recognition of Métis indigeneity by other indigenous nations,¹⁶⁷ the State has consistently refused to recognize that the Métis are an indigenous people. Such a recognition would involve admitting that the Métis have a inalienable relationship *as indigenous peoples* to our territory. This strategy of denial has existed since well before 1870 and is evident in John A. Macdonald's address to the House of Commons after the Battle of Batoche:

the half-breeds did not allow themselves to be Indians. If they are Indians, they go with the tribe; if they are half-breeds they are white, and they stand in exactly the same relation to the Hudson's Bay Company and Canada as if they were altogether white.¹⁶⁸

Denying Métis indigeneity is a convenient tactic to justify Metis dispossession by downplaying the strong relationship between the Métis people and our territory. Such a strategy rationalized the dispossession of Métis territory on a family-to-family basis, using the scrip system, where individual families signed deals exchanging their land for a small one-time payment from the government. Being unable to deal with the State collectively and thus resist such an individualizing process, a once nationally-conscious Métis people lost most of its ability to function as a nation.

¹⁶⁶ Day 2000: 119

¹⁶⁷ See Chartrand 2007.

This denial of indigeneity was also used to maintain a clear racial distinction between the supposedly superior European colonizer and the inferior indigenous colonized subjects, which the mixed nature of the Métis hopelessly frustrated. As Richard Day notes, “good settlers are supposed to stay in one place, till the land, and quietly reproduce” the colonial order.¹⁶⁹ However, emergent forms of identity as a result of the interaction of European and indigenous peoples produced hybrid identities that ran counter to state interests:

What the state absolutely forbids is that any group might begin to striate its own space according to its own rules...[and] the *coureurs de bois* were relatively successful *competitors* for organized control of geographic space, especially as they were seen to be taking on the socio-political forms of Native peoples, which were fundamentally nomadic...and therefore appeared as a challenge to sedentary society.¹⁷⁰

Métis identities created the constant threat that many ‘good European settlers’ might ‘go Native’ and thus jeopardize the whole colonial expedition meant to sedentarize indigenous nations and assimilate them into European lifeways. The denial of Métis indigeneity served to comfort the European psyche, maintaining the colonial delusion that culture only flows one-way.

While other indigenous peoples were ghettoized onto reserves, as sites of extreme striation and bureaucratization, Métis territorial dispossession was a different experience entirely. Métis communities were not entitled to reserves as they were not seen as indigenous communities. As already mentioned, there is a general tendency by the State to treat Métis on an individual basis, and since reserves acknowledge indigenous ideas like collective ownership responsibility, Métis were offered scrip instead. However, during the 1872 survey of Manitoba, several communities petitioned the Canadian authorities for reserves, including St. Laurent, Manitoba, but the State refused to discuss Métis claims at a collective level. The following year

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Weinstein 2007: 16.

¹⁶⁹ Day 2000: 85

the local Métis families were successful in petitioning the government for *individual* legal recognition of their ‘property.’¹⁷¹ The Métis communities that remained *as such* did so as a result of conscious efforts to protect their culture and language. This was accomplished in many places by maintaining a close connection to family on reserves where relatives were considered Indians under the *Indian Act*.¹⁷²

The lack of a recognized, community-governed land-base has meant a desire to reclaim or possess one, often by petitioning the State for the support and protection of existing rural communities. As many Métis communities have limited resources, expansion outside of State channels is a difficult process. Much focus recently has been on the recognition of the Manitoba Act of 1870, as a treaty between the Métis people and the Crown, in order to gain recognition of the Métis government and a land base.¹⁷³

Métisness, constructed in this fashion, provides a convenient way for the State to reject negotiating treaties with, and maintaining responsibilities to, a sizable indigenous people, while at the same time managing to dispossess the Métis nation of our land base.¹⁷⁴ As a result of this (non)relationship with the Canadian state, Métis government emerged as a historical and political response to denials of Métis nationhood, and as a way of putting Métis concerns on the political radar.

5.2.2 Creating a Métis Voice

The response of many Métis people to the denial of their land base and the rejection of their indigeneity has been an internalization of these colonial strategies. Their treatment as white settlers has produced many Métis who claim to be just that. During the interview process, it

¹⁷⁰ Day 2000: 86.

¹⁷¹ St-Onge 2004: 30.

¹⁷² Lawrence 2004: 86.

¹⁷³ Helen, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

became apparent how much of an impact that this denial of indigeneity and the subsequent isolation of individual Métis families has had:

when you talk about people changing, take for example the long lost relative of yours, [...] who's long since passed away, super guy, a local politician here in Winnipeg, for years he considered himself a Frenchmen, part of the French community, always, even though he was from St. Laurent, he always considered himself French and passed himself off as that for years. And it wasn't until the later part of his life that he came out and said he was Métis and that was that. Not only [him], but another well known politician here, [...]. [He] spent years as a French politician, only lately he's come out and publicly said that he's Métis. And it's on and on, on. You have people like that who said that they were French and now they're all saying they're Métis, so I think it's an educational project that occurred, the people today, more aware of it.¹⁷⁵

While every indigenous community must deal with the affects of assimilation, it is a more pervasive problem for Métis people, when the bulk of the Métis people are either unaware or willfully ignorant of who they are. During an interview a friend told me that she only found out she was Métis two years ago:

AG: And how did you find that out?

Gabrielle: My parents told me actually.

AG: Really?

Gabrielle: Ya. A friend of mine went to school with me and she is a relative just through marriage. She told me that she was Métis and she said that by my cousin, which was her husband, I was Métis too. And my dad said, ya I was, so...I went and applied for my card and...that was it.

AG: And they never told you until you asked them?

¹⁷⁴ Lawrence 2004: 88.

¹⁷⁵ Evan, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB August 14, 2008.

Gabrielle: Ya.

AG: That's actually a lot like my family.

Gabrielle: They just said 'probably'.

The lack of a land base, the denial of indigeneity, and the refusal to deal with Métis people as a collective entity, made the politics of Aboriginal recognition a top priority, especially since the recognition of Métis as an Aboriginal people in the Canadian Constitution in 1982. State recognition is thought to be closely tied to self-recognition as Métis and being comfortable in one's own Métis skin. The focus of much of this effort has been on the State, and since the Métis are still in some instances, considered a "provincial concern" much effort is invested in federal recognition in practice, as constitutional recognition has not produced the federal relationship that was originally desired.¹⁷⁶ Métis self-government emerged as a desire to reclaim what the government denied, as a response to the denial of who we are.

For several decades, recognition of existing Métis rights, and our relationship with Canada from a nation-to-nation perspective are seen as the key issues of Métis self-government. A central part of this strategy has been producing a unified Métis Voice, to make Métis issues heard. Several research participants spoke to this strategy as a primary role of Métis self-government. Evan describes the need for a Métis Voice as the reason for the founding of the MMF:

what happened was that a group of people used to go to a meeting, an Indian meeting, the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood... The voice of the Métis were never heard, it was always First Nations issues, they finally said 'enough is enough,' they broke away and formed the Manitoba Métis Federation. That was more out of necessity[...] People wanted a vehicle to express their concern, and the only way they could do it was to

¹⁷⁶ Marcel, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 31, 2008.

form a new organization and not be part of an old one, and be assimilated with them and become...Aboriginal.¹⁷⁷

However, creating a clear and coherent Voice has always restrained what can be said by Métis government. Alice stresses the necessity of organizations like the MMF:

Alice: without them you're only one voice or a hundred voices and say you want one issue done, what do you do, if its you standing against the government? It wouldn't do anything.

AG: So 'voice' is important then?

Alice: I think so ya, they act as a voice for the Métis people.

AG: And that's a voice that can present itself to the feds or the province?

Alice: Yes. To the province on issues or with regards to programs, and policies and just structure of the organization in general.¹⁷⁸

The need for a *united front* against the State is a common theme as many Métis are continually wary of divide and conquer tactics employed by colonial authorities. The result is a certain unified conception of Métisness as a coherent identity, which is capable of producing a common Voice, representative of all Métis people in Manitoba. A singular Voice is thought necessary to protect the interests of the united Métis community of Manitoba:

AG: Would you have a province-wide Métis community without the MMF?

Helen: You would but it wouldn't be organized. You'd have what the government was trying to do when they said 'Oh, this community of The Pas, this community of Duck Bay, this community of...', these are the Métis communities' and you'd have eleven Métis communities in the province of Manitoba. But

¹⁷⁷ Evan, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 14, 2008.

¹⁷⁸ Alice, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB August 12, 2008.

with the MMF you have a unified, not just government, but ya! a community![...]

AG: So these eleven communities, were the government's attempts at divide and conquer?

Helen: Ya, that's what they were trying to do with the Powley Implementation Committee after the Powley decision came down. They said 'well we're going to send out these people to identify Métis communities.' I don't know who these people were, I don't think any were Métis... One was a business professor and I don't know what her expertise in identifying Métis communities was, but they said eleven communities made the list and they were going to recognize certain areas as areas where Métis from those communities could hunt.

AG: So if you were living in the city, you were...

Helen: Screwed? Ya. And even if you were from Duck Bay and move to Alberta [you were ineligible to hunt under Métis harvester rules].¹⁷⁹

A united Métis voice prevents the State from playing one Métis community off another, as the Province of Manitoba attempted to do with Métis harvesting rights, recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada's *Powley* decision. By maintaining that the Métis are a united nation (at least the Métis in Manitoba), the ability of the State to induce divisions into the nation is limited.

Métis government is born out of the realization that the State makes many major decisions that affect the lives of Métis people, and functions on the ideal that by attempting to influence those decisions Métis families can build increasingly autonomous relationships with one another. However, this relationship between Métis government institutions and the State does not seek to alter the power imbalance and can take on long term, institutionalized relationships similar to that of lobbyists to legislators. Jeff describes the MMF as following this model:

¹⁷⁹ Helen, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB August 6, 2008.

that's really how I consider the MMF, as a lobbyist for the Métis people. But as a political voice, the Métis still do not have a voice in government. Sure we can go to the MMF and the MMF can go and try to do this and try to do that, but in the end, time after time after time the government *may* take our recommendations into consideration, and that's the role of the MMF.¹⁸⁰

Jeff describes the very real limitations in the model of self-government which the MMF has chosen to pursue, specifically, that it remains dependent on State funding, and as a result is highly constrained in what it is capable of doing, and the policies and services it can create:

AG: So do you consider the MMF to be a Métis government?

Jeff: I don't personally. I don't...it's not self-sustainable, because it's still relying on federal monies[...]I just see it as more a lobbyist or again a social services group that works for the Métis people and is able to deal with government[...]if you want to put it this way it is a subsidiary, it's a governmental department. In the same way that INAC is, you have Indian and Northern Affairs. I don't see any difference between that, which is a government department, and the MMF.¹⁸¹

Jeff's understanding of the MMF as a subsidiary of the State is a provocative observation, as he challenges the idea that Métis government is an autonomous entity. Given the desire of the MMF to produce a unified Métis Voice to the State, it is possible that its relationships with the governments of Canada and Manitoba have actually created a relation of verticality between these two organizations. It also suggests that despite the desire to produce increasingly autonomous familial (lateral) relationships, involvement with State organization may actually reinforce dependency and re-establish a vertical relationship with the State.

¹⁸⁰ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

¹⁸¹ Jeff, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

5.2.3 Métis Self-Government and the Relations of Verticality

“Euroamerican society still displays the persistence of arrogance in confronting its problems by attempting to design solutions from within the same intellectual and moral framework that created the problems in the first place.”-Taisiake Alfred, Wasáse¹⁸²

As Jeff suggests, the production of relationships of dependency on State resources creates an unequal flow of information where the State is able to structure MMF policy, as if the MMF was a part of the State apparatus. Since program policy and funding flow down the State’s hierarchy of departments and offices, this can be said to integrate Métis self-government into the State’s vertical structure. This verticality creates an upward flow as well—the indigenous government’s information gathered during service delivery flows upward towards the State’s bureaucratic institutions. With this information the State can manipulate programming, allowing increased control from a distance. Returning to a previous example of verticality, it is possible to see the unequal flow of responsibility and power in the relationship between Métis government and the State in an MMF employment program:

Every month each LMB [Local Management Board] office submits an export of their statistical information from Contact IV to the PMB [Provincial Management Board]. The PMB office uploads this information through the Internet based program (Data Gateway), to HRDC [Human Resources and Skills Development Canada]. This information is processed and the outcome of the uploaded data is reported back to the MMF through the Aboriginal Relations Office website. The MMF also collects this data manually and tracks the employment outcomes.¹⁸³

In this case, as a result of this vertical relationship, the responsibility of the MMF is primarily delivering services and reporting back data on delivery. The State however, has the privilege of

¹⁸² Alfred 2005: 111.

¹⁸³ Manitoba Métis Federation, Inc. *36th Annual General Assembly Program: ‘Building the Métis Nation: Strength, Struggle, Success’*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation, 2004), 43-44.

policy formation, the allotment of resources, and the power of oversight. In this case the vertical relationship is structured by a downward flow of information which contains employment programming policy, funding and allotment directives, along with an upward flow of information to assure that government policy is being properly implemented and that funding resources are being allotted as determined by the State, and to a lesser extent, the service organization. This means that policy control is situated further up the government hierarchy than the MMF. While the State's policies may be challenged or re-negotiated by the MMF, the ultimate decision to provide funding or not resides with the State alone. Therefore, the vast majority of Métis-focused services exist only with the blessing of the State and its agencies.

These vertical relations mean that these Métis-specific programs are not “ours” because most program policy and funding decisions are made outside of Métis organizations, and this is widely known by MMF workers. Marcel, an MMF manager describes the MMF's role is delivering government programs:

[We say to the province and federal government that] ‘We want *your* system to be able to respond better to Métis needs. But there are some services we probably could deliver better for ourselves and we'll develop better for ourselves.’ [...] An example of this is we're administering *their* social housing through an agreement and they're saying ‘you can respond better, have an easier time by managing that *for us*.’ And we're doing that.¹⁸⁴

While Marcel is asserting an increased capacity of the MMF along with other organizations to deliver services to Métis people, there is nonetheless an open acknowledgement that these programs do not belong to ‘us’, the Métis, but belong instead to the governments of Canada and Manitoba. It is increasingly obvious that Métis self-government is not as autonomous as it aspires to be, but is reliant on the State for both money and policy. These vertical relationships are only

¹⁸⁴ Marcel, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 31, 2008. *Emphasis added.*

possible because of the ever-present need of these services within the Winnipeg Metis community. Métis government is in a situation where it must willingly perpetuate this unequal and vertical relationship with the State for the good of the community.

5.2.4 The State as an Apparatus of Capture

This situation of extreme verticality results in the pursuit of two fundamentally divergent goals. As a form of Métis self-government the MMF desires increased autonomy from the State, and the independence to pursue nationhood on its own terms. However, the State desires to capture and appropriate this Métis self-government apparatus for its own goals—to bring the Métis, long regarded as a problematic ‘semi-external Other,’¹⁸⁵ into the Canadian fold as ‘productive’ Canadian citizens.

The desire to internalize all that is exterior to it is consistent with the state-form as described by Deleuze and Guattari. The State is an apparatus of capture, whose principal function is “the reterritorialisation of the mutant flows so as to prevent them from breaking loose at the edges of the social axiomatic.”¹⁸⁶ The Metis nation is a mutant flow. We have resisted for over a hundred years the State forces that would bring about our assimilation into the Canadian “nation”, and continually reasserting our nationhood despite the State’s best efforts to Canadianize us. The Métis nation has always fought to exist outside the conceptual territory claimed by Canadian nationalists. The capture of the Métis people as Canadian would as Patton describes it, “feed the powers of the capturing body” by adding legitimacy to Canadian claims of sovereignty in the Métis homeland. The ultimate goal of capture is the elimination of the possibility of autonomous Métis nationhood within Canada’s claimed jurisdiction.

¹⁸⁵ Day 2000: 87.

¹⁸⁶ Patton 2000: 89.

The State has always only sought the capture of indigenous organizations and their reterritorialization into the dominant order, typically relying on the imposition of vertical relationships created through government funding to establish indirect control over indigenous authorities. Sykes Powderface, a former activist with the Indian Association of Alberta, describes the successful capture of the organization by the State through the imposition of verticality, transforming it from an oppositional body to, at best, an internal critic of State policy and service provider:

Initially, when the Indian Association of Alberta was formed, it had no federal or provincial government monies. Financially it was independent. This was achieved by sacrifice. ... The Indian Association of Alberta had remarkable strength at the time. Its members were not afraid to speak out against federal and provincial governments on those issues that concerned Indian people. However, this changed completely when government monies were accepted to support the organization. The aggressiveness had been watered down, and compromises detrimental to our people have been made.¹⁸⁷

Despite attempts to disguise this form of capture and control, the manner of State involvement in Métis organizations betrays these goals, and it is difficult to imagine that this will change in the near future. For example, the prevalence and strategic use of government audits by the State allows the sponsoring government agencies to maintain indirect control over “their” programs without constant observation and direct, overtly colonial oversight. Marcel discusses how accountability and audits affect the MMF:

Well you have to be accountable for what you are doing, there’s no money flying south or whatever it is, and if it did, we wouldn’t have the programming we do have to administer... We do show we are accountable for those programs, because we have audited statements, we have governments coming in and doing special audits saying ‘we had a complaint that you’re not

¹⁸⁷ Powderface 1984: 167.

administering a program the way we'd like to see it' and we say
'come on in and we'll show you'¹⁸⁸

While accountability is indeed an important element of any democratic institution, the accountability described here is accountability *to a State bureaucracy* or funding agency, not to Métis people. Bureaucratic accountability is a mechanism that reinforces the vertical relationships to ensure that State resources are used to fund programs the way the State would like them to. This involves de-emphasizing the lateral relationships between the Métis government organizations and the community,¹⁸⁹ and reinforcing the vertical ones with the State. This approach neglects the community relationships that produce real forms of accountability based on direct democratic involvement, involvement that is so central to traditional forms of Métis governance.

So long as capture is the ultimate goal of the State, its relationships with Métis people and organizations will always be vertically structured, and the flows of responsibility and power will always be unequal. Therefore the path of self-government, as currently defined by the State seems to be a dead-end in terms of real autonomy. So long as the goals of the State tend towards capture, and the goals of the Métis people remain autonomy, vertical relationships will undermine Métis goals.

Strong vertical relationships between Métis organizations and State organizations, as noted above, benefit the State, and place the Métis community in a subservient position. However, lateral relationships, or relationships between Métis people and Métis communities, can create autonomy by strengthening the self-sufficiency of the related groups. Lateral relationships, as existing largely outside of the State apparatus are a threat to the continued existence of vertical relationships and the colonial relations of power, on which the State thrives.

¹⁸⁸ Marcel, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, July 31, 2008.

Seeing strong lateral relations as a threat to Canadian colonial dominance, the State has invested a great deal of effort in co-opting community initiatives. Howard Adams, a prominent Métis community organizer, Métis nationalist and academic, describes this experience when President of the Métis Society of Saskatchewan in the 1960s and 70s:

native people established welfare committees in Métis local communities, whereby committee members went with our needy people to welfare offices to ensure that they would receive fair and just treatment from welfare officials. To counteract this decolonization activity, the Liberal government offered to hire native people to work as welfare assistants in their offices to deal with the needy Métis. If native workers had accepted these positions, they would have become bureaucrats with a vested interest in their jobs, salaries and prestige. At the same time they would have become decision-makers over their own people.¹⁹⁰

Increasingly self-sufficient communities are a consistent target of the re-institutionalization of relations of verticality, so rather than receiving encouragement to develop community-level governance systems that do not require State funding, these emergent grassroots systems are targeted for capture and co-optation.

5.2.5 Rethinking Métis Government

While self-government organizations are problematic in terms of their autonomy, I am not advocating their abandonment—I merely want to problematize their central role in contemporary Métis politics. I understand that the State-run services ‘designed for’ indigenous people are notoriously racist, paternalistic and dehumanizing, and that the development of Métis services run by and for Métis people is an important task.¹⁹¹ However, the limitations of this approach must be recognized—as Joe Sawchuk notes “if the ultimate goal of the Métis is defined as relative

¹⁸⁹ Corntassel, 2008: 105.

¹⁹⁰ Adams 1989: 178.

economic or political independence...all they have managed to do is make themselves even more dependent on the government than ever before.”¹⁹² Acknowledging that Métis nationhood must depart from such vertical formations in order to be sustainable and autonomous, I agree with Jeff Corntassel that “the identification and implementation of nonstate, community-based solutions should take precedence” over State-based programs of decolonization.¹⁹³ The State will not decolonize us, that is something we must take responsibility for ourselves.

While originally the aspiration of many indigenous communities and nations in Canada, the limitations of the self-government model are increasingly obvious, in that what it offers is not increased autonomy and the reclamation of indigenous nationhood, but a new form of colonialism that reinforces State dominance. Alfred writes:

Large-scale statist solutions like self-government and land claims are not so much lies as they are irrelevant to the root problem. For a long time now, we have been on a quest for governmental power and money; somewhere along the journey from the past to the future, we forgot our goal was to reconnect with our lands and preserve our harmonious cultures and respectful ways of life. It is these things that are the true guarantee of peace, health, strength, and happiness—of survival...Our concern about legal rights and empowering models of national self-government has led to the neglect of the fundamental building blocks of our peoples: the women and men, the youth and elders.”¹⁹⁴

If what we have neglected is the basis of politics as everyday relationships of real people, then new forms of *governance* must be imagined. These forms must be based in the relations *between* Métis people, the lateral relationships among equals, not the vertical relationship based on inequality and dependency on the Canadian State. If these forms are grounded in our traditions as

¹⁹¹ Given current financial constraints and the refusal of the State to surrender any real control of policy formation to Métis organizations, developing programs within the State framework is a noble occupation indeed, and one that I have great respect for.

¹⁹² Sawchuk 1978: 80.

¹⁹³ Corntassel 2008: 121.

Métis people, they may also serve our larger decolonization project, one that targets our political culture as we contend with State encroachment on our nationhood and our autonomy. True governance then, seeks to go beyond rhetoric and moves towards action.

5.3 Governance

It is not my intent to admonish existing forms of Métis government or to deny their benefits, as they do work to strengthen individuals and Métis communities. Nor is it my intent to claim that Métis efforts have somehow failed entirely. What I hope to show is how many Métis people in Winnipeg, despite pressures and incentives to do otherwise, have preserved a powerful vision of a traditional form of Métis governance that remains in practice today. I also will discuss the potential of this form of governance as a decolonizing practice and as a valuable tool in the reclamation of Métis spaces from the vertically-minded colonial State. There is a need to “do it *our way*,”¹⁹⁵ it is not enough to simply reclaim political space “we need to fill it up with indigenous content if it is going to mean anything.”¹⁹⁶ Moving away from notions of State-sponsored self-government, one can instead examine what urban indigenous communities are already successful at, and how these forms of community governance can be practiced in terms of reclaiming Métis spaces.

Susan Lobo argues that urban indigenous communities are based on relationships, which create an interconnected community network that connect to indigenous organizations as well as with hidden community gathering spots.¹⁹⁷ As was discussed in chapter 3, these forts and home bases are interconnected and bound together through lateral linkages—relationships between community members. These lateral linkages are contrasted with the vertical and hierarchical

¹⁹⁴ Alfred 2005: 31.

¹⁹⁵ Alfred 2005: 131.

¹⁹⁶ Alfred 2009: 4-5.

relationships between the community organizations and the State. Lobo demonstrates these forms of lateral linkages when she describes the role of “Delphina”, an urban clan mother, whose interpersonal relationships connect her into a dense network of indigenous people in the Bay Area of California and although occupying no formal institutional role, she is an integral part of her community’s governance system:

“Delphina’s” kitchen was known throughout the Bay Area Indian community as the place to go to dip into the stream of information and communication that constantly flowed. Others might have referred to it as gossip, but women who spent hours in the kitchen knew that it was important to them to remain informed about who was doing what, when, where and with whom, in order to assist in keeping the community in balance and to play a mediating role should conflicts develop. During the day, and often in the evening, Delphina’s kitchen was the place to go to find out what was happening in the community. Delphina never spoke in public, nor sat on any boards. Yet she held great influence and respect in the community, and her kitchen was a key anchor point.¹⁹⁸

The everyday governance of indigenous communities is a major reason for their continual survival, especially in the overwhelmingly non-indigenous city centres of urban communities. Delphina’s role is one of information dissemination, a role that allows her and others like her to ‘keep balance’ in the community by staying informed of disagreements and falling-outs to provide mediation, as well as to provide resources for community members in need. Running parallel to large bureaucratic organizations that provide community services, are the informal arrangements that generate informal employment searches (through family networks and women like Delphina), and informal health and healing resources through kinship networks, and sites of ceremony throughout the city.

¹⁹⁷ Lobo 2003: 505.

¹⁹⁸ Lobo 2003: 516.

Others have noted the tendency for the existence of parallel formal-informal institutions in urban indigenous communities. In their study of the development of the Chicago indigenous community, Straus and Valentino argue that women “have been the de facto leaders...of the community, and indeed in the very establishment of the community” even though “they have not always occupied official positions in community organizations.”¹⁹⁹ Women, in Chicago occupied positions of respected authority, similar to Lobo’s urban clan mothers, and were responsible for the maintenance of the community’s lateral relationships and ensuring balance. There was also a general responsibility of certain elder women to keep the indigenous organization’s goals consistent with the goals of the urban community. They write:

Consistent with the world outside the Indian community, as well as with tribal norms, the executives, those who held public positions of authority at the American Indian Centre, were men. Also consistent with tribal norms, if not with the world outside the Indian community, the opinions and input of women were considered extremely important, and the public positions held by men were sanctioned by the women of the community.²⁰⁰

The role of the grassroots community leaders, the key members of the lateral governance system, was to ensure that the lateral relationship in the community stayed strong, not just interpersonal relationships, *but the relationships between the community members and the organizations* which voiced their concerns to the State. Straus and Valentino note that it was the community governance system that kept the formal government organizations grounded in community politics.

It is when these linkages between community and government institution are strained (usually by the creation of vertical relationships by State funding that displaced lateral linkages) community governance and indigenous government institutions begin to split, and government

¹⁹⁹ Straus and Valentino 2003: 532.

²⁰⁰ Straus and Valentino 2003: 527.

becomes detached from those it claims to represent. Jackson, in her study of the Anishinaabe community in Riverton, Michigan notes that, “When the funding came in, the real grassroots people decided that’s not what they wanted—and they left.”²⁰¹ She explains that it took her a while to realize that,

beneath the surface of the highly visible and readily accessible official institutions lay a patchwork of extended Anishinaabe families...when the BCIA and Riverton University’s AISO stopped functioning as social clubs (or when their social function was eclipsed by other priorities), the original Anishinaabe migrants to Riverton simply shifted venues...the core of their informal social groups was nearly always extended family (or groups of extended families).²⁰²

At the core of the Riverton community, as with many other urban indigenous communities, including Winnipeg, are two major impulses for organizations. First to serve a governance function—as social clubs and cultural venues that provide space for the practicing of indigenous lifeways—as well as producing a service function which often appeals to those indigenous people who lack the strong lateral relationships to the existing communities and cannot access many of the services through informal channels. A shift from a social or governance function to a service function in government organizations can drastically change those Métis involved in the institution’s space. For example, job hunts are made easier by a strong social network of contacts to help find available and desirable work, if one does not have access to this, or if this fails, the next choice would be a bureaucratic employment agency. Bureaucratic indigenous service providers target primarily the less embedded community members, and form more formalized (and less enduring) relationships, as relationships between clients and service providers, and rather than building lateral relationships, build vertical ones. If this becomes the primary focus of indigenous organizations, it can easily alienate the key lateral connections of elders and those in

²⁰¹ Jackson 2002: 115.

positions of community responsibility, as it did in Riverton. The result is a detached governing institution, with little grounding in the urban indigenous community.

5.3.1 Métis Governance in Winnipeg

Traditional forms of governance remain a strong influence in Métis families and the Winnipeg Métis community, and are practiced in the everyday life of Métis people. A key component of Métis community-building and the re-establishment of autonomous Métis governance is the Métis family, which is generally conceived to be the basic unit of Métis politics and culture.

MMF President David Chartrand describes the Métis people as a “close-knit family” and he uses the model of the extended family unit as a representation of the Metis nation as a whole:

We're family-based and family-clan-based so we use that and in a lot of ways it keeps our identity, our nationhood alive. Because without it if you go back in history from the 1800s to the attempts of government, not only did they try to colonize, but they tried to remove the Métis within the Métis, so if it wasn't for the family system that we have, they probably would have been successful. But it's because of that closeness[...and] our elders, our elders are very prominent, they stay within the family and we'll see the grandparents a lot of the time living with the children, so that continuation of families is very strong.²⁰³

Family as governance remains a strong theme in the Winnipeg Métis community, and families (as home bases) are very often the starting-point for more visible forms of politics, such as the establishment of forts. Ignace, himself a Métis elder, told me a story about how he and his family worked together to found an MMF local in Winnipeg, today one of the most successful locals in the city, due in part to its focus on building kinships linkages and a family-like atmosphere:

We were sitting together, with our family: brothers and sisters, and we decided to start a local, we needed a board member and needed nine members and three executive members. Liberty Local started from that. We decided to make meetings once a

²⁰² Jackson 2002: 115-116.

²⁰³ David Chartrand, interview with the author, Winnipeg, MB, August 22, 2008.

month and we called our Métis friends and started fundraising. Eventually we had quite a few members, over 350. With the money, we decided we were going to have an educational focus, and we made small bursaries available to give to our youth. From that more and more people joined. We had Christmas parties and other gatherings that attracted more people and made the local pretty big. When we organized the local, the Métis we invited attracted more and more people.²⁰⁴

While a family gathering initiated the founding of Liberty Local, what made it a successful and sustained Métis space of governance was its continual reproduction of kinship relations. Ignace and his family sought out their cousins and other relations when first founding the local, and their cousins brought their family networks into the local, generating a rather large community rhizome that for a while grew exponentially. Another important focus of the Local was the use of fundraising to subsidize the education of its younger members. The focus of sharing resources reproduced another important aspect of family governance and promoted the Local as a structure of participatory community governance, existing at once inside the MMF's vertical structure and as a kinship-based entity rooted in lateral relationships.

Despite the success of Liberty Local, MMF locals have faced an erosion of direct involvement in Métis governance, and have therefore tended to become part of the larger vertical structure. Some locals' primary function is disseminating information about MMF and State-based services for Métis people. Leon, an MMF worker and chairperson of a Winnipeg local, is concerned that MMF locals are losing relevance and governance ability as more and more decisions are made at the Annual General Assembly and by MMF workers:

The locals lost some of their relevance at that point. They still are there for fundraising and cultural events, but the real political involvement, the participatory democracy, it's almost like the delegate and committee type work vanished. And that itself is not good for democracy, as we know [what happens when] people feel that they can't have day-to-day involvement in a

²⁰⁴ Ignace, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 5, 2008.

decision-making process and that's what we have right now. Decision making is not made by the people, because it's not in all of these committees, it's not in these delegations, it happens once a year at the Annual General Assembly and every four years when you have a general election. Some people will say it is democracy, but it runs the risk of people voting without really understanding the issues, coming out to vote once a year, or once every four years and *being led to believe they are doing their job and not doing their job the rest of the time.*²⁰⁵

From Leon's statement, one can begin to see how vertical relationships with the State, which demand bureaucratic control of governments, can begin to disrupt the lateral relationships that existed prior to the relationship with the State. Leon's concern about the increasing irrelevance of locals and his fear that his own local will one day be reduced simply to "running bake sales"²⁰⁶ attests to the alienation that some community members are already feeling as a result of State relationships being developed at the expense of community ones.

Nonetheless, in the Winnipeg Métis community, there continues to be a strong understanding of autonomous governance and the need to pursue grassroots methods of producing community, parallel to or independent of, more vertical methods of community building and service provision. Kim notes how her Métisness has shown her the necessity of independence and autonomy:

we are independent nations, but we have to take responsibility for ourselves, nobody takes responsibility for us. If our community is suffering then we have to look at that as a community altogether, not just a chief-in-council or the Band Council. All together as a community. You come in here. These are your children. These are your kookums. Everybody lets look and talk. Take responsibility. I think the colonization process along with the economic welfare process has created somewhat dependent nations for all Aboriginal people, and I am not for that. I'm a believer in independence. Part of my Métis roots

²⁰⁵ Leon, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 18, 2008. *Emphasis added.*

²⁰⁶ Leon, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 1, 2008.

taught me I can't depend on others, and that's what I'm proud of.²⁰⁷

Independence, self-sufficiency and autonomy are central teaching in Métis communities and resonate throughout the Métis governance system as a grounding principle. These values structure a system in which individuals are responsible for maintaining strong lateral ties with family and kin, as well as with the wider community. The impetus for these teachings comes from the Winnipeg community's elders, who are living examples of Métis governance, autonomy, independence and responsibility.

There is strong support for the knowledge of elders within the community, which reinforces the family-model of governance that is prominent in Métis communities. Elders offer advice and experience, which helps to shape the actions and ways of being of community members, and thus plays a central role in community governance. For Winnipeg community members, the term "elder" has multiple meanings. An elder can be a fairly broad concept, which creates a responsibility of respect and a relationship based on learning:

the way I was raised, the Métis way, is to respect your elders. Anyone who isn't doing that is going against your elder. So your elder could be anything from your older cousin, to your aunty, to your grandpa and grandma, right down to the Pope.²⁰⁸

And there are more institutionalized roles where elders are sought for their experience:

There are also elders that are involved that are people that are older, people that we have sought out, people that are role models, people that are older, sort of loving—people you'd want around your children. And those people [don't have an] overt involvement [in governance] but the role that they play is more of a role model or somebody giving guidance and direction[...]But I mean, even I am seen as an elder to lots of kids who come to me, and I provide direction and support[...]as well. When I think of elders I'm caught between the whole cultural, formal concept of an elder, as opposed to the informal,

²⁰⁷ Kim, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 21, 2008.

²⁰⁸ Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

family structure of elders that I was raised with. So I think they play a lot of roles, in a lot of ways.²⁰⁹

Jeff sees elders in a similar capacity, and thinks that being elder is not an undertaking chosen by older people, but a role they assume a responsibility to “pass on good medicines” and “pass on good knowledge”:

The role of an elder is to serve as guidance and this is saying we attach a role, now that would be us saying ‘that is what an elder has to do’, but no, an elder does it because they want to. They’ll pass on their knowledge to the youth and hopefully help guide the youth, and act as spiritual wisdom, a mental mentor to the youth when at all possible. If they had a role per se, that’s it.²¹⁰

The role of elders in family-governance remains a strong form of social and political organization for Métis in Winnipeg. This is descended from traditional forms of Métis governance that valued the characteristics of family-based responsibilities of autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence as well as community participation, and the passing on of knowledge to young people. This emerged as a Métis form of governance, inherited largely from our indigenous roots and values. The most obvious manifestation of traditional Métis governance is the Buffalo Hunt Model, which formed the backbone of Métis collective political action. The Buffalo Hunt Model was the same organizational method used for organizing the various resistances against encroachment of Métis territory and political autonomy by the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Canadian State.²¹¹ The Buffalo Hunt Model embodies the key features of indigenous systems of governance, described by Alfred above, and it is for this reason, that it remains a relevant form of governance still practiced in Winnipeg today.

²⁰⁹ Blanche, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

²¹⁰ Jeff, interview with the author, Winnipeg, MB, August 15, 2008.

²¹¹ Adams, 1989: 80.

5.4 Métis Buffalo Hunt Governance

“Without a value system that takes traditional teachings as the basis for government and politics, the recovery will never be complete.” – Taiaiake Alfred

The Métis values which resonated in many of this project’s interviews (self-sufficiency, autonomy, independence and direct participation) find their origins in traditional Métis life, and this form of relating to one another was expressed most clearly in Métis traditional forms of governance, namely the buffalo hunt system.²¹² This model of direct Métis democracy was fairly pervasive in Métis life, and was utilized any time that social organization involved several families. Barkwell, Carriere Acco and Rozyk argue that the key feature of Métis governance is consensus:

The authority of Métis leaders was based in the consent of the followers. In order for authority to be effective, it had to be democratic. Everyone had a part in making the laws. Métis leaders were commissioned to carry out only the agreed-upon task and nothing more. Authority was given to others only for a specific purpose and was revocable [if confidence was lost in their abilities].²¹³

Traditional Métis leadership is situational, and never coercive. Since consent to leadership could be revoked at any time, all Métis life remained independent of a permanent centralizing force like a state-system. The buffalo hunts on the prairies during the 19th century involved thousands of Métis hunters and hundreds of families, but still resisted the permanent institutionalization of

²¹² Although the buffalo hunt is not the origin of these values, nor were these values shaped by the buffalo hunt, it nonetheless is treated as a central feature of Métis life. Perhaps discussion of the Métis buffalo hunt governance model is so popular because it arose out of the need for mass organization, and even though it was merely a biannual occurrence, it fits well within a discourse like western political science, which has difficulty conceptualizing everyday forms of governance and politics.

²¹³ Barkwell, Carrier Acco and Rozyk 2007: 9.

authority or leadership. Prefontaine and Dorion describe the governance process as emanating out of “informal assemblies led by Elders” that were usually:

held in the Pembina Hills of southern Manitoba, prior to the departure of the two bison-hunting camps (one to the Forks of the Saskatchewan River and the other to what is now North Dakota) met and laws were implemented...At these assemblies, the Métis elected a ‘Chief of the Hunt.’ Following that, a series of ‘*dizanes*’ or a force of ten men selected a captain. All captains reported directly to the Chief and in turn they coordinated hunting and resource preservation strategy.²¹⁴

This model translated well to other collective undertakings, as it did not obstruct the independence of Métis families. At several points in Métis history, the model was incorporated into a military system, where willing individuals could form ‘hunting parties’ who could engage enemy combatants that threatened Métis autonomy. When the Scottish Selkirk Settlement ran the buffalo²¹⁵ in an attempt to force the Métis to vacate their homeland for territories further west, hunting parties were formed to engage the settlements leaders, and eventually forced the settlers out.²¹⁶ Similarly during the 1870 and 1885 armed resistances to Canadian invasion of Métis territory, the hunting party model was used at the Red River and in Saskatchewan. In respect for their autonomous decision-making capacities, Métis fighters, and indeed entire communities were free to choose whether or not to join the defence, and were free to leave the battle at any time.²¹⁷ In fact, during the 1870 Provisional Government several Métis communities—St. Laurent and White Horse Plains—chose not to participate, which the Provisional Government respected, as it too was bound to respect the independence and self-sufficiency of those communities and

²¹⁴ Prefontaine and Dorion 2003: 5.

²¹⁵ Hunting in advance of a dizane would cause the buffalo to flee, making it impossible for the hunting party to harvest buffalo meat for their families.

²¹⁶ Métis Association of Alberta et al. 1981: 70.

²¹⁷ Adams 1989: 86.

families.²¹⁸ While the buffalo hunt model is often discussed in its 19th century manifestation, it has continued relevance today, as it remains consistent with core Métis values.

5.4.1 Contemporary Governance and the Buffalo Hunt Model

This model of Métis governance remains in practice today, largely at the family and kinship level. While Métis self-government initiatives seem to move away from non-institutional and situational leadership for practical reasons, many opportunities remain for the development of governance practices based on kinship networks. MMF locals hold the potential for utilizing this style of governance for broader social change, as Liberty Local did for making higher education more accessible for its members. Howard Adams utilized a similar approach with the Métis Society of Saskatchewan in the 1960s and 70s. He advocated the building of local councils specific to each “native community, reserve or urban ghetto” where the local community would establish a council based on traditional forms of Métis governance, used to maximize both participation and inclusion of local Métis families. He was very explicit about the intended structure:

There is no official executive: the people select a person to take the chair for a limited period of time, as required. This person acts as a spokesman for the group and is responsible for the details of the administration. All major decisions are made by the whole group or by committees established for special functions. Every effort must be made to prevent power from being invested in one person and, similarly, the group must not become dependent on one or several individuals to make decisions and do all the work.²¹⁹

The goal of this approach is to simultaneously organize around local issues affecting people’s lives and raise political consciousness among Métis about political subordination and colonization. Adams’ was confident in the ability of Métis people to work and mobilize against a

²¹⁸ Sawchuk 1978: 44.

State that sought to assimilate them and rob them of their self-sufficient, autonomous and independent nature. Despite his overtly Marxist framework and rhetoric, autonomous forms of Métis politics remain central to his analysis and theory. Given the Métis commitment to direct democracy there is an obvious affinity to radical politics.

One however, does not need to be a radical to build the capacity for autonomous Métis governance. One simply needs to take the responsibility for their own involvement in local politics. There is also the opportunity to learn from those who embrace these values. Politics in the Métis sense involves taking actions to become and remain self-sufficient, independent and work towards a collective autonomy, outside of the State's impositions of hierarchy and verticality.

5.5 Conclusion

Politics, as a central activity of Métis life remain an important part of contemporary Métis communities. There is currently a disproportionate amount of energy however, being invested in the establishment of vertical linkages with the State. These relationships are never equal and result in increased control of Métis government and a dependence on the State's resources to keep Métis self-government alive. As a result, Métis government, in its current form, is not necessarily consistent with traditional values of Métis governance, which stress the role of non-institutionalized elders. Governance systems, still alive and well within the Winnipeg Métis community, relies on lived experiences of key members to maintain balance and healthy lateral relations within the community network. It thrives on the production and maintenance of strong families that are politically autonomous, economically self-sufficient, independent-minded and feel a strong responsibility to community, respecting these values in other families. These values

²¹⁹ Adams 1989: 182.

are consistent with the Métis Buffalo Hunt Model, which is a powerful tool in the resurgence of traditional forms of Métis governance and the revival of an autonomous Métis politics that is not dependent on the State to produce services or in the production of policy.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Reclaiming the Fort

This thesis has explored the multiple struggles to reassert Métis autonomy in the fields of community space, identity and politics. The divide between these three ‘issues’ is artificial, but each individually presents important insights to different truths about the colonial experience and how it affects Métis people. In terms of space, the most pressing concern is the protection of Métis spaces from State encroachment and involvement in the spaces where Métis family and kinship networks remain strong. It is in these autonomous spaces that Métis people can work to re-build and re-imagine Métis nationhood. Currently, public Métis spaces are sites of State striation and without strong kinship networks and home bases to back up the forts, they can quickly succumb to State co-optation. The same is true for Métis identity, which is understood by Métis people primarily through their lived experience. However, Métis identity’s more public persona is often engaged in a politics of recognition and structured to accommodate State interests and demands. These demands are not without real world consequences and ultimately limit the ability of Métis communities to define ourselves and to determine who belongs, free of State-sponsored definitions.

Ultimately spatial autonomy and identity politics are a matter of community governance, and the strength of a Métis community’s autonomy is measured by its ability to make independent decisions that are consistent with the traditional political culture of the Métis nation, one that values autonomy, self-sufficiency and family responsibility. While much attention gets paid to the forts—especially the MMF and friendship centres—the bulk of community governance occurs at the family level and it is here that decisions are made. Métis governance is inherently non-institutional, relying on the dynamic relationships between people rather than

standardized processes of government. This approach to governance is not easily decipherable by outsiders—especially the government and media—who prefer to work with institutionalized political organizations. However, non-institutionalized politics should not be seen as a weakness, but rather as consistent with traditional Métis approaches to governance. This approach is a more democratic and participatory alternative to the existing political order based on the un-Métis quality of delegating authority. The self-government approach favoured by the State turns the responsibility for political decision-making over to politicians and technocrats. Non-institutionalized political processes suit the Métis context well; as such arrangements value autonomous social relations between individuals, families, communities and nations.

It is the core values of autonomy, independence, self-sufficiency and family responsibility that form the basis for Métis social and political forms of organization. This is true in both the historical and contemporary context. I have argued that relying on State institutions and programs to build our community spaces, community programs and perception of ourselves, jeopardizes the very essence of Métisness and promises to undermine the things we seek to preserve. We must begin to reassert our autonomy and resist the State's attempts to create relations of dependency and verticality in our nation and in our daily lives. This is not to say that Canadian society and the Métis nation cannot co-exist on peaceful terms, but that Canadian society needs to learn what peaceful co-existence means. And Métis people may need to teach them.

Historically speaking, there is a long tradition of Métis movements that seek to *remind* colonial institutions that the co-habitation of the Métis nation and other non-indigenous people is one reliant on Métis *consent* to such arrangements. Consistent with the Buffalo Hunt Model

outlined in Chapter Five,²²⁰ such consent must be maintained. Maintenance of strong and respectful relationships was the key to peaceful co-existence, but there were many times in history where settlers began to take this relationship for granted and needed to be *reminded* of the *way things are* in the Métis homeland.

In fact, Métis history is rich with stories about how the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and its employees, Canadian settlers, then later the Canadian State, needed to be *reminded* on whose territory they were situated and who was ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of that territory. Many actions involved re-taking the fort, demonstrating that the existence of Canadian public institutions was only permissible providing they respected their relationship with the Métis people. If not, non-violent Métis displays of force reminded the settlers that Métis lifeways could not be disrespected. There are several prominent examples that demonstrate this tendency to *remind* settlers of Métis interests. The goal of *acts of reminding* which at times involved mobilization of armed Métis hunters, was not to enforce Métis dominance of the homeland, but to renew relationships that had become unbalanced by settler assumptions *that they owned the place*.

The Battle of Seven Oakes in 1816 serves as a case-in-point. In 1815 the local settler government attempted to ban Métis cultural practices, intending to sedentarize the Métis. The Métis response was one that restored balance, even though the settlers attempted to use violence to gain ascendancy. The result was 22 settler deaths and the death of two Métis hunters:

When Miles Macdonell, the governor of Lord Selkirk's settlement, began issuing proclamations against hunting buffalo from horseback, and against exporting pemmican from the settlement, it must have been obvious to the Métis that some action would be necessary to protect their interests. How much imagination was needed for people born and raised in the area, taking for granted the right to use natural resources of the area,

²²⁰ See Barkwell, Carrier Acco and Rozyk, 2003.

to interpret the arbitrary orders from an outsider as unwarranted intrusions and incursions into their territory and own business.²²¹

The result of this confrontation of settlers who presumed themselves superior to the Métis was renewed respect for Métis autonomy, and indeed the Métis continued life as they had previously, until such a time as ambitious settlers would again need to be reminded that colonial arrogance would not be tolerated.

Another confrontation in 1849 again demonstrates the Métis response to settlers with colonial pretensions, imagining that they governed the Métis and could therefore restrict Métis lifeways for the benefit of settlers. This time, HBC charged an independent Métis trapper with breaking the HBC fur trade monopoly given to it by absentee shareholders and monarchs in Britain.²²² This monopoly theoretically empowered the Hudson's Bay Company to control the flow of furs in the Métis homeland. However, Métis families (and other indigenous peoples) traded quite regularly with whomever they pleased as their traditional systems required. This practice, of course, cut into HBC's profits and was something that its Royal Charter expressly forbid. Preoccupied with this Royal Decree that seemed to allow it to do whatever it wished, the HBC ignored its reliance on Métis consent to operate within the Métis homeland. When Guillaume Sayer, a Métis trader, was charged with breaking this monopoly by HBC officials and taken to court for trial, the Métis decided that it was time again to remind the settlers that their presence in Red River was only with the consent of the Métis people, and that if this relationship was abused, it would not be renewed. Before the trial, Louis Riel the Senior²²³ gathered roughly five hundred Métis hunters in the centre of town to decide on a course of action regarding the trial

²²¹ Métis Association of Alberta, Sawchuk, Sawchuk and Ferguson 1981: 70.

²²² Adams 1989: 23.

²²³ The father of the more commonly known Louis Riel, leader, prophet and martyr of the Métis nation.

and the HBC. The decision was made to remind the HBC of whose territory they traded on and the five hundred hunters, all of them armed, went to await the decision of the court.

With the court in session, word quickly reached the judge that five hundred Métis hunters, armed to the teeth, were ready to hear his verdict. A guilty verdict would likely result in the removal of the judge and HBC from Métis territory, which motivated the judge to pronounce Sayer guilty, but without punishment so as not to invite the Métis wrath. The result was an autonomous declaration by the Métis people of ‘Free Trade’ and the effective end of the HBC fur trade monopoly. The Métis were again free to continue living their life they were accustomed to.²²⁴

This process of reminding involved the use of non-violent (and sometimes violent) action to reassert Métis autonomy and to send the message, ‘that settlement and trade exists here because the Métis people allow it to, it is in our mutual interest to allow co-existence, but if you abuse this relationship, you will be forced to leave’. This non-violent direct action was the same model used in 1870 and 1885, when the Canadian State once again needed to be reminded of their relationship with the Métis. The target of the 1869-1870 act of reminding was Lower Fort Garry, the major fur trade and military outpost in the Red River Settlement. The target was not simply military in nature, but it was likely a very real representation of removing the HBC from Métis space—having sold the Métis homeland, something it had no real ability to do, reclaiming the fort was a symbolic act that symbolized the end of the relationship between the Métis and the HBC, ushering in an era of Métis autonomy. This act reminded HBC and Canada that the Métis were autonomous and could not be bought and sold by colonial authorities. It was an act the State could only end with the use of overwhelming violence in the form of military invasion.

²²⁴ For a detailed description of the Sayer trial see Patrick Young, Todd Paquin and

Reminding Canada of this relationship based on respect and co-existence has been neglected for some time, largely because of the overwhelming use of force used against the Métis in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan and the execution and imprisonment of many Métis leaders in the nineteenth century. As a result, for many years unequal collaboration and partnership with the State was the only option available to Métis people. Indeed, little consciousness of autonomous Métis nationhood can be found outside of the nineteenth century, due to the government's success in atomizing the Métis nation—to the point where governance functioned at the family level, but ceased at the national level.²²⁵ While it is true that this reality is a result of the harshness of the colonial experience, the contemporary Métis context has seen the potential for reclaiming the fort, renewing relationships with the settler society, by reminding it whose territory this is. It is my hope that this thesis has demonstrated that by moving away from State-sponsored spaces, and instead producing our own spaces, we can reclaim the fort and by doing so, reclaim the governance abilities that have been eroded over time.

Spaces that function with a Métis logic, where Métisness doesn't require coherent definitions or visible performances—where Métisness can just be lived—are the starting-points for rebuilding the necessary community relationships to accomplish this task. The development of Métis forms of governance, as a grounding political force, will serve to remind the Canadian State whose territory it occupies. By refusing to deal with the State on the State's terms, Métis governance can develop Métis priorities outside of State structures that currently deny Métis interests—autonomous nationhood and governance—instead of the unsatisfactory goals compatible with settler-colonialism and the exploitation of the territory. Ultimately, it is these vertical relationships with the State, ones that delegate responsibilities previously held in Métis

Darren Préfontaine, "The Hudson's Bay Company Trading System" *Gabriel Dumont Institute* May 30, 2003. 27-29.

families and communities—inclusive political decision-making and familial participation in Métis governance—which undermine our ability to be autonomous. Autonomy is not gained through appealing to the State for rights; autonomy is not something that can be given. Being granted autonomy implies dependency. Autonomy can only be created by those who work for it, it is about shedding dependency. Autonomy relies on relationships among independent subjects, and it is these relationships that colonialism attacks. Without strong horizontal relations, we lack the necessary resources to survive as individuals and communities, let alone have the ability to *reclaim* and *remind*. Autonomy is about building strong, self-conscious communities of like-minded people. In the indigenous context, autonomy is grounded in kinship and relationships to the land.

It is my hope that this thesis presents alternatives to the current statist-orientation of mainstream indigenous politics, Métis politics included, because it is my belief that Métis politics is at its core *anti-statist*, *anti-coercive* and *autonomous*. The Métis nation faces considerable barriers to asserting Métis nationhood with the same power and conviction as was possible the nineteenth century. But this is because colonialism has eroded the strong and healthy relationships we once had. The way to revive the nation is to re-build and re-claim those horizontal, Métis-to-Métis relationships that made us strong and autonomous in the first place. Once this is the case, we can *remind* the State on whose territory it so heavily treads, and we can renew our relationship with Canada *as equals*. It is then that we can reclaim Winnipeg as an autonomous Métis space, where Métisness can coexist peacefully and equally with Canadian settlers. It is then that we can *reclaim the Red River*.

²²⁵ Helen, interview with author, Winnipeg, MB, August 6, 2008.

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