



MARIE-LOUISE: PROTECTOR OF LOUIS RIEL IN QUÉBEC

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“If you will, bless us in particular, us the French Canadien Métis. Bless us with all the other Métis from all origins.”

—Louis Riel (1985a, p. 23; our translation)

Introduction

Descendants of Métis from the eastern provinces of Canada are at present facing various accusations of being “ethnic frauds” and mere political opportunists from some of those within neo-nationalist Métis academic and activist circles.¹ They are told that using the term “Métis” essentially amounts to “cultural appropriation.” And they argue that the term “Métis” should be reserved to the Red River Métis Nation descendants alone (by virtue of the transmission of some “matured” political consciousness that would have emerged only in the Prairies).² It is also suggested that the ancestors of Eastern Métis have never used the term “Métis” until recently, thus confirming their alleged neo-colonialism and “wannabe” impulses (Vowel and Leroux 2016, Andersen 2016). Finally, it is argued that Eastern Métis are merely archivist

¹ E.g., Vowel and Leroux (2016), Gaudry and Andersen (2016), Adese (2016), and Andersen (2014).

² See Jacqueline Petersen (2012) for an example of such argument. Quoting Chris Andersen, Petersen posits the need for political maturation to secure a “real” peoplehood, with the most extreme consequence that, for Petersen, the “Métis Nation of Ontario” would amount to a “misappropriation” of the term “Métis” per the descendants of mere “Half breeds.” A similar social-evolutionary approach to Métis identity seems to inform the work of Darren O’Toole, who distinguishes the “passage” from métis/identity to Métis/nationality along a teleological spectrum, placing at its apex a metaphysical embodiment of a nationalistic Métis “*Geist*” capable of subjective desires and even “agency” (O’Toole 2013). It could be argued that such scaling replicates the one between primitive (Petersen’s mere “Half breeds”) versus matured cultures under the necessary scope of nationalist expressions (i.e., the Métis Nations) we find at the heart of what Bruce G. Trigger described as “colonial anthropology” (Trigger 1984).

hungry ghosts or “zombies” (as if coming back from the dead) with no proof of living transmission of Métis culture or any genuine relationships (leading to accusations of “Self-Indigenization,” see Andersen 2016).

In light of these accusations, this essay has two objectives. It first seeks to challenge Métis *neo*-nationalist discourses that deny the existence of Métis Easterners by presenting evidence to the contrary. Second, it wishes to refute the accusation that archival documents attesting the historical existence of Eastern Métis would not constitute a *living* proof of “genuine” Indigenous cultural transmission.

We use the term “Métis *neo*-nationalism” in this essay with two interrelated meanings to build our criticism of such phenomena: first, we use the term to describe an ideological position framed by a fallacy which consists in conflating the conditions of possibility for all possible Métis ethnogenesis (and/or cultural expressions) with a single ethno-nationalist narrative based on classic Red River historiography; second, we use it to stress its recent vintage (neo-) and mark its difference with the historical Métis nationalism as articulated by Métis leader Louis Riel. By the term “Métis neo-nationalism” we refer to an ideological position *of recent vintage* that makes *only* the descendants of the Métis from the Prairies (and Red River in particular) “real” Métis. The other non-Prairies Métis would be merely “mixed-blood” descendants. The ideology of Métis neo-nationalism rests on the argument suggesting that only Prairies Métis experienced the “maturation” of becoming a full-blown Métis nation, which, in turn, would secure the transmission of a “genuine” Métis culture to the contemporary Métis who can trace such ancestry. Because of this political maturation, it is argued, only Prairies Métis should be granted the rights to take on the name “Métis.” In this essay, we provide evidence that Louis Riel’s vision of Métis nationalism contradicts this exclusionary doctrine, especially when it comes to Riel’s inclusiveness toward all Métis and “Half breeds” irrespective of their location in the British territories of North America. We do so, moreover, by exploring the oral tradition pertaining to Marie-Louise Riel in the Outaouais region (in Québec).

The first part of this essay discusses the juridical treatment of Métis identity through the *Powley* and *Daniels* decisions in order to better situate the preoccupations of Métis neo-nationalism. We then criticize a fallacy we suggest is at the heart of neo-nationalism, which consists of making the neo-nationalist narrative based on mainly populist accounts of classic Métis historiography of the Red River region the *necessary* condition of possibility for *all* Métis ethnogenesis. We do so by unpacking a range of historical evidence, including from historic Métis leaders Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont. The second part of

this essay then tackles the argument that archival proof should not be enough to prove the “living” transmission of Métis culture. This leads us to present the oral tradition of Marie-Louise Riel, which is evidence of the historical usage of the terms “Métis” in the Gatineau Valley (in Québec), East-West kinship relations between Métis families, as well as enduring cultural attachments to both Métis identity and the figure of Louis Riel among descendants of Outaouais Métis still living today. This essay thus invites the reader into a step-by-step refutation of the main psychologism, political rhetoric, and abusive generalizations used within neo-nationalist academic and activist circles currently busy denying the existence of Métis in the eastern provinces of Canada, including Québec.

The Juridical Arena: Who Are the Métis?

The Métis became, in 1982, one of the three Aboriginal peoples whose rights are constitutionally recognized and protected in Canada.³ But after 35 years, the question ‘Who are the Métis?’ is still debated. Lacking a clear definition of Métis identity, in 2003 the Supreme Court of Canada articulated a juridical test in the *Powley* decision by which the Courts now evaluate the “legitimacy” of rights-bearers per s. 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The *Powley* trial involved Steve and Rodney Powley, charged for hunting a moose out of season, for which they invoked a constitutional Aboriginal right (*R. v. Powley* 1998, para. 3). Appealing the decision from the Ontario Court of Appeal, the Crown then attempted to dismiss the Métis identity of the Powleys, highlighting that the term “Métis” was only used in the 1990s by the members of their *ad hoc* “Métis” community (thus of recent vintage). The Crown also pointed out that the Powleys were only 1/64 and 1/128 Ojibwe ancestry, going back seven generations, and to a single Indigenous ancestor from Wisconsin (Canada 2003, para. 3, 111–112). The Crown also suggested that the Métis “community” of Sault Ste. Marie, then already sparse, showed no evidence of continuity since 1850. The Supreme Court of Canada gave these arguments no merit, ultimately confirming the Aboriginal right of the Powleys.⁴

³ The three Aboriginal peoples are mentioned in section 35(2) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*:

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

Definition of “aboriginal peoples of Canada”

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

⁴ These unsuccessful arguments pressed by the Crown are important to highlight, as they announce not only striking similarities with the rhetoric used by proponents of Métis neo-

In rendering its decision, the Supreme Court articulated a ten-point “test” to assess claims of s. 35 right-bearers Métis (*R. v. Powley* 2003, paras. 18–50). For the purpose of identification, these criteria include self-identification as Métis, the demonstration of an ancestral connection to an historic Métis community, and acceptance by the modern Métis community (para. 30). The Court also stated that not everyone of mixed-ancestry necessarily qualify for the purpose of s. 35 Métis rights (para. 10). The Court describes the Métis as forming a distinctive culture, while highlighting the possibility of various Métis peoples.⁵ We could add that a person can also be of “mixed-ancestry” and not identify as “Métis” (they could rather self-identify as First Nation or Inuit, for example). Because Aboriginal rights for the purpose of s. 35 are seen as collectively held, a Métis claimant who is not able to demonstrate a connection to a historical Métis community (i.e., a community that existed after the period of contact yet before the estimation of effective control by European authorities) can still have their constitutional defence rejected by the Court.

The logic we find in the *Powley* decision—that not all people of “mixed-ancestry” are Métis for the purpose of s. 35—has often been instrumentalized to condemn as “fake” those Métis unable to secure a *Powley* test. In the case of the Eastern Métis, the legal failure to secure the *Powley* test sent the signal that such failure would confirm the untrustworthiness of their identity as “Métis.” In addition, such juridical failures often translate into difficulties accessing services and negotiating tables with the government for these Métis. The *Powley* logic is, moreover, at the centre of concerted efforts by a Western-based Métis organization created in 1983, the Metis National Council (MNC), to forge a “Métis Registry” that would be based on the *Powley* test—with the risk of creating a two-tier Métis identification system while suppressing the autonomy of established independent Métis communities across Canada (see Senate of Canada 2012).

nationalism when attacking other “fake Métis,” but also ground their charge against the adoption by the Judiciary of a “racially-charged” treatment of Métis identity, accused here of being detrimental of the “true” expression of Métis nationalism.

⁵ The reality of the diversity of Métis communities is highlighted by the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Powley* decision, at para 11: “The Métis of Canada share the common experience of having forged a new culture and a distinctive group identity from their Indian or Inuit and European roots. This enables us to speak in general terms of ‘the Métis’. However, particularly given the vast territory of what is now Canada, we should not be surprised to find that different groups of Métis exhibit their own distinctive traits and traditions. This diversity among groups of Métis may enable us to speak of Métis ‘peoples,’ a possibility left open by the language of s. 35(2), which speaks of the ‘Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada’” (*Powley* 2003, para. 11).

It was the risk of seeing their “Métis” identity obliterated by the creation of such *Powley* Registry, handled by a western-based Métis organization that rejects the existence of any Métis in the eastern provinces of Canada (the MNC), that pushed thousands of Métis over the edge: many leaders of Eastern and Western communities decided to assert claims of their own, or to regroup under the banner of newly formed and grassroots organizations such as the “Métis Federation of Canada” (MFC). In 2016, this organization successfully financed, through various community activities, an intervention into the high profile case *Daniels v. Canada* before the Supreme Court of Canada, which was set to determine who, between the federal and the provincial levels of government, holds a primary fiduciary to the Métis and Non-Status Indians per the section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

Many non-Prairies and Prairies-Métis grew anxious when the MNC sought to intervene in the *Daniels* case to limit the fiduciary responsibility associated with section 91(24) only to “*Powley* Métis,” an argument the MNC held in parallel with their own project of creating a *Powley* registry, which could potentially exclude thousands of Métis from governmental recognition (as “non-registered” Métis).⁶ Among the opponents, the Metis Settlement General Council from Alberta opposed this line of argument in its intervention, criticizing the restrictive territorialization of the *Powley* test, which freezes, per the notion of “historical community,” the evolution of Métis culture and politics in time, stating that their own membership code had accepted Métis from different areas.⁷ Denouncing the insistence that s. 91(24) pertain only to

⁶ See the MNC strategy of using the *Powley* test to close the access at 91(24) in the Factum of the Intervener, Metis National Council, in *Daniels v. Canada* (2016), at para. 22, p. 9:

22. In *Powley*, this Court established a workable and durable framework for identifying the Métis and their rights for the purposes of s. 35. *Powley* allows for Métis “diversity,” however, it confirms that Métis are not simply “mixed Aboriginal ancestry” individuals or groups that now self-identify as Métis.

23. Contrary to CAP’s claims that *Powley* is too “restrictive” and “[v]ery few Métis communities” have met success, Métis rights have been recognized or accommodated in significant parts of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories. This Grundnorm of Métis constitutional law must inform s. 91(24). While litigants in other parts of Canada may not have met success, the case law suggests that the problem may be the facts of history for those groups—not the *Powley* framework.

⁷ See the Factum of the Intervener Metis Settlement General Council, in *Daniels v. Canada* (2016), at para. 22, p. 7:

22. These questions are essential to the Metis Settlements who have a unique history. While many of the Metis Settlements are located in Northern Alberta and are associated with a larger historic regional Métis community it is also true that Métis from other areas were drawn to the colonies and Settlements. It would be a

collective entities as too simplistic and a mere distraction (a position noticeably defended by the MNC), the Métis Settlement General Council went on with a clear declaration at paragraph 30 of its intervention:

MSGC submits it does not assist efforts at reconciliation to focus on divisive, politically territorial arguments. Just as the diversity of Canada's Indian and Inuit can be recognized under s. 91(24), so can the diversity of Métis be recognized. *Just as there is no single voice for the myriad First Nations and Inuit in Canada, MSGC resists any notion there is a single collective voice speaking on behalf of the Métis in Canada.* (MSGC 2016, 9; our emphasis)

Ultimately, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed in part with MSGC and the Métis Federation of Canada, while giving the Powley argument produced by the MNC no merit, stating the obvious that s. 35 and 91(24) served different constitutional purposes. The *Daniels* decision established that the Federal government has a fiduciary duty toward *all* Métis and Non-Status Indians as “Indians” per section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. The Court moreover stated that this fiduciary relationship includes not just those Métis who have secured the *Powley* test, but all Métis and non-status Indians, even those who have *not* secured the *Powley* criterion of “community acceptance” as a result of being separated from their community, or in case of adoption, and so on.⁸ On

disastrous result if a strict application of the Powley test brought the legitimacy of these individuals and communities into question for the purposes of s. 91(24).

Similarly, there is no principled reason why an individual's identity as Métis should depend upon where they live.

⁸ We have reproduced the most important paragraphs of the *Daniels* decision to that effect (*Daniels v. Canada*, 2016), including mentions of the three Powley criteria discussed above, and the arguments why the Supreme Court of Canada reject the community acceptance criterion derived from the *Powley* test:

[48] The issue in *Powley* was who is Métis under s. 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The case involved two Métis hunters who were charged with violating the *Game and Fish Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. G.1. They claimed that the Métis had an Aboriginal right to hunt for food under s. 35(1). The Court agreed and suggested three criteria for defining who qualifies as Métis for purposes of s. 35(1):

1. Self-identification as Métis;
2. An ancestral connection to an historic Métis community; and
3. Acceptance by the modern Métis community.

[49] The third criterion—community acceptance—raises particular concerns in the context of this case. The criteria in *Powley* were developed specifically for purposes of applying s. 35, which is about protecting historic community-held rights: para. 13. That is why acceptance by the community was found to be, for purposes of who is included as Métis under s. 35, a prerequisite to holding those

the question of Métis identity, the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed that there is no consensus on who the Métis are, adding that ethnic labels are more fluid than often admitted (*Daniels v. Canada* 2016, paras. 48–49). This was followed by a passage suggesting that there is “no one exclusive Métis people in Canada” (para. 17), that to know who the “Métis” are for section 91(24) remains a fact-driven question on a case-by-case basis in the future (para. 47), and the *Powley* test remains in effect *when it comes to s. 35 rights* which are community-based (paras. 48–49).⁹

The Academic Arena: Engaging Métis Neo-Nationalism

From the standpoint of this juridical turmoil, establishing who the Métis are has not been a simple task. Métis across Canada are caught between juridical test and reasoning while battling their own inner conflicts, and often

rights. Section 91(24) serves a very different constitutional purpose. It is about the federal government’s relationship with Canada’s Aboriginal peoples. This includes people who may no longer be accepted by their communities because they were separated from them as a result, for example, of government policies such as Indian Residential Schools. There is no principled reason for presumptively and arbitrarily excluding them from Parliament’s protective authority on the basis of a “community acceptance” test.

[50] The first declaration should, accordingly, be granted as requested. Non-status Indians and Métis are “Indians” under s. 91(24) and it is the federal government to whom they can turn. [...]

[58] The appeal is therefore allowed in part and the Federal Court of Appeal’s conclusion that the first declaration should exclude non-status Indians or apply only to those Métis who meet the *Powley* criteria, is set aside. It follows that the cross-appeal is dismissed. The appellants are entitled to their costs.

⁹ Paragraph 17 from *Daniels v. Canada* (2016) is explicit:

[17] There is no consensus on who is considered Métis or a non-status Indian, nor need there be. Cultural and ethnic labels do not lend themselves to neat boundaries. ‘Métis’ can refer to the historic Métis community in Manitoba’s Red River Settlement or it can be used as a general term for anyone with mixed European and Aboriginal heritage. Some mixed-ancestry communities identify as Métis, others as Indian:

There is no one exclusive Metis People in Canada, anymore than there is no one exclusive Indian people in Canada. The Metis of eastern Canada and northern Canada are as distinct from Red River Metis as any two peoples can be.... As early as 1650, a distinct Metis community developed in LeHeve [*sic*], Nova Scotia, separate from Acadians and Micmac Indians. All Metis are aboriginal people. All have Indian ancestry. (R. E. Gaffney, G. P. Gould and A. J. Semple, *Broken Promises: The Aboriginal Constitutional Conferences* (1984), at p. 62, quoted in Catherine Bell, “Who Are The Metis People in Section 35(2)?” [1991], 29 *Alta. L. Rev.* 351, p. 356)

succeeding in securing official recognition and funds from governmental agencies. Both the *Powley* and *Daniels* decisions have, in turn, been criticized by a number of Métis scholars and jurists whose views often align with the politics of the MNC. They have argued that these decisions favour “race-based” conceptions of the Métis at the expense of what would be the “true” essence of Métis identity, namely, its nationalist or political embodiment that emerged from the Red River events (see Chartrand 2008; Madden 2008; Teillet 2014). These decisions have also been accused of favouring a language with racist undertones (by reducing Métis identity to the result of mere “mixture”), or settling for an overly restrictive “community-based” understanding of Métis identity (Andersen 2012, p. 394; Adese 2016, p. 12). This “piecemeal” approach has been criticized for balkanizing or fragmenting what is deemed the “true” Métis *political* identity that would originate *solely* in the Prairies (Andersen 2011, p. 56; Andersen 2014; Adese 2016).¹⁰ These debates have evolved into an assessment of the causes for the multiplication of Métis “communities” outside the Prairies (or cases of Métis self-identification), which are accused of opportunism or “ethnic fraud” for using the now constitutionalized term “Métis” while attempting to gain recognition from Canadian authorities (Andersen 2014; Adese 2016).¹¹ As Dubois and Saunders

¹⁰ Chris Andersen describes some sort of intimate “awareness” that allows him to discern who the “true” Métis are, namely the reaching of a level of “political maturity” of some kind on an evolutionary scale, seen as necessarily radiating outward from and in direct connection to the Red River Métis history:

Likewise, although it may well be that the shortcomings and biases of the colonial record relied on by ethnohistorians will continue to enormously complicate the precise tracing of contemporaneous self-ascriptions, *we are more than aware of who did use the term Métis and of the social relations in which they were embedded*. Thus, while “mixedness” constitutes a near-ubiquitous feature of social relations in the vast indigenous territories claimed by various imperial powers, *only in Red River did the encounters, intimacies, and antagonisms that characterized previous “separateness” bloom into full political maturity*: the Métis people thus represents “an exceptional phenomenon that responded to a unique set of social, political, and economic stimuli in western Canada during the nineteenth century” (Chartrand and Giokas 2002: 295), and following from this, ethnohistorical scholarship wedded to a “peopled” rather than a racialized analytic is best served by charting an analytical course in the light of this conceptual cartography. (2011, p. 56; our emphasis)

¹¹ Chris Andersen did not hesitate to use the derogatory expression “soup kitchen” to describe the “other Métis,” who, he posits, abuse the term “Métis”:

Despite the racialization that has shaped Métis politics, however, the category “Métis” is not a *soup kitchen* for Indigenous individuals and communities disenfranchised in various ways by the Canadian state (see Andersen 2011): however volatile our Métis citizenship codes have necessarily become in the

highlight, this sentiment appears to be shared by the current President of the MNC, Clem Chartier, who resolutely excludes a number of Métis not fitting MNC strategic definitions in line with his constitutional power struggles:

Others, like President Chartier, worry that that failure to clearly demarcate the boundaries of membership will not only threaten the internal cohesion of the nation, but will inhibit efforts to negotiate land and self-government with the state. For Chartier (2013b), “The days of putting off difficult decisions for fear of upsetting people are over. The stakes are too high.” The enforcement of the MNC definition across the Métis Nation imposes a fractious choice on provincial governing bodies mired in the complex legacy of colonialism: forcibly remove individuals from their membership registries—people who may have identified as Métis their whole lives but who do not meet the new criteria—or allow them to remain, thus creating a two-tier system of citizenship (Saunders 2013) (Dubois and Saunders 2017, p. 11).¹²

Accusations targeting the non-Red River/non-Prairies Métis as “ethnic frauds” have been criticized, in turn, for *conflating* all possible causes of a Métis ethnogenesis with an exclusivist ethno-nationalist discourse on Métis identity (Gagnon 2009; Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Malette 2016, pp. 355–383). In other words, supporters of Prairies-centric definitions of Métis identity would conflate a *causal explanation* using a romantic and often populist account of Métis ethno-nationalism (itself derived from classic Métis historiography),

racialized cauldron of Canada’s colonialism, they deserve to be respected. (2014, p. 24; our emphasis)

¹² In 2014, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reported that MNC President Clem Chartier attempted to influence former Prime Minister Harper to halt the process of appeal from Canada in *Daniels v. Canada*. Chartier attempted to do so at a stage when the last standing decision was more favourable to the exclusion of the “Other Métis,” in agreement with the MNC strategy of closing their access to the fiduciary relationship with the Federal government per 91(24) by instrumentalizing the Powley criteria set for s. 35 rights (which are collective by default). The intent appeared to have been to effectively cut down the number of Métis who could have sought to initiate former recognition processes with the Federal government of Canada. President Chartier went as far as to argue that the government would equally benefit from cutting down the number of Métis claimants, with the new Qualipu First Nation band as an example, causing the uproar of the President of the Congress of the Aboriginal Peoples, Mrs. Lavallée. The article mentions that: “the Canadian Press obtained a copy of Chartier’s April 23 letter to Harper under the Access to Information Act. In it, Chartier warns that broadening the definition to include people from eastern Canada could result in a huge surge in people claiming to be Métis” (Rennie 2014).

with all possibilities of causation of Métis ethnogenesis and cultural manifestations. Thus they would commit the fallacy of making the presence of *a specific nationalistic causal explanation a necessary condition* for proving *all* possible “Métis” ethnogenesis anywhere.

Supporters of this exclusionary logic are at risk of formulating chauvinist, if not plainly intolerant expressions of Métis culture, especially when stating that some regions of Canada would be more truly “Métis” than others. Nourished by this fallacy, the notion of “ethnogenesis” used in debates on Métis identity can be criticized for oscillating between the need to prove either a “settlement locus” or a closed-territorialized ideal of the Métis nation, with both assuming an atomistic configuration. As such, both ideals make the condition of possibility of the achievement of “political consciousness,” either at a local or national level, dependant on some ontological “enclosing” criteria (such as population density and immediate territorial proximity). It has been shown that these criteria are not only ultimately arbitraries, but often contrary to the mobile and trans-territorial kinship-based upon which the experience of Métis political consciousness has been experienced in various ways (Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Malette, 2016, pp. 379–381).¹³

The dissemination of such a fallacy also explains why there is little room within neo-nationalist circles for arguments suggesting that “Métis” identity may have been conceived and internalized in myriad ways. Indeed, we find little room for arguments suggesting that Métis culture may have evolved in different “regional” Métis identities or communities, or that cherishing a dual heritage does not necessarily condemn one to become a “racist or a neo-colonial bigot.”¹⁴ It also explains why there is little room for argument that

¹³ The problematic nature of the “political ontology” favoured by supporters of Métis neo-nationalism at the expense of the “Other Métis” across Canada will be discussed by Malette in a forthcoming chapter entitled, “Political Ontologies in Turmoil: The case of Métis Nationalism,” in Christopher Adams, Gregg Dahl, Ian Peach (eds.), *Metis in Canada: History, Identity, Law and Politics*, Volume 2 (University of Alberta Press, forthcoming).

¹⁴ In the current state of the debates on Métis identity, if the self-identifying Métis is unable to demonstrate such a community link, but able to show a connection with an Indigenous ancestor, that person risks being labeled a “wannabe,” that is, someone with only distant and insignificant Indigenous ancestry. If a self-identifying Métis in Canada is able to show such a connection (to a community), the cultural quintessence of that historical “mixed-community” can still be doubted by asking that person to prove that their historical community and/or ancestor did use the term “Métis” (or “Half breed”). Finally, even if a self-identifying Métis is successful in showing a connection to a Métis historical community, it can still be argued that the cultural transmission was interrupted for too long; that all that this person has are “dead” archivist documents and not the fruit of a real still-living nationalist Métis tradition:

self-awareness and “political consciousness” can be experienced in multiple ways outside the strict nationalist interpretation of the Métis historiography of Red River, or any top-down sociological approach conflating ethno-nationalist discourses with what *ought* to constitute “peoplehood.”¹⁵ The presence of such a fallacy furthermore explains the reactionary pushback from the most extremist factions that defend a Prairies-centric definition of Métis identity, repudiating as “colonial” even the *Powley* logic, which, in principle, does not require from Métis claimants to necessarily belong to the Red River Métis Nation. In all cases, the presence of such a conflation helps to explain the mounting accusations of “ethnic fraud” toward the “other Métis,” now weighed down with accusations of “false consciousness,” “moves to innocence,” and other psychologisms, leading scholars to impugn motives to Justices and “fake” Métis combined.¹⁶ That being said, we can certainly agree that there are

These new Métis organizations have offered several alternative sources, instead, in addition to attachment to their organizations, in lieu of an attachment to community, and they offer two in particular, that I found interesting: the first is archival sources, and the second is DNA. These two technologies of self-making, archives and DNA, fit perfectly within a *non-relational animus*, in that all that claims rely on inert documentations required is the realisation that because you want something, you deserve it, and thus you should be able to have it. (Andersen 2016; our emphasis)

¹⁵ The influence of Chris Andersen’s conflation between ethno-nationalist discourse with “true” peoplehood—a “truthiness” derived from a quasi social-Darwinian scale between Indigenous peoples having reached “political maturity,” topped with allegations of coordinated and wilful attacks against the “true” Métis Nation from “the State”—is perhaps best encapsulated in Jennifer Adese’s concluding remarks on the *Daniels* case. In the passage below, her conflation between the genuineness of Métis identity and a quite romantic and homogenizing Métis neo-nationalist discourse is blatant:

The state, in particular, facilitates the continued misrecognition of Métis as mixed-race and the abrogation of Métis nationhood. The state’s (perhaps witting) denial nearly widened constitutional inclusion so much as to render it meaningless. As Andersen (2012) [*sic*] points out throughout his book *“Métis”: Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*, there are many people who have mixed ancestry or “Indian” ancestors, but this alone does not necessarily make them a part of the Métis people and *thus a part of Métis peoplehood expressed politically in terms of Métis nationalism—a people*, I argue, whose labour resulted in Métis being recognized within the constitution. (Adese 2016, p. 16; our emphasis)

¹⁶ These psychologisms and accusations toward the Eastern Métis often suffer from the informal fallacy of hasty generalizations built from a few cases, of which fewer examples would not condemn the problematic nature. These generalizations and psychologisms are exemplified in the passages, quoted below, from Leroux and Vowel, and Andersen and Gaudry, respectively. Their method consists mainly in isolating few problematic cases such as the “Mikinak” attempts to seize a tax break in Québec, the remoteness of Indigenous ancestry of

dangers of reification and stereotyping when we favour *only* the cultural elements at the expense of the political, especially in the context of juridical “tests” created to assess the Indigeneity of a people (see Gunn 2015). But we

Métis in Québec (essentially rehashing the blood quantum argument), or a Métis leader from a Côte Nord Métis association who used to be involved in a “White rights defence association,” to suggest that *all* Métis in Québec would be guilty of “ethnic fraud” when claiming to be “Métis” because they would, in fact, be “Whites” wanting to play “Indians” due to lack of self-esteem, guilty-consciousness, or other colonial impulses to steal an Indigenous identity. We hope that this article will highlight the harm of impugning such motives, moreover via hasty generalizations to *all* Easterner Métis, potentially damaging the reputation of countless individuals and communities already struggling for recognition.

From Vowel and Leroux, on the impugning motives that the proliferation of Métis in response to *Powley* and *Daniels* would be caused by a “neoliberal enthusiasm for individual redefinition” and not a genuine attempt to salvage one’s cultural identity due to new juridical dynamics:

The response to the *Powley* and *Daniels* decisions presents a set of troubling dynamics that has led to the proliferation of “métis” (and potentially, non-status Indian) communities. In a perverse way, the Métis, who fought several high-profile, anti-colonial wars against the Canadian state alongside their Indigenous allies and kin on the Prairies, *risk being subsumed in the neoliberal enthusiasm for individual redefinition*. (Vowel and Leroux 2016, pp. 38–39; our emphasis)

And from Gaudry and Andersen, on impugning motives that new groups of Métis would not have the “right” motivations, but would represent a “danger” to the self-determination of other Indigenous collectivities:

Paradoxically, *these new groups now claiming to be Indigenous seem largely uninterested in reconnecting with, let alone productively engaging, Indigenous communities*. In many cases their relationships with Indigenous communities are outright adversarial (see Deer, *The Eastern Door*, July 20, 2016). It is therefore understandable that many Indigenous communities see these new supposedly Métis and non-status Indian groups as undermining Indigenous communities’ self-determination and ability to productively regulate the membership of their community, to say nothing of their various political and policy relationships with the Canadian state. (Gaudry and Andersen 2016, p. 25; our emphasis)

Finally, Gaudry and Andersen, on the notion of self-Indigenization at the expense of the true peoplehood of Indigenous collectives, groups “like” the Mikinak using their White privileges (hence the generalization, by using the term “like” suggesting comparative encompassing other Easterners), and the “desires” that would drive such “self-Indigenization” (hence the psychologism):

Self-Indigenization can result from complex motives, but is nonetheless straightforward in its colonial logic. Steeped in white possessiveness (Moreton-Robinson 2015), groups like the Mikinak make use of their white privilege to make claims to Indigeneity at the expense of the place- and history-based peoplehood of Indigenous collectives.

The motivation for claiming an Indian or Métis identity where none has previously existed is in our opinion *motivated by two overlapping desires: wanting to feel something more by becoming Indigenous and wanting to get something more by becoming Indigenous*. (Gaudry and Andersen 2016, p. 27; our emphasis)

ought to see equally the perils of adopting mono-logical and romantic conceptions of the “Métis Nation,” especially when derived more from the European classical conception of what constitutes Indigenous replicas of the nation-state as the only locus of “legitimate” politics (which, in turn, tend to presume the homogeneity of the nation, its culture, its population, and its enclosed territoriality). Such an enclosing and homogenizing of nationalist imagination simply does not correspond with the historical realities of most Métis *peoples* across North America, whose identities are based on fluid, kinship-based, open, and trans-territorial relations that evolved differently across different regions and according to specific circumstances.¹⁷

Evidence to the Contrary?

But can these accusations toward the Métis of the eastern provinces of Canada withstand the examination of historical evidence, including the ways in which historic Métis leaders Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont conceived Métis identity? We know that, historically speaking, the Métis peoples have emerged out of relationships forged in the context of the fur trade crisscrossing the North American continent. Métis leader Louis Riel has clearly stated that the Métis peoples originated from unions between European peoples involved in the historical fur trade and Indigenous women from various nations:

The Métis have as paternal ancestors, the former employees of the Hudson’s Bay and Northwest Companies, and as maternal ancestors, Indian women belonging to various tribes. The French word Métis is derived from the Latin participle *mixtus* which means “mixed”; it expresses well the idea it represents. (Riel 1985c, p. 272; our translation)

Yet Riel has also stated that the Métis of the Northwest formed a people and a “nation” (Riel 1985c).¹⁸ Should we then understand Métis identity and culture(s) as limited only to the Red River vicinities or the Northwest? Did Riel adopt an *inclusive* or *exclusive* understanding of Métis identity for the purpose

¹⁷ St-Onge and Podruchny have already offered a similar warning: “We caution researchers and jurists against focusing too closely on territorial delineations and worry that current notions of nation, rooted to state and with clear concepts of territoriality, may come to dominate definitions of a Metis Nation” (St-Onge and Podruchny 2012, p. 60).

¹⁸ See this passage from Riel, where the term “nation métisse” is clearly used: “Grace been given to God, the *Métis nation* always had the honour of defeating its Indian enemies. The advantages which she claimed from these victories was first peace, and then the freedom to communicate and trade with the defeated tribe” (Riel 1985c, p. 274; our translation and emphasis).

of his political project? Reputed for their mobility, we have evidence that the Métis have occupied different regions of Canada and the United States. The Métis were also known for speaking many languages, most noticeably French, as well as various Indigenous languages. Reflecting such diversity, the term “Métis” has been used to designate different sub-groups, such as the “French-Canadian Métis,” the “Half Breeds” or “Country Born,” and the “Acadian-Métis” (Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Malette 2016, p. 389). Métis were also identified by different ethnonyms, including “French” and “Canadians.” In *The French Half-Breeds of the Northwest*, Havard refers to the usage of diverse ethnonyms (including “French”), as well as the continental distribution of Métis populations, from the coast of Oregon, to the Midwest, to the Eastern provinces of Canada:

The usual name of half-breeds used by English and Americans presupposes blood from the paternal and maternal ancestors, mixed in equal proportion; but, as mentioned before, this is not often the case. The term mixed-blood is too vaguely comprehensive. Métis, when referring to French mixed-bloods, seems the most appropriate name. *The designation of French is often indifferently applied to Canadians, métis of all grades, and even pure Indians who associate with métis and speak their patois.* It should also be stated that in Manitoba and other places a certain proportion of mixed bloods, from English and Scotch fathers, bearing such names as Grant, Grey, Sutherland, &c., are classified as French, from their language, religion, and associations, while occasionally such names as Lambert and Parisien are found among English half-breeds. [...]

If we could obtain the number of métis in *Canada* [i.e. Ontario and Québec], *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Labrador, and in the northern part of New England*, as well as that of the French-descended families tainted with Indian blood in *the States of Illinois and Missouri*, I doubt not the total would reach at least 40,000 as the strength of the population of French-Canadian mixed-bloods in North America, (Havard 1880, pp. 314–317; our emphasis)

Making the matter even more complex, Métis identities have historically challenged the settler-Indigenous binaries found at the heart of colonial laws, on which race-based privileges have been articulated (White rights to liquor, to

property, and to vote).¹⁹ The Métis could never quite fit the identitarian categories used by colonial authorities, which came to oppose “Whites” to “Indians” (or Indigenous) as mutually excluding racial categories. As Métis leader Louis Riel suggests, one drop of each “blood” would suffice to make someone a “Métis,” if that person chooses; a philosophy of Métis-Indigeneity clearly undermining the efforts deployed by colonial authorities to assimilate and subdue all traces of Indigenous identities:

Very polite and amiable people may sometimes say to a Métis, “You don’t look at all like a Métis. You surely can’t have much Indian blood. You could pass anywhere for pure White.” [...]

It is true that our Indian origin is humble, but it is indeed just that we honour our mothers as well as our fathers. *Why should we be so preoccupied with what degree of mingling we have of European and Indian blood? No matter how little we have of one or the other, do not both gratitude and filial love require us to make a point of saying, “We are Métis”?* (Riel 1985d, pp. 278–279; our translation and emphasis)

The “choice” offered by Louis Riel to people of mixed Indigenous and Euro-Canadian heritage to embrace the Métis identity, an invitation denounced in its contemporary manifestations as this tyranny of “self-Indigenization” (Andersen and Gaudry, 2016), surely problematizes the restrictive definition of Métis identity espoused by a Prairies-centric and neo-nationalist ideology. For the partisans of such ideology, any Métis identifications outside the expression of a strict ethno-nationalist discourse grounded in the political awakening of the Red River events is perceived as internalizing a racialized logic pressed by colonial authorities. But here it is important to note that the Métis were not just the passive victims of “racial” colonial policies; the formulation of their “racialized” or dual identities were not the mere product of gullible minds caught in an overwhelming colonial spider’s web until rescued by the neo-nationalism of Andersen and Gaudry (2016). This overly deterministic argument repudiates not only the inclusive invitation of Louis Riel to all Métis and Half-breeds to join his political project, but it takes simply too much away from the agential powers the Métis had (and still have) to craft their identities in various ways—including upholding their dual or hybrid heritage as part of

¹⁹ Exclusion of the Métis as “non-Indians” can be found in the *Indian Act* of 1876, and in attempts to block Métis from accessing treaty negotiations and/or Indian reserves, effectively preventing the Métis from protecting or consolidating existing Métis of *Half Breed* collectivities or networks. In western Québec, see the correspondence of Father Nédélec for a telling example of such exclusion (LAC 1892–1896).

their *distinct* Indigenous identity without *necessarily* losing any analytical power or degree of agency to it (Andersen 2014, p. 38).

Although it is undeniable that Métis peoples have suffered from a number of exclusions due to their status of being in-between “races,” it is important to remember that Métis were also known historically for playing these identitarian colonial divisions sometimes to their best advantage. At times, Métis did benefit from Indian annuities or by joining a treaty if they could, sometimes opting out so as to gain other benefits and better societal positioning (see Ens and Sawchuk 2016, pp. 215–216). Métis were also reported to have bought liquor for the Indians, taking part in various contraband enterprises as “intermediaries” (see Hickson *et al.* 1895, p. 670). Blurring the boundaries between settler/Indigenous, the lives of many Métis unsettle current expectations about what we often imagine as “true” or “pure” Indigeneity, as critiques of Indigenous “hybridity” would like us to believe. On the one hand, a number of French-Canadian Métis have been recorded for having boosted the role they played in “civilizing” the West (or the “Indians”), thus boosting the role they played in colonization—a philosophy that certainly emerged in the refusal of voting privileges to the “uncivilized” or “unsettled” Indians by the Red River Métis in their 1870 third list of rights (Begg 1871, quoted in O’Toole 2010, p. 164 for the List).²⁰ On the other hand, Métis are remembered for claiming their Indigenous roots in defence of their rights

²⁰ An example of this sentiment of cultural superiority over the so-called Indians can be found in Riel’s writings when he declares: “Before the Confederation the Métis, per their superiority over the Indian tribes dominated over them but without abusing of their powers” (Riel 1985d, p. 281; our translation). Métis leader Gabriel Dumont also declared: “pride is not our main vice, but I must admit with pride that we have been, us the Métis, pioneers of the civilization in the North-West” (Combet and Toussaint 2009, p. 241; our translation). In the Great Lakes, Métis, or *Bois-Brûlés*, are also reported as perceiving themselves as a superior class of people compared to Indians, this time by a government official:

[...] on Lake Huron and other places, where I have had the an opportunity of meeting the “*Bois brûlé*” and the full bred Indian, a marked difference is to be seen between the two. The former are mostly of French origin, a cross between the numerous Canadians employed by the traders. *The half breed is a species of Pariah from his own people, and assumes over the Indians a superiority they are unwilling to concede*; he is beside generally dissipated, and unprincipled, and in all commercial intercourse, takes advantage of his knowledge of Indian character and habits, more effectually to grind down and impoverish the wretched dependants on the trader. These people are the curse of the Aborigines, and in all cases mislead them. They excite them to dissipation, rob them when under the influence of the ardent spirits they take among them, and in fact the synonymous word to “good trader” is “great rascal.” (Report On the affairs of the Indians in Canada 1847, p. 467; our pagination and emphasis)

(including title to the soil by virtue of their “Indian blood”), and even defending the rights of the “Indians” to treaties (see O’Toole 2008). The Northwest Métis are also remembered for various alliances with First Nations kin, relatives, and allies (Innes 2013, pp. 54–58). Métis leader Gabriel Dumont himself is remembered for expressing a dual or *hybrid* appreciation of his heritage, as both “French” and “Indian,” on the basis of which he justifies his political resistance and assertion of rights:

as long as we have a drop of French and Indian blood in our veins, we will claim the rights for which we fought and for which they have judicially assassinated *feu* Louis David Riel. (Combet and Toussaint 2009, p. 238; our translation)

Clearly, Gabriel Dumont did not refrain from formulating identity in terms of being “mixed,” however little intermingling in one’s heritage there might be. Complexities and perceived ambiguities in the articulation of Métis identities are therefore not a new phenomenon.²¹ Historically speaking, we know that the Métis were found in many regions of North America, were speaking different languages (including French), were predominantly Catholic, were not *always* on good terms with other Indigenous peoples, and expressed their distinct identity as a claim for both their French and Indian heritage. What is new, however, are the criticisms of “cultural appropriation” and “ethnic fraud” toward the non-Prairie Métis that appear at odds with the inclusive vision of Métis leader Louis Riel or the importance Gabriel Dumont conferred to his dual “French-Indian” heritage.²² As discussed elsewhere, Louis Riel’s political vision resists any regional reductionism and ethno-nationalist essentialism (Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Malette 2016). Riel’s writings, moreover, problematize current assertions that Métis identity is limited to a Canadian Prairies phenomenon. Riel himself even goes a step beyond their position by

²¹ See O’Toole (2012) for the historical opposition between Anglophone “Half breeds” and French Métis, even in the heart of Red River.

²² The backdrop of these academic debates also involves power struggles between various Métis organizations seeking the exclusive recognition from governmental officials who hold the keys to finance their activities, often at the cost of millions of dollars, looping back in affirming the sole legitimacy of these financed organizations. In the case of the Métis National Council, an organization created in 1983, their Prairie-centric philosophy currently excludes the possibility of Métis in Québec, parts of Ontario, and the Eastern provinces of Canada. The importance of these organizations is underlined in Jennifer Adese’s analysis of the *Daniels* decision (2016), where she opposes the Métis Federation of Canada for its inclusive approach to Métis identity, to the exclusivist and Prairies-centric definition adopted by the Métis National Council.

acknowledging the existence of Métis in the Eastern provinces of Canada *with equal political rights of the Métis of Manitoba*:

When it comes to the Eastern provinces of Canada, many Métis live there persecuted under the attires of the Indian costume. Their villages are villages of indigence. Their Indian title to the soil is, however, as good as the Indian title of the Métis of Manitoba. (Riel 1985b, p. 121; our translation)

Confirmation that Louis Riel opposed a Western-only Métis identity can also be found in the transcripts of his 1885 trial, where he states: “if the principle of giving one seventh of the lands to the Half-breeds in the North West is good, it ought to be good in the East also,” adding, “I will say if you ever have an opportunity of crossing the line in the East do it and help the Indians and Half-breeds of the East to have a revenue equivalent to about one seventh” (Anonymous 1886, p. 158). These passages suggest that Louis Riel did not negate the “political agency” of Eastern Métis or Half-breeds. Rather, Riel affirmed the inherent dignity and the political power of all “Half-breeds” or Métis (East or West) to join his political project and equally to claim Métis identity.

Hence, when it comes to accusations against Eastern Métis for wanting to wash their colonial guilt away by evoking their *métissage*,²³ the bad news for

²³ Gabrielle Monique Legault discusses this “moves to innocence,” in relation to Chelsea Vowel’s criticism of “the mythology of Métissage.” In doing so, Legault quotes Barker (2012) who suggests that: “settler societies co-opt and assimilate indigeneity through incorporating Indigenous aesthetic and expression as a means to legitimize settler colonialism.” Legault points that Barker is wary that such claims to hybridity would originate from settler positionality. In short, Barker would be wary of some “moves to innocence,” whereby settlers deny their role and benefit in colonization. Supporting Vowel’s own criticism of “the mythology of Métissage” as something that can be purely self-ascribed, both preoccupations echo the criticism we find in Tuck and Yang’s (2012), *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*:

In this move to innocence, settlers locate or invent a long-lost ancestor who is rumored to have had “Indian blood,” and they use this claim to mark themselves as blameless in the attempted eradications of Indigenous people... [it] is a settler move to innocence because it is an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land. (2015; quoted by Legault 2016, p. 107)

Per Legault’s account:

Vowel argues that the self-fashioning of Native identities, especially through the lens of Métissage is an act of ongoing colonialism that seeks to erase Indigenous peoples and undermine Indigenous rights (including those of Métis people), especially if the ratio would become a majority of self-proclaimed Métis—then all indigeneity would be lost. This line of argument only makes sense, however, if we accept three problematic premises: (1) that Métis identities bear no historical

everyone is that there is no primordial “innocence” to fall back on (see Tuck and Yang 2012, Barker 2012, Vowel 2015). Métis complex histories simply do not allow for such an ideological shortcut, and no amount of resisting the Queen for the Patriots or Canadian nation-building for North-western Métis completely absolve their descendants from other entanglements with colonialism—to which many Métis have sometimes complex relationships, as we have seen. Undeniably, there have been a number of injustices suffered by the Métis peoples that are in need of reparation and compensation, including a much-needed solution for the breach of fiduciary duty by Ottawa when dealing with the land claims of the Métis of Manitoba and of the historical Northwest. We are not denying this. Yet we ought equally to have the courage to realize that these injustices often mingle in complex ways with other injustices suffered by Indigenous peoples living on the Land before the Métis—and sometimes rival to the Métis. We also need the courage to realize—without abandoning the project of seeking Justice, redress, and self-determination *with and for* Indigenous peoples—that assessing who might be deserving (or not) of a primordial “move to innocence” is a bad starting point, especially when it comes to assess the authenticity of Métis identities.

Against the accusation of being Living-Dead: The story of Marie-Louise Riel

What might still be unclear, however, is how Riel came to conclude the existence of Métis in the eastern provinces of Canada. What evidence supports this claim, besides Riel’s own writings? And if we did find evidence that the terms “Métis,” “Métif,” or “Bois-Brûlé”²⁴ were used historically in Québec, would these findings withstand the repudiation that these are only dead and dusty “archival” material resurrected by mere opportunists and wannabe “Métis” (Andersen 2016)?

relationship whatsoever to any colonial scheme in which Métis peoples could have taken part (which we know to be false); (2) that all indigenous peoples fall equally under a one-size-fit-all understanding of their indigeneity, identity, and rights (which then flats out Indigenous diversity and complex approach to one’s identity); and (3) that any expression for Euro-Indigenous hybridity as a vector of Métis identity necessarily amounts to a willful attempt to eradicate Indigenous peoples (which is to impugn motive and use abusive generalizations appealing to populist arguments based on utopian scenario). (Legault 2016, p. 107)

²⁴ “Métif” is an older version of the word “Métis.” “Bois-Brûlé” is one of the many ethnonyms attributed to Métis peoples across the country, at least from Québec to the West Coast.

To offer just one answer to this challenge, the remaining sections of this essay explore a case study involving Riel's exile and refuge in Québec. The popular story suggests that Riel returned to the Canadian Prairies in the late 1870s, and that a party led by Gabriel Dumont brought him back in 1884 from Montana to represent the Métis in present-day Saskatchewan. Classic Métis historiography tells that after the battle of Batoche, Riel was taken into custody, judged, and tragically executed (see Howard 1952). His execution was followed by waves of repression against the Western Métis, while French-Canadian nationalists reacted to the hanging by building-up their political project in Québec (Clapin 1894, p. 15). Without more detailed historical knowledge of Louis Riel's period of exile, we might be under the impression that the fate of the Métis leader is tied exclusively to the birth of a "Western" Métis nation. A closer examination of Riel's exile reveals, however, that Riel travelled to many other locations, including Keeseville, Plattsburgh, Ottawa, Hull, Montréal, Québec, Trois-Rivières, and Beauport. In each location, friends, family members, priests, and communities supported Riel. The Riel family (including Louis Sr. and Jr.) travelled extensively between Québec and Manitoba, as well as many other locations where French-Canadian and Métis populations were located.²⁵ Riel's own aunt, Lucie Riel, and uncle, Mr. John Lee, settled near Montréal and protected Riel while he sojourned there.

Given the scholarship positing that Métis identity is only "authentic" if still "alive" and rooted out West (Andersen 2014 and 2016), the remaining sections of this essay will unpack the oral testimony offered by a Québec Métis woman named Violet Lalonde, herself the great-great-granddaughter of Marie-Louise Riel. We believe that her unpublished testimony written in the 1980s is valuable for several reasons. First, we believe it sheds light on rarely discussed events surrounding the protection of Louis Riel in the Outaouais region during a relatively obscure period of his life. Second, the story of Violet Lalonde (1926–2005) offers key characteristics describing the Métis historical ways of

²⁵ Louis Riel Sr. was Christianized in 1822 in Berthier, Québec (GSU, BMS of Sainte-Geneviève-de-Berthier, 1822-09-23), as many Métis from Red River were revealing fascinating connections between Lower Canada and the Red River settlement. We might forget that both Louis Riel Sr. and Jr. were educated and lived many years in Québec. Moreover, at least 12 voyageurs' contracts involving individuals of the name of Jean-Baptiste Riel (who was the name of the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of Louis Sr.) figure on the Voyageur Contracts Database (SHSB 2010) between 1752 and 1818, and almost all concern the Michilimackinac region. Most of them mention a guide occupation, and Laprairie, Québec, as the origin of these voyageurs. Even if matching perfectly the ancestors of Louis Sr. to any of these contracts is close to impossible, the probability of some positive match is very high—especially as Riel was recorded at the end of the 19th century as one of the common Métis surnames at "Mackinac and other place on the Lakes" (Havard 1880, p. 326).

life in the Gatineau and Lièvre Rivers region, including connections and migrations leading to the coalescence of Métis families from different regions (including Red River).²⁶ Third, researching the story of Violet Lalonde reveals additional evidence that corroborates not only the presence of Louis Riel in the Outaouais, but also that of mixed-blood communities called “Métifs” and “Bois-Brûlés” inhabiting this region—some never discussed before. Fourth, the enduring respect for the oral tradition of Violet Lalonde by a number of Métis living in the Gatineau Valley provides a strong rebuttal against accusations that Eastern Métis would have no “living” continuity when it comes to their culture (Andersen 2016).

Who is Marie-Louise Riel?

According to the narrative of Violet Lalonde, Marie-Louise Riel (ca. 1800–1898) is the daughter of the voyageur Jean-Baptiste Riel and Marguerite Boucher, married *à la façon du pays* around 1810. It is suggested that Marie-Louise travelled with her parents to Lower Canada following the increasing violence between fur companies out West. After a brief stop at Mattawa, the Riel family went to Sainte-Geneviève-de-Berthier, where two children of Jean-Baptiste were baptized in 1822, Louis (Sr.) and Sophie (GSU, BMS of Sainte-Geneviève-de-Berthier, 1822-09-23). Marie-Louise then married a voyageur and hunter of Scottish descent, Robert McGregor in 1826 (GSU, BMS of Mission du Lac-des-Deux-Montagnes, Oka, 1826-08-14; Newton 1991, p. 16), while Lucie Riel married John Lee to eventually settle near Montréal (GSU, BMS of Notre-Dame, Montréal, 1849-10-23).

One question remains: is Marie-Louise *really* the sister of Louis Riel Sr.? We believe Marie-Louise to be probably the half-sister of Louis Sr., since it would have been very unusual for her not to be baptized at the same time as her alleged siblings at Sainte-Geneviève-de-Berthier in 1822—especially in a

²⁶ We should not expect each element of an oral tradition to be in full compliance with empirically verifiable historical facts. However, the concordance of several important points with the archival data gives *general* credence to the narrative of Violet Lalonde. The original manuscript is kept at BAnQ-Gatineau, under the quotation P1000, D65. Its author, Violet Lalonde, is described in the *Alliance* newspaper as a “Métisse de la région de Maniwaki.” The manuscript was given to historian Pierre-Louis Lapointe in the 1980s (*Alliance* 1986, p. 23). Lapointe touched briefly on the story of Marie-Louise in one of his publications (2006). We must also warmly credit Stéphane Jobin (a Marie-Louise descendant) who made Lalonde’s manuscript available online, and also wrote an article (see Jobin 2013).

family as Catholic as the Riels.²⁷ There is of course also the possibility that the Riel-Boucher couple adopted Marie-Louise. But no document has been found that could establish a connection with the young Marie-Louise and the Riel family. If Marie-Louise was indeed fathered by Jean-Baptiste Riel, it thus appears plausible that she was born from an unknown Indigenous woman living in Michilimackinac (or in the vicinity), and presumably raised in her mother's community until she partnered with Robert McGregor, with whom she would have two children before their marriage in 1826. This could explain why the surname Riel was not used at her marriage or baptism but rather the name Chipakijikokwe. However, the Riel surname appears early, for example at the baptism of her daughters in 1825 and 1827 (GSU, BMS of Pointe-Claire, 1825-08-12; 1827-08-12). In support of our hypothesis, we know that Jean-Baptiste Riel's involvements in Michilimackinac match Marie-Louise's approximate conception date, prior to his marriage with Marguerite Boucher—this according to the evidence suggesting that Marie-Louise is *around* 30 years old in 1826. If our hypothesis is correct, Marie-Louise Riel would be the *half-sister* of Louis Sr., and thus still technically the “aunt” of Louis Riel Jr., as the oral tradition of the Riel-McGregor family suggests.

²⁷ Marie-Louise was baptized a few months before her marriage with the voyageur Robert McGregor, in Oka in 1826, and recorded then as part of the “Sauteux” nation. The couple had two children, baptized in Sault Ste. Marie and Pointe-Claire, who were “legitimized” by the act of union (GSU, BMS of Pointe-Claire, 1825-08-12; Mission du Lac-des-Deux-Montagnes, Oka, 1826-08-14). The priest indicates then that she was around 30 years old at her marriage, and not 15, as suggested by Violet Lalonde. We must also highlight the absence of any Riel family members per Marie Louise's marriage document, the witnesses rather being identified by Indigenous surnames. Although this does not prove that no Riel family members were present at the marriage, it reinforces our hypothesis of an “illegitimate” birth or adoption in the case of Marie-Louise. How else could we explain the fact that Marie-Louise lives in the vicinity of Sault Ste. Marie, away from the parish of Berthier, that no parents are mentioned on her baptismal document, and no Riel family members are recorded at her marriage?



Alleged photograph of Marie-Louise Riel. Unknown author and date. A copy of this photograph was given by Violet Lalonde to historian Pierre-Louis Lapointe. Credit: Stéphane Jobin.

Métis culture, peoplehood, and kinship

Marie-Louise's use of the Riel surname may have acknowledged her father's lineage and heritage—a phenomenon documented elsewhere in the fur trade, as, for instance, on the Missouri (Thorne 1996, pp. 157–170). It may also indicate her attachment to her Métis identity—a self-identification she transmitted to her descendants—which she perhaps felt was boosted by taking more often the Riel surname after 1840 (Jobin 2013, p. 10) already in usage among the Métis families of the Outaouais and Red River from that time. If this were true, the kinship relation between Marie-Louise and Louis would have been symbolic, through the recognition of a shared patronym. Without any baptism, marriage, or death certificate (i.e., “BMS”) establishing a direct link between Jean-Baptiste and Marie-Louise Riel, it is nearly impossible to prove or disprove a *biological* connection.

Proving a direct patrilineal kinship connection is not so important when we consider the impact that this oral tradition has had on shaping the identity of Métis families in the vicinities of Maniwaki, Québec. Many Métis in Maniwaki feel a deep sense of connection with the memory of Louis Riel, especially among the descendants of Marie-Louise, who cherish her memory as a healer who did not hesitate to defy the Law to protect her “nephew.” Elders Mr.

Benoît Guilbault and Mrs. Liliane Cyr (herself a descendant of Marie-Louise Riel) confirmed in an interview that Louis Riel took refuge in Val-des-Bois (more specifically in the house of “Mr. Latour”). They described Louis as remembered for canoeing via the 31 Miles Lake and the Poisson Blanc, pausing at Lac Sainte-Marie, to reach Maniwaki before going toward the city of Hull, Québec. Liliane Cyr also mentioned that Marie-Louise Riel was well known to her mother as a regional midwife and a healer (Malette 2016).

In a separate interview, Mr. Laurier Riel from Maniwaki declared that the uncle of his grandfather (this uncle also a McGregor and an old resident of Lac Sainte-Marie) told him that Marie-Louise Riel stored some of Louis Riel’s belongings in the community of Lac Sainte-Marie (bed sheet, dishes, etc.). Mr. Laurier Riel further described Marie-Louise as the *sister*²⁸ of Louis, travelling with him as he sojourned in the region because he was supposed to sit as a Member of Parliament (SMC 2016).²⁹

²⁸ Another historical source hints toward Marie-Louise as a relative of Louis Riel. In 1906, the husband of a great-granddaughter of Marie-Louise (also named Marie-Louise), Thomas Bélanger, was killed at Buckingham. The newspaper *La Patrie* presents Bélanger as the “nephew” of Louis Riel. But in the next day’s edition, the Bélanger family rectifies this: their Bélanger side is not linked to Riel. Even if Marie-Louise is not mentioned, it can be assumed that such confusion arose between the family of Thomas Bélanger and that of his wife Marie-Louise McGregor (the great-granddaughter of the elder Marie-Louise) (*La Patrie* 1906a, 14; *La Patrie* 1906b, 5; Lapointe 2006, 235).

²⁹ This interview is part of a SSHRC-funded research project, *Le statut de Métis au Canada*, under the direction of Dr. Gagnon (U. de Saint Boniface). It should be noted that the different accounts of the kinship connection between Louis and Marie-Louise tend to confirm the authenticity of a transmission based in oral tradition, as they are not emerging out of written or archival narratives, but rather through their performative transmissions across history, thus allowing slight variations based on transgenerational reminiscence. Here is the transcription of the passage in question, in French:

Laurier Riel (LR) : Pis lui [McGregor], lui y me l’a dit qu’y demeurait au lac Sainte-Marie, pis y a d’autres McGregor qui restent là. Pis ... qu’y ont eu des biens qui appartenait à Louis Riel aussi. Parce que Marie euh ... Marie-Louise, elle a apporté des choses avec elle, elle avait des ... des affaires qu’elle a apportées, pour laisser là, des ... des ... d’la vaisselle, des affaires comme ça.

Interviewer (I) : Marie-Louise qui ?

LR : Marie-Louise Ri... Marie-Louise Riel. Elle a apporté du stock là, au lac Sainte-Marie.

I : Mais c’était qui ça Marie-Louise Riel, c’tait la... ?

LR : Ça aurait été la sœur de Louis. Pis a l’a laissé du stock là au lac Sainte-Marie. Des ... des ... des draps, d’la vaisselle, des choses comme ça ... qu’elle avait amenées.

I : Pendant, comme, l’exil de Louis Riel ?

The “people” of Marie-Louise: The Métis

Notions of kinship (real or fictive) therefore appear central to the articulation of Métis identity in Maniwaki, Québec. From a symbolic standpoint, we know that the notion of kinship has been discussed in the literature as key to the construction of many collective forms of identity, including national ones (Özkirimli 2010, p. 54; Smith 1997, p. 38). In the building of “national” identities, it is not rare to find extrapolations on what would bind common kinship ties (real or imagined) as the source of processes labelled as “ethnogenesis.” In this respect, being considered a “cousin,” especially in the fur trade *voyageur* cultural traditions (Podruchny 2006, p. 193), can be seen in a shared common surname and/or a common ancestor, no matter the degree of biological kinship; this could have been enough for Marie-Louise Riel to be considered the aunt of Louis Riel, and the memory of such a relationship in the family’s oral tradition.³⁰

However, not all elements derived from the oral tradition of Marie-Louise belong to the realm of the symbolic. Evidence suggests that Louis Riel did visit the Outaouais region between 1873 and 1875. Riel is remembered for having stayed in Hull, Pointe-Gatineau, and Angers.³¹ A letter to his mother confirms his stay in the Outaouais region in May 1874, for what seems a period of at least 8–9 months. Louis adds that he benefitted from having many supporters and friends in Québec, or “en Canada” (SHSB 1874a). Interestingly, Louis Riel visited Trois-Rivières (Québec) in 1874, where 20 *coureurs de bois* are reported as having been mobilized to ensure his protection against police detectives (SHSB 1874b). During one of his visits in Québec, Mr. LaRivière suggests to Riel in a letter dated 17 October 1873 that he uses the countryside of the northern Outaouais region in order to get from Montréal to Hull because it allowed a safer passage:

LR : Dans l’temps qu’a voyageait, là. A voyageait avec lui. Parce que est v’nue ... est v’nue avec lui, pour aller à ... siéger au parlement. (SMC 2016)

³⁰ Many more or less distant relatives of Riel lived in the Outaouais region, some described as “Métis” or “Half Breed.” For example, Louis Bastien, a former *voyageur* and freeman, married to a local Algonquin woman, Mani Josette Sipiikwe, located in Mattawa in the 1840s and later was the first cousin of the mother of Louis Riel Jr., Julie Lagimodière (Marcotte 2017, p. 71). In more recent years, the oral tradition concerning Louis’ parentage in the Outaouais was still observable. At least two articles in the 1980s local Métis newspapers mentioned Louis Riel’s aunt, or the Riel métis parentage in the region (Anonymous 1985, p. 17; Riel, M.-J., 1985, pp. 3–5).

³¹ The oral tradition was still living at Noëlville (Ontario) in the 1950s, concerning the hiding of Riel in Angers. See Villemaire 1953.

When you will be in Montréal, if you wish to go to Ottawa, I think the best route would be to pass through the countryside at the north of the Ottawa [River], and then until reaching Hull. [...] I have beside no other suggestions to make, as you know your business better than anyone else, to the grace of God!
(SHSB 1873; our translation)

The “countryside” north of the Ottawa would have been home to the Outaouais Métis. It is there that Marie-Louise came to be known as a figure of humanitarian relief for the inhabitants, including Indians, Métis, and squatters (BAnQ-G 1980, pp. 2, 8, 11). In her testimonies, Mrs. Violet Lalonde depicts Marie-Louise as a woman of an extraordinary longevity, still living a nomadic and independent life. She is portrayed as a medicinal woman and a bone healer with an extensive knowledge of plants. She was also sought for her midwifery skills and did not hesitate to go to the isolated homes of the pioneers and *her people*, “*the Métis*,” by using birch bark canoes that she had built herself (BAnQ-G 1980, pp. 2, 39). Marie-Louise is also reported as crafting her own moccasins, and was known for wearing a traditional long black dress, along with a rosary crucifix made of cedar wood.³² Finally, she is remembered as a local hero for helping her “nephew” Louis Riel to escape the Law. As Mrs. Violet Lalonde declared:

Let me tell you about the ‘hide-away’ as told to me by my father Wilfred McGregor. Look at a map of Quebec and find the following places: Hull, McGregor Lake, Buckingham, Notre Dame de la Salette, High Falls, Val des Bois and Maniwaki (Lake St. Marie).

With a pencil connect these locations and you will see that they make a circular formation on the map. This was where my nomadic grand grand mere lived, fished, traveled the waterways, worked amongst the people, and, of course, hid Louis—her fugitive nephew, from the clutches of the law. [...]

Grand grand mere McGregor realized that it was important to keep Louis on the move which well suited her nomadic existence, for she too—was constantly on the go. Relatives and friends took turns hiding him. Mary Louise’s children—Robert, Elizabeth, and Maria, as well as her own sister Lucy

³² Archival material supporting Violet Lalonde’s account includes reports of the moccasins manufactured by Marie-Louise. In 1844, she traded to a local merchant on the Lièvre River 32 pairs of moccasins in only nine days (BAnQ-G 1844-1860, folio 152).

and granddaughter Hermeline, all played a part in this adventure and were known as the “family pack.” That’s what my father called them when he referred to them in his stories. (BAnQ-G 1980, p. 38)

Interestingly, the oral tradition making Marie-Louise a Métis healer and protector of Métis leader Louis Riel is supported by a 1904 article in newspaper *La Patrie* which announces the death of the daughter of Marie-Louise the elder. Here are some salient passages from the article:

Mother Valiquette was born in the North-West, around 1818: *her mother was a métisse named Riel, cousin³³ of Louis Riel, who played a certain role in the Northwest.* Her father, J. McGregor, was a Scotsman at the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company on that date. A few years after his birth, her parents came to stay at Bytown and from there to Lake of Two Mountains; They baptized her as they passed through the Sault Sainte-Marie. [...] Mother Valiquette was well known and esteemed by all the settlers of the place, from Buckingham to the Ferme Neuve. Her old mother, who had died on the river a few years ago, at 113 years of age, had taught her art as a midwife and a doctor at the same time. —Art in which mother and daughter excelled. [...] For certain illnesses, they kept her services, eight, fifteen days, a month in advance, and night and day, they came hastily to seek this courageous old mother, by birch bark canoe, the only way to travel at that time—through impossible weather [...] The mother, either in the rear or in front of the canoe, according to the skill of her companion, put her rowing in her hands and handled the pallet five or ten, fifteen, or twenty miles to destination [...] A great number of patients have been relieved and cured by her care. The mountains and swamps provided her with the remedies necessary for her art: she knew the values of medicinal plants and always used them successfully. (*La Patrie* 1904, p. 7; our emphasis)

So stated, the daughter of Marie-Louise seems to have been trained as a midwife and healer by her mother in the same region, evoking the possibility of overlapping individual stories in the oral account of Violet Lalonde. At that

³³ Here again, a different parentage is attributed to Marie-Louise: Marie-Louise would be a *cousin* of Louis Riel Jr.

time, we must remember that the upper regions of the Gatineau Valley were still sparsely inhabited and access to midwifery was both rare and crucial. The low population density can in part be explained by the Gatineau forestry privileges, which halted mass colonization of this region until 1843. Historically part of “les Pays d’en Haut,” the Outaouais region is best known for its fur trade and forestry activities, as well as for its rugged population including many squatters. Independent fur traders took advantage of the absence of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) monopoly in the region, boosted by its strategic proximity to Bytown (Ottawa). In the first half of the nineteenth century, “petty traders” could acquire supplies in Bytown to trade with local Indigenous peoples without any effective oversight from the Company, including transactions of cash and alcohol (Newton 1991). Cases of HBC desertions (HBCA, B.134/c/41, 238) and contraband activities involving Métis families such as the McDougalls³⁴ (HBCA, E.41/10, 11b) were not uncommon in the 1840s. A few decades later, we find the Indian agent of Maniwaki, James Martin, echoing the complaints about the “Half-breeds” of the region for the part they played in similar activities (Martin 1895, p. 31).

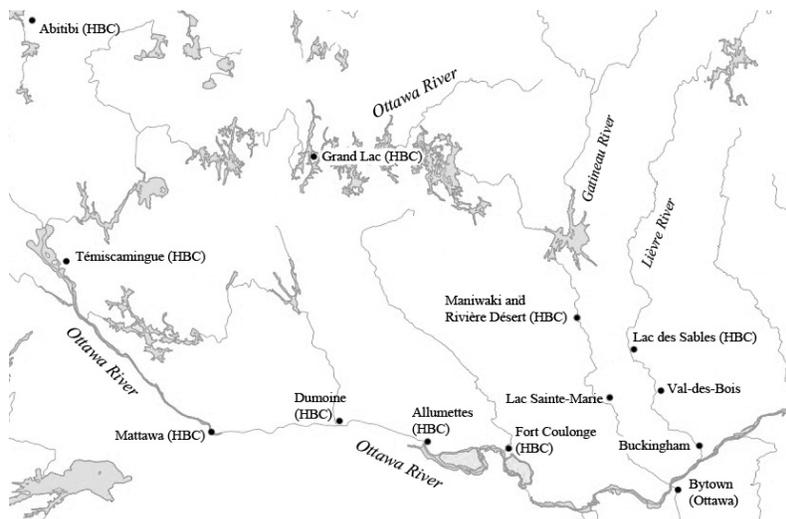
With such a history, Louis Riel was arguably not taking refuge in just any “countryside”; he was, in fact, taking refuge among resourceful and experienced Métis families, many of them working in the fur trade. Nor was the Outaouais hinterland isolated from the political events occurring in Red River. We know that news of the Métis resistance (1870) reached the distant fur trade posts at the Ottawa River sources, when the HBC *engagés* McBride (a former North West Company *half breed*) and Anderson are reported as trekking in snowshoes to deliver the pressing news from the Témiscamingue post at Grand Lac (HBCA, B.82/a/4, 17b).

To be clear, the backcountry of the Outaouais was described as early as 1829 for harbouring French-speaking “Bois-Brûlés” and “métifs,” known to local “Indians” for trading furs with them (Ingall, Nixon, and Adams 1830, 24 and 25 September). The Ottawa River shore itself also had at least one Métis settlement, near old Fort Coulonge, where the “La Passe” hamlet was described as a “nest of old trading people—French or Bois Brulées,” a population associated here with the underdevelopment of agriculture (Shirreff 1831, p. 265). According to Father Bellefeuille in 1838, not only one but all the fur trade posts stretching from Fort Coulonge to Abitibi (see map 1) were also occupied by “Métif” families:

³⁴ Amable McDougall was a “well known halfbred [*sic*]” on the Lièvre and Gatineau Rivers and was also known as “Amable Christineau” by local fur traders (HBCA, B.134/g/9-12; Russell 1851, cited in Sabourin 2010, p. 72).

[Flora] is about 45 years old, and besides her name of Baptism and her Indian name, she also bears the name of L'Évêque [Lévesque] from her late father, a former Canadian or métif voyageur. There is also in this same post [Abitibi] Savages or métifs, like Gaucher and others of the name Chénier. As in Témiskaming there is a numerous family who are descendants of an old voyageur named Leduc. And in all these different Posts there are métifs descendants of Voyageurs or Clerks or Bourgeois, Canadians or Scottish for the most part. These métifs are usually more clever than the others. (BANQ-RN 1838, p. 6; our translation)

The distribution of the Outaouais “Métifs” thus appears regional in scope. The study of the BMS show that the Outaouais Métis are also ethnically diverse through what became the coalescence of local *Canadien*-Métis, Scottish-Métis, and retired Métis voyageurs from different locations (i.e., Red River and the Northwest Territories). This diversity is not surprising, as most fur trade communities were neither ethnically nor culturally homogeneous (see Jones 2005 and 2011; Ray 1998; Thomson 2005). To take one telling example, the mission of Lac Sainte-Marie is described in the exact same way as the community of Sault Ste. Marie—namely, as made up of *Canadiens*, Métis, and Indians (*Codex Historicus de Longueuil* 1847, cited in Carrière 1962, p. 103; Gaulin 1841, p. 54).



Map 1. The Outaouais region with its Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) trading posts and a few settlements mentioned in this essay.

The David family is a great example of such mobility and diversity at the core of the Métis people.³⁵ Originally from Red River, with Madeleine David taking a Half breed scrip³⁶ and marrying André Gaudry, the Davids did not hesitate to split the nuclei of their family when Joseph David, brother of Madeleine, decided to settle in the Outaouais region, next to another Métis family whose members also travelled between the West and Québec on multiple occasions, the Pauls.³⁷ Interestingly, Pierre Paul is most likely the same individual who, accompanied by his famous father Joseph Paul (“the strongest man in the Northwest”), was involved in the fur wars when they were captured north of Lake Winnipeg, in 1819, by men of the HBC (Rumilly 1980, vol. 2, p. 240). Clearly, Métis families were moving and settling in both Eastern and Western regions of Canada.

Another example is the Naud-McPherson family formed from a retired voyageur from the Grand Lac trading post (north-west of Maniwaki) that

³⁵ Basile David, a *Canadien* married to the Métis Thérèse Dufault, founded the family. Their daughter Madeleine filled a scrip at St. Boniface in 1875 (LAC 1876). Their son Joseph married at the mouth of the Lièvre River in 1840 with Rose Robert. The name of Joseph’s mother is not mentioned, but the priest specified between parentheses that Joseph David was a “metis” (GSU, BMS of Saint-Grégoire-de-Nazianze, Buckingham, 1840-08-17). Recognized as one of the “squatters” established on the Lièvre River, not far from the Hudson’s Bay Company post at Lac des Sables, he settled in this area as early as 1841, and later moved in the township of Cameron (Goudreau 2014, p. 54) near the Métis Pierre Paul. In 1881, thirteen members of the extended family seem to have lived with this “Red River” man (LAC 1881, p. 1).

³⁶ As Nicole O’Byrne makes clear in her article discussing the historical context surrounding negotiations over scrip policy between Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta and the federal government: “At this time, the federal government accepted the fact that in order to enjoy clear title to the newly acquired territories, it would have to recognize and extinguish the Indian title held by the Aboriginal peoples, including Metis, who had traditionally occupied the lands. The federal government used two different legal instruments to extinguish Indian title: Indian treaties and Metis scrip. The main difference between these instruments was that Indian treaties included continuing obligations such as annuities and education, while Metis scrip was a one-time land grant after which the recipients would be treated on the same basis as any other Canadian citizen” (O’Byrne 2007, p. 218).

³⁷ Pierre Paul settled between Maniwaki and Lac Sainte-Marie probably in the second half of the nineteenth century (LAC 1861a, p. 143). In 1800, he was baptized (under the name of Joseph) in Sorel as a natural child of Joseph Hus Paul and a “Sauvagesse de Nation Siousse” (GSU, BMS of Saint-Pierre-de-Sorel, 1800-11-11), at six years old. Given this age, he was surely born in the Northwest. Pierre Paul married Marie Antoinette Richer in Saint-Ours, where he was said to be “a traveler in the upper countries” (GSU, BMS of Saint-Ours, 1820-04-24; our translation). He probably travelled extensively for various fur trade companies, including on the Lièvre River in 1841 (HBCA, B.134/g/16). Later, the Canadian censuses of 1861 and 1871 confirm that he was established in the Outaouais, while mentioning he was born on the territories of Hudson Bay (Rupert’s Land). In 1871, eleven members of his extended family lived in his immediate surroundings near Maniwaki (LAC 1861a, p. 143; 1871, p. 14).

married a local Métisse woman of Algonquin extraction named Elizabeth McPherson. In this particular case, Francois Naud came to settle in the community of Lac Sainte-Marie in a canoe also transporting his brother-in-law, George McPherson,³⁸ who would later settle at Red River before witnessing Treaty 3 in Western Ontario in 1873 (Lefebvre 2006, pp. 21–22; Morris 1880, p. 48). The arrival of these freemen in the Outaouais seemed to worry the HBC, which questioned their real motives for being in the region (HBCA, B.134/c/40, 48). As noted above, the HBC was already struggling to enforce their declining influence in the region.

A few decades later, about the same time that Louis Riel was a fugitive in the Outaouais, Jean-Baptiste McDougall, a son of one of the founding couples of the Lac Sainte-Marie mission, is reported to have expelled an Indian agent *manu militari* from his house, leading the agent to complain about the “half breed” origin from Red River of the McDougall family.³⁹ Clearly, intermarriages between local Outaouais, Sault Ste. Marie, and Red River families are known in the region. Indeed, the “half breed” identity appears to have been expressed not only by *outsiders*, but also by the local Métis themselves (as a self-ascription). André Lacroix, a freeman born in Mackinac living in Maniwaki, for example, integrated the logical patrilineal filiation of Indigeneity applied by Indian Affairs in Canada when he explains the difference between his daughter (a “half breed”) and his granddaughter (an “Indian”) in a letter addressed to officials.⁴⁰ Hence, Lacroix was certainly aware of the differential treatment reserved for the “Métis” (or Half breeds) versus the “Indians.”

The examples of the Davids, the Pauls, the Nauds, the McPhersons, the McDougalls, and the Lacroix help us to illustrate that the social, political, and cultural horizons of the Métis were not contained by strict geographical boundaries that would artificially disconnect eastern from western Métis

³⁸ Many primary documents enable us to identify George McPherson as being Elizabeth’s brother (see HBCA, B.82/d/3, 1837-06-03; B.134/c/8, 140, 158).

³⁹ The Indian Agent Baudin, when reporting on the census he was doing on the Maniwaki reserve, writes in 1874: “the second day we arrived at a little house where lives a certain John Baptiste McDougall, who has been treated as an Algonquin, though his father was a half breed from the Christinos of Red River” (LAC 1874, pp. 24–25).

⁴⁰ André Lacroix, born at Mackinac in 1803 (Faribault-Beauregard 1982, p. 149), married Véronique Macteni, an “Indian woman” (GSU, BMS of Notre-Dame, Ottawa, 1834-08-25). In 1879, he contested the expulsion from the Maniwaki reserve of his granddaughter. He explicitly wrote that she was an Indian girl, being the daughter of “Simon Covart (an Algonquin Indian) who married Sophia Lacroix. She [Sophia] was a half breed, being my daughter” (LAC 1879, p. 2).

families. Exemplifying this point further, the narrative of Violet Lalonde mentions another family that protected Louis Riel in the Outaouais: the family of “J. Lépine,” identified by Lalonde as the cousin of Ambroise-Dydime Lépine, the famous Métis right-hand man of Louis Riel.

This information seems exact when we know that the father of Ambroise-Dydime, a *Canadien* named Jean-Baptiste Lépine, of Saint-Jacques, Québec (Ens 2005), had three brothers who settled from Saint-Jacques to the Lièvre River in the 1840s. Interestingly, Joseph Lépine, the eldest brother, is in fact closely linked to the Paul family (mentioned above), as he was also taken prisoner by the HBC to the north of Winnipeg Lake in 1819 (Masson 1889, p. 147; Morice 1908, p. 183; Rumilly 1980, vol. 2, pp. 240, 248). One year after this dramatic episode, he married, as his brother Jean-Baptiste did in the Prairies, a North West Métis named Marguerite Brousseau, the daughter of Jean-Louis and Marie Suzanne Nantikau.⁴¹ Among their children, *or* in the two other Lépine families already living on the Lièvre, was probably the J. Lépine mentioned by Lalonde.⁴² Again, the difficulty in pinpointing the exact identity of “J. Lépine” neither negates the obvious East-West kinship Métis connections, nor the political charge associating the Lépine family name and the Red River resistance, providing one more example of the political dimension made explicit by Lalonde through kinship ties (real or fictive).

At this point we can safely state that voyageurs and métis families from different origins settled the Outaouais region as early as the 1830s, such as the Cadottes,⁴³ the Riels,⁴⁴ the Lépinés, and other “half breed” families connected

⁴¹ We can safely assume that Marguerite Brousseau was born in the North West, since her mother, Marie Suzanne Nantikau (aged 58) was baptized on the day of her daughter’s marriage (GSU, BMS of Saint-Jacques, 1820-10-24). The former “North West” voyageur occupation of Brousseau is confirmed later in the burial documents of his wife, who was described as a “naturelle” (GSU, BMS of Saint-Jacques, 1827-04-18).

⁴² Joseph Lépine Sr. came to the Lièvre with his new *Canadienne* wife (Goudreau 2014, p. 62), most likely with the métis children from his first marriage. At least one Métis daughter from Joseph Lépine/Marguerite Brousseau is present in Outaouais (GSU, BMS of Saint-Grégoire-de-Nazianze, Buckingham, 1848-07-03). Joseph Lépine and his second wife would later have another daughter named Marguerite Lépine (GSU, BMS of Saint-Grégoire-de-Nazianze, Buckingham, 1860-05-21). They should not be mingled. According to Stéphane Jobin (2013, 12), “J. Lépine” would be Joseph Trefflé Lépine, son of François Lépine, one of the three brothers on the Lièvre. It is also noteworthy that the extended Lépine family was engaged in the Outaouais fur trade for the HBC as early as 1821, and on the Témiscamingue from 1788 for various traders (HBCA, B.134/g/1-6; E.41/2, pp. 7–8).

⁴³ Two Cadotte clearly identified as “métif” appears on the BMS of the Outaouais missions in the 1830s and 1840s (ADP, BMS of Missions sauvages, 1837-08-10; 1837-08-11; 1842-07-31).

to petitioners from Sault Ste. Marie to Green Bay. Eventually, the resistance in the North West could have been an extra source of preoccupation for colonial authorities in charge of the Outaouais region; this in continuity with the previous anxiety expressed by HBC staff concerning the activities of freemen, contraband, and cases of desertion.

Illustrating such political tensions on a regional basis, the correspondence of Father Nédélec and Indian Agent McBride of Témiscamingue to the Indian Department reveal the attempts of Nédélec to negotiate the entry of the Métis (*Half Breeds*) to the Témiscamingue reserve in the 1890s, with some “from below” (south and east of Kipawa Lake). Nédélec is moreover asking for two seats for the Métis *qua* Métis at the Band council. This is ignored both by the Indian agent (a former North West Company *half breed*, accused here of nepotism but pretending to speak for the Indians) and government officials, who state their intent to prevent Métis and Indian gathering in such a collective yet non-agriculturalist manner (villages), seemingly fearing the consequences that such political empowerment might carry (LAC 1892-1896). This correspondence illuminates in unique ways the government’s attempt to suppress the *collective* existence of the Métis located in the Outaouais hinterlands late in the nineteenth century, stuck without any possibility to secure land on a collective basis. Furthermore, it highlights the political existence of the Outaouais Métis per the requests for seats “as Métis” on the band council. Such documented revelations from Lacroix to Nédélec, and from Ingall to Bellefeuille, make it increasingly clear that the Métis of the Outaouais region had their own struggles and histories, as the narrative of Mrs. Violet Lalonde confirms when she suggests that Louis Riel came and sought protection among his people in the Outaouais.

Métis Migration along the East-West Continuum

Memories of bi-directional East-West migrations and solidarities involving Métis families are another example of the specific mobility highlighted by the narrative of Violet Lalonde. Explaining why the McGregors relocated in the Outaouais, Mrs. Lalonde mentions that they found themselves at the heart of the Patriot insurrections of 1837–38 in Lower Canada. These insurrections would have precipitated the departure of Louis Riel Sr. Westward, and the

⁴⁴ Paul Riel, son of Émilien Riel and Henriette McDougall, from Lac Sainte-Marie (LAC 1861b, p. 1), was reported to be “part Indian” by colonial authorities, having successfully reached remote First Nations in the backcountry to deliver medicine during a severe smallpox epidemic (LAC 1880-1885, 11, 22).

McGregors towards the Outaouais. Although we have no knowledge if the husband of Marie-Louise Riel was a Patriot himself, this example highlights the dissemination of political experiences arising in Lower Canada shaping the cultural experience and migrations of a number of Métis families. It is well documented that the British repressive campaigns of 1837–38 forced a number of “Patriots” to go into exile (Filteau 2003). This includes, for example, Francois-Xavier Mathieu, who then took refuge in Red River, and then in Oregon,⁴⁵ where we also find independent “French” communities described by De Monfras as inhabited by “Bois-Brûlés” shaping their policy around the concept of “responsible government” to form a provisional government, concepts that were then popular both in Lower Canada and in Red River (Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Malette 2016, p. 362). Confirming the mobility of political ideas along an East-West continuum, we find praises for the Patriot movement among the “half-breeds” of Red River, as described by Alexander Ross:

The Papineau rebellion which broke out in Canada about this time, and the echo of which soon reached us, added fresh fuel to the spirit of disaffