The Métis of Lethbridge: A Microcosm of Identity Politics

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ABSTRACT. Métis have emerged since the 1970s as a new and assertive force in Canadian Aboriginal politics, yet "Métis" remains undefined. "Métis" has been used narrowly to refer to descendants of the Red River colony of Louis Riel, and very broadly as a residual category of people of indigenous descent who are neither status Indians nor Inuit. Ethnographic and historical studies of rural Métis communities suggest that Métis identity has been highly fluid, contextual, and frequently covert, until the constitutional recognition of Métis as an "aboriginal people" in 1982. A 1993 census estimated that there are nearly one thousand Métis in Lethbridge, southern Alberta, although they are barely "visible" as a distinct community within the city. Our 1998 survey found that self-identified Métis in the Lethbridge area generally choose to remain somewhat invisible unless they consider themselves visually identifiable as Native people. Invisibility may be a function of identity ambivalence, as well as of the expectation of discrimination.

SOMMAIRE. Depuis les années 1970 les Métis s'imposent comme une force avec laquelle il faut compter en politique autochtone; pourtant "Métis" demeure indéfini. Ce terme a été utilisé de façon étroite pour désigner les descendants de la colonie de Louis Riel sur la Rivière Rouge, et de façon très large pour une catégorie résiduelle d'ascendance autochtone qui n'est ni indienne ni innuit. Les études ethnographiques et historiques sur les communautés métisses rurales suggèrent que l'identité métisse a été extrêmement fluide, contextuelle et souvent voilée, jusqu'à la reconnaissance constitutionnelle des Métis comme "population autochtone" en 1982. Un recensement de 1993 estimait qu'il y a près de mille Métis à Lethbridge, au sud de l'Alberta, bien qu'ils soient peu "visibles" en tant que communauté distincte. Notre enquête de 1998 montre que les Métis de Lethbridge qui s'identifient comme tels choisissent généralement de demeurer plutôt invisibles, à moins qu'ils ne se considèrent reconnaissables comme autochtones. Cette invisibilité est peut-être fonction d'une ambivalence d'identité ainsi que d'une peur de discrimination.

In 1982, Canada adopted a constitutional amendment which, for the first time, expressly recognized Métis as an "aboriginal people" equal in legal status and rights to Indians and Inuit (Bell 1997). For more than a decade, Métis and "non-status Indian" organizations had worked to mobilize broader membership, achieve national visibility, and build fragile partnerships with Indian and Inuit coalitions.[1] For practical as well as tactical reasons, Métis identity remained poorly defined in contrast with Indian and Inuit, who had long been subjected to federal administrative supervision (Sawchuk 1978). As Métis begin to advance constitutional claims to "aboriginal rights" such as traditional uses of fish and wildlife, and

demand a comparable share of public spending on Aboriginal peoples, individuals and organizations will increasingly be challenged to authenticate their Métis identity. Neighboring First Nations are potential competitors for rights and resources, and likely to be among the challengers.

There are 135,000 self-identified Métis in Canada, according to a recent government survey (Normand 1996). Three-fourths of them reside in the Prairie Provinces, where they comprise roughly one-third of all Aboriginal people. One-quarter of all self-identified Métis are found in the cities of Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Edmonton, where there are as many Métis as Indians. Like Canadian Indians, the Métis population is relatively young and faces significant problems of chronic ill-health. Métis are less likely to retain Aboriginal languages or to continue to engage in subsistence activities on the land. Métis are slightly more likely than Indians to have attained a grade-eight education,[2] and to be employed.[3] Fewer Métis report facing discrimination in employment: 12 percent of Métis compared to 18 percent of Indians.

Aggregate statistical comparisons reify "Métis" as a category and obscure the variety of possible ways of being Métis at the individual and community levels. We decided to explore the varieties of current Métis experiences and identities within a single Alberta Métis Local — Local 2003, which represents Métis in Lethbridge and rural areas south of Calgary.

Métis Identity

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) gave relatively little specific attention to Métis — one chapter in a five-volume final report — but accepted the core premise that Métis constitute a distinct people entitled to compensatory social programs and aboriginal rights. According to RCAP, the factors which should be considered in defining Métis are those which had been discussed throughout the constitutional process: some aboriginal ancestry, self-identification as Métis, and recognition as Métis by a Métis community (Royal Commission 1996: 199–386). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians appear to believe that being Métis and being Indian are mutually exclusive.

Rainier Spencer argues that reifying cultural borders and ethnic categories is incompatible with the lived experience of people who (like himself) inherit multiple roots:

> There is no identity; there are identities, various and fluid. Depending on the situation and my mood I can identify as an American, German-American, Afro-American, Afro-German, male, New Yorker, Texan, Georgian, antiracialist, antisexist, academic, human, straight-ahead jazz-loving, baby boomer. I can deploy these identities separately or in combination with full consistency. No one of them defines me more than any other; all of them come into play to constitute my whole personality (Spencer 1998: 132).

This is consistent with Slobodin's (1966) early work on Métis identity in the North, which found widespread overlaps of kinship between Métis and Indians, and shifting, situational distinctions being made between these two purportedly separate groups (compare Blu [1980: 200–235] on the mixed Indian and African-American identity of the Lumbee).

Ambiguity is not only inevitable but arguably the core experience of peoples

who form along the boundaries between pre-existing groups. Mixed-ancestry families and settlements developed throughout the vast French, British, and American fur-trade empires from the 1670s to the 1920s, from Acadia and Hudson's Bay to the Rocky Mountains and the Great Slave Lake. The earliest "British" and "American" towns of the Great Lakes, established before the Revolutionary War, were of distinctively mixed ancestry and culture (Peterson 1985). As the fur-trade frontier moved west and north in the 19th century, new mixtures arose, continuing the process of métissage. Métis themselves have been mobile, following a westward drift. As a result, Métis aggregations in the Prairies, such as Alberta's officially recognized Métis Settlements, are heterogenous in ancestry, language, and religion (Pocklington 1991; Driben 1985).

As intermediaries in the fur trade, Métis lived on the margins of European towns and tribal communities. They were doubly outcasts, and were ridiculed on the grounds of drinking, fighting, and indolence by their European and Indian kinsmen alike (Slobodin 1964). In response, Métis scholars have long promoted the uniqueness and superiority of a hybrid society. Duke Redbird (1980: 55) defines Métis as "a race apart from both white and Indian and the only race indigenous to Canada," a founding nation of Canada that has suffered particularly grievous exploitation. Adrian Hope, an influential Alberta Métis leader of the 1960s, declared that "I am, and we should all be proud of being Métis as we are the progeny of the best of two peoples." Northern Alberta Métis reportedly remain aloof from neighboring, related Cree Indian communities on the grounds of being better Catholics, although both groups face similar levels of discrimination in non-Native towns (Driben 1985: 150–54).

There is no doubt that the Canadian state has played an important role by imposing "Indian" and "Métis" categories on a mixed population (Chartrand 1991; Miller 1994). The people of Grande Cache, Alberta, chiefly of Iroquois, Cree, and French origins, referred to themselves as "freemen" or "halfbreeds" until recently, and had not thought about whether they were Indian or Métis because such categories were only of concern to outsiders (Nicks and Morgan 1985). Similarly, Joe Venne, a northern Manitoba Métis elder, tried to explain the term "Métis" to an interviewer in these terms (Zeilig and Zeilig 1987: 39–40):

> [Métis] means we have a certain amount of Indian blood in us. We are mixed people. I first met French people, that were called Metis, in St. Hubert, Saskatchewan [about 1918–1921]. And when they came to us, when they came to our home, they said, "Oh, you are Metis." That's the only time I heard about Metis people, which we used to call "michif". It didn't mean anything to us. ... [Y]ou're half and half, with Indian blood. You could be Scotch or English or French. There could be anything — Ukrainian, whatever, you name it — but you're half and half.

An interesting light is shed on Métis identity by the terms the Blackfoot common use to refer to Métis: *saayaapiikiiwan* ("real people who live on the outside") and *aanookiitaapikiwan* ("half-real people"). In Blackfoot perspective, then, Métis tend to live in the white world, and may be only half-conscious of the aboriginality. Similarly, Cree of northeastern Ontario refer to their Métis relatives as *apet'ililew* ("half-Indian") or *wemistikosheekan* ("not really white") (Long 1985).

Sawchuck (1978) argues that the conception of Métis among Métis themselves

has widened considerably since the 1960s as a result of new political strategies based on inclusiveness. The Métis Nation proper, historically tied to the Red River, has mobilized others of mixed ancestry across Canada in an effort to build a larger power base. In Labrador, the emergence of a new, publicly recognized category of mixed ancestry has meant that "pride and interest in one's roots have replaced stigma and shame" (Kennedy 1997: 17). Waldram (1987) likewise argues that the resurgence of Métis consciousness in the 1970s arose from feelings of deprivation relative to Indians, who were making visible economic and political gains at that time.

Métis families have survived by "testing the winds," and aligning themselves with whichever community is most welcoming (Peterson 1985). In the absence of precise legal categories, and in a Canadian national culture that continues to be ambivalent about aboriginality, it is not surprising that Métis identity is multifarious, volatile and personal, sometimes even covert: "Being a Métis nowadays seems to be largely a matter of perception" (Douaud 1987: 216). Generalizations about "Métis culture" are extremely hazardous.

Métis in Lethbridge

Emigration from Métis settlements along the Red River in Manitoba to central Saskatchewan and northern Alberta began in the 1870s, after the young Dominion of Canada asserted its sovereignty over the western prairies at rifle-point (see, generally, Stanley 1961). Following the northern edge of the grasslands, the Métis diaspora resulted in a thin band of distinctly Métis settlements extending from The Pas (Manitoba) through Prince Albert (Saskatchewan) and Edmonton (Alberta), to Grande Cache in the Rocky Mountain foothills. Where the prairies meet boreal forests, Métis found rich hunting and trapping territories which were, for several generations, too isolated and unprofitable to attract many other settlers. Since 1945, however, mining and logging have "opened" the northern prairies and helped industrialize prairie cities such as Saskatoon and Calgary, drawing more Métis southward.

Alberta Métis began agitating for political recognition and land rights during the Great Depression. The Metis Association of Alberta was formally organized in 1932 with 41 locals and more than 1,200 paid members. Alberta legislatively recognized eight northern communities as Métis Settlements in 1938, but provided little in the way of social or economic investments. Association membership plummetted after World War II, but Alberta Métis reorganized in the late 1960s and 1970s. Today, there are an estimated 60,000 Métis in Alberta, of whom nearly 5,000 are voting members of the Metis Nation of Alberta. Goals of the Metis Nation of Alberta include economic self-sufficiency, just treatment, and retention and promotion of Métis history and culture.

Local 2003 is one of 59 chapters constituting the Metis Nation of Alberta. Its 80 voting members live either in the city of Lethbridge or in nearby smaller towns in southern Alberta. According to a house-by-house survey conducted by Local 2003, there are nearly 1,000 Métis in the area, of whom 39 percent reside in the city itself (Local 2003, 1993).[4] Although Métis would thereby comprise 31 percent of all self-identified Native people in Lethbridge, there are no significant neighbourhood concentrations of Métis, and only one-fifth of the Métis adults identified by the survey are members of the Local.[5] The survey also found that 58 percent of the employed

Métis identified themselves as laborers, 35 percent of them reported earning $20,000 or less, and mean personal income was roughly $15,000. Half of the respondents (47 percent) reported receiving some form of government assistance.

Research Issues

Nicks and Morgan (1985: 175) contend that the Métis who settled in southern Alberta had already lost their Métis cultural identity by the 1950s, as a result of intermarriage. Sawchuck (1978), Waldram (1987), and Peterson (1985) attribute current assertions of Métis identity to their recognition as Aboriginal people in the Constitution Act, 1982, and to their potential eligibility for land claims and material benefits. Kennedy (1997) suggests that Métis are self-identifying simply because discrimination has abated. We decided to explore the validity of these assertions in terms of the ancestry, attitudes, and self-identification behavior of Métis in the Lethbridge area.

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

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

Methodology

To obtain relatively detailed and comparable self-reflective data on Métis identity under conditions of complete anonymity, we designed a 28-question questionnaire, and pre-tested it for comprehension and specificity on University of Lethbridge students. The cover sheet explained that "Native and non-Native students at the University of Lethbridge [are] interested in finding out more about the Métis people who live here in Lethbridge: where you come from, what's important to you, how well you feel your interests and needs are being met."

A random sample of the entire city was not practical, as we would have had to mail a minimum of 15,000 survey forms to recruit 100 Métis respondents. We chose instead a targetted sampling strategy, aimed at reaching as many self-identified Métis as possible. Survey forms were mailed directly to members of Local 2003. To reach less active Métis, we also recruited participation through low-profile, anonymous pick-up boxes in high-use, ethnically neutral public places and businesses, as well as the offices of the Métis Local and other Native organizations. To draw attention to the pick-up boxes, modest posters were placed at public buildings and businesses around the city, and we arranged for a "human interest" story describing the study in the *Lethbridge Herald*. A $20 reward was offered for every tenth response.

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

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

Results

Based on the total Métis population of the area reported by Local 2003, approximately 10 percent (N=52) of Métis adults responded to our survey. Half of the respondents were members of Local 2003, hence the response rate of members was three times greater than that of non-members. We had anticipated that members of the Local would be more strongly self-identified and assertive as Métis, and therefore more likely to respond to the survey. However, we had not expected such low levels of interest, among members or non-members in view of the extensive publicity we had arranged for the survey.[6]

Age Effects

A significant demographic characteristic of the sample is its age structure. For Lethbridge as a whole, according to the 1996 national census, the ratio of persons aged 20-39 to persons aged 40-59 was 1.4, indicating a relatively youthful population. In our sample this ratio is 0.8, a strong bias in favour of older adults. The strength of this bias is underscored by the fact that the total Métis population of the Lethbridge area, as well as the Métis population of Canada as a whole, appear to be much younger than the non-Aboriginal population (Normand 1996: 12; Local 2003, 1993).

Within our sample, variables estimating respondents' interest in, and assertion of, their Métis cultural identity were not significantly correlated with respondents' age.[7] In other words, age apparently was a factor in the decision to respond to the survey, but not a factor in the way the respondents described themselves. An explanation for this phenomenon may be found in answers to our question, "How old were you when you began to think of yourself as Métis?" Half of the sample (52 percent) began to self-identify only as adults, and a large number (25 percent) began to self-identify only after age 40.

Cultural Roots and Ties

The cultural roots of our respondents are varied and overlapping, as indicated by Table 1. Just over half of the respondents have roots at Red River, and have Cree and French ancestors. Most of the others trace their Aboriginal roots to Métis communities that arose elsewhere in the Prairies, largely but not entirely of Cree, French and Scottish ancestries.[8]

We found a strong pattern of maternal communication of Aboriginal culture. Of those respondents who reported learning about their Métis heritage from parents, grandparents, and other relatives (88 percent), 46 percent learned about themselves exclusively from female relatives; 26 percent learned from both male and female relatives; and 19 percent had relied exclusively on male relatives. Books, genealogical studies and Métis organizations had been secondary sources of information for one-third of the respondents. The centrality of women in transmitting Métis identity has already been inferred from historical studies (Brown 1983).

Table 1. Reported origins and ancestry of Lethbridge-area Métis (percentage of respondents who reported each origin)

Ancestral Area		Aboriginal Roots		Immigrant Roots	
Red River	58	Cree	52	French	42
Saskatchewan	23	Ojibway	17	Scottish	29
Alberta	17	Other	10	Anglo-Irish	17

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

Conception of "Métis"

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

Table 2. Lethbridge Métis conceptions of who is "Métis" (percent of respondents who included each category of persons)

Group Identified	%
Direct descendant of Red River	70
Grew up in a distinctly Métis community	48
Speaks *michif* or is culturally Métis in some way	46
Native, but is not a status (registered) Indian	54
Indian, but did not grow up on an Indian Reserve	29
Self-identifies, and is accepted by other Métis	66

Barely half (48 percent) of the respondents agreed that Métis status can be conferred by Red River ancestry or some combination of the other criteria. It therefore appears that historical Red River ties, and contemporary cultural orientation, are conceptually distinct among our respondents, and form the bases of two competing ideas about what it means to be Métis.

Visibility and Its Consequences

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

Nearly half of our respondents (44 percent) did not identify any "advantages"

to being Métis; two-thirds of them (65 percent) did not report any "disadvantages." Among those who *did* identify advantages, a majority (62 percent) referred exclusively to intangible benefits such as personal identity and cultural pride, rather than the enjoyment of any special legal rights or economic benefits. The disadvantages of being Métis, according to those few respondents who identified any, involved discrimination by both Indians and non-Indians.

Expressions of Identity

A majority of respondents (74 percent) agreed with the statement, "My Métis heritage makes very little difference in my everyday life"[9]; while only 15 percent agreed with the statement, "My Métis heritage is absolutely central to my life." Respondents' self-assessed visibility was a statistically significant predictor of agreement with the second of these two statements (Pearson's $\chi^2=10.751$, p<.001), as we predicted. Visibility should logically have predicted disagreement with the first statement as well, but fell just short of the threshold for statistical significance ($\chi^2=3.742$, p=.053).

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

Most of our respondents have children (81 percent); and of those respondents with children, most have told their children that they are Métis (74 percent), and most have encouraged them to be proud of their Métis heritage (55 percent). Only 31 percent of respondents reported taking their children to Métis political meetings or cultural events, however, which suggests that the family is the context for maintaining awareness of identity.

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

Identity and Political Activity

Over half (54 percent) of the respondents who are members of the Local described themselves as "actively involved." However, very few respondents (14 percent) have been members of the Lethbridge Local, or any other Métis organization, for more than five years. Local membership was not correlated with respondents' self-perceived visibility, but weakly correlated with their agreement with the statement, "My Métis heritage is absolutely central to my life" ($\chi^2=3.835$, p=.050), and their disagreement with the statement, "My Métis heritage makes very little difference in my everyday life" ($\chi^2=5.838$, p=.016).[10] Métis who view their Métis identity as relatively unimportant are unlikely to become active in any Métis organization: this much seems intuitively obvious.

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

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

Economic Status and Concerns

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

Table 3. Local issues identified by Lethbridge-area Métis (percentage of respondents classifying each issue as "crucial")

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

Despite the fact that employment and advanced education accounted for a majority of respondents' relocation to the Lethbridge area, only one-third of them (33 percent) are currently self-employed, salaried, or earning more than 15 dollars per hour.[11] Another third (31 percent) are employed part-time or at wages less than 15 dollars per hour. The remainder (36 percent) are unemployed, retired, or attending a college or university. These economic conditions are roughly average for the population of Lethbridge as a whole, but somewhat better than average for Métis nationwide (see Normand 1996: 38–51), which may explain why employment did not lead our respondents' list of "issues for the Métis people living in Lethbridge" (Table 3).

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

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

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

Implications

Most of the respondents to our survey were ambivalent about their aboriginality. On the whole, they report feeling pride in their roots privately, but exercising restraint in public expression and assertion of Aboriginal, Indian, or Métis identity. They generally anticipate a negative reaction from others (including Indians) and, to some extent, adverse social and economic consequences from being visible. Of course, they may differ little from self-identified Indians with regard to the expectation of discrimination and intolerance. However, the Métis in our study tend to believe that they can evade visual detection. It may also be significant that Métis have long been belittled by Indians and Europeans alike, arguably resulting in a greater sensitivity to prejudice and greater expectation of rejection.

Our study highlights the usefulness of comparisons with *mestizos* in Latin America and "mixedbloods" in the United States. The Spanish Empire initially encouraged intermarriage as a means of assimilation, little anticipating the development of a complex caste (*casta*) system in which *mestizos* were intermediate in status between their Indian and European ancestors (Mörner 1967). In Mexico, mestizos were encouraged to self-identify wherever possible as *criollos*, or native-born whites (MacLachlan and Rodriguez 1980: 216). In Peru, *mestizos* could acquire property and status solely by identifying themselves with the Spanish elite (Stern 1993: 170–74). Darkness of skin has been the principal marker of low socioeconomic status throughout Latin America (Stavenhagen 1970; Forbes 1993). In North America, the significance of African-Americans' ability to pass as white in the context of identity formation and social status has long been recognized, but it is scarcely acknowledged as an issue for Native peoples.

To be sure, there have been cultural counter-currents in several Latin American countries. *Mestizaje* was welcomed in colonial Mexico, on the grounds that it resulted in a kind of hybrid vigor (MacLachlan and Rodriguez 1980: 217; compare Douaud 1987). Mexican revolutionaries promoted "indigenism" as a distinguishing feature of national culture, but this merely idealized "real" Indians without improving the status or social conditions of Indians or *mestizos* (Knight 1990; Stavenhagen 1988: 302–05). Brazilians also ambivalently idealize "real" (that is, forest) Indians while despising *mestiços* or *mamelucos* (Ramos 1998: 285–89; also see Wagley 1972). Contemporary Bolivia has appropriated an invented Indian national identity as well, while perpetuating a self-styled European elite (Abercrombie 1991).

Latin American ambivalence towards *mestizaje* can also be seen in the United States among *chicanos*, as descendants of *mestizo* families in the northern provinces of colonial Mexico (Abalos 1986; Gutiérrez 1991: 284–86): Indianness may be admired in some of its aspects, but Indian ancestry is a blemish in a lineage that could pass as white.

The biological and cultural contribution of indigenous peoples to the national

population as a whole is least acknowledged in the United States, where legislation and popular thought draw sharp lines between "Indian" and "White." People of multiple ancestry who did not grow up on an Indian reservation, or could not document enough "blood quantum" to obtain membership in a federally-recognized Indian tribe, fell into an identity limbo. They were even threatened with criminal conviction for claiming to be Indians (Barsh 1994). The possibility of mutually-meaningful exchanges and syntheses of indigenous and European ideas is rejected in favour of the illusion of two monolithically antagonistic, immiscible cultural systems (Womack 1999: 143; also Abalos 1986: 51).

Only recently have Native writers such as Gerald Vizenor and W.S. Penn coined terms such as "mixedblood" and "crossblood" to legitimize their multiple ancestries. "Crossbloods who hate white and black must hate that place and time in themselves," Vizenor (1991: 149) observes. The alternative to recognition and inclusiveness of multiple heritages is the repression of one part of the self, and the idealization of the other: "Mixedbloods have to know this, especially urban mixed-bloods, or else go around hating a good bit of themselves" (Penn 1995: 240). A self-consciously mixedblood inheritance also means acknowledging the hurt that our ancestors have inflicted on one another:

> My lips are tight from stretching when my small family is introduced alongside the large extended family. Later, driving home, I weave a story for my children — how their great grandma rode sidesaddle, waving her .22 in the air trying to scare those relatives away (Louise Halfe 1998:61).

Louis Owens (1998, 197–98) observes that "to be what is called a mixedblood is never to rest. ... One may opt for this side or that, but one is always balanced on a thin line between ways of knowing. A choice there is, in every day and moment. But only because cultures insist upon choice."

Notes

1. Consistent with popular usage in the Canadian Prairies, we will use "Indian" to refer to members of "First Nations" (communities organized and recognized under the Indian Act), and "Aboriginal" to refer to all those indigenous peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis) who fall within the scope of section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.
2. According to Normand (1996), 11.8 percent of Metis in the 15-44 age group had attained less than a grade-eight education, compared to 15.4 percent of Indians and 4.9 percent of non-Aboriginal Canadians. Metis were *not* more likely to have completed a college degree, however.
3. Normand (1993) reports that 62.1 percent of Metis in the 25-44 age group were employed in 1991, compared to 53.1 percent of Indians, and 78.8 percent of non-Aboriginal Canadians. Only 20.1 percent of Metis in this group were employed in managerial, professional, and technical positions compared to 23.0 percent of Indians and 30.1 percent of non-Aboriginal workers.
4. The survey actually enumerated 699 Metis, but adjusted this upwards to 974, based on the proportion of households in the area which had not been interviewed. We have used the higher figure here.
5. According to the Local 2003 survey, the tiny hamlet of Diamond City just north of Lethbridge (total population 102) was 10 percent Metis. In all other neighbourhoods, towns and hamlets, Metis were less than 2 percent of total population.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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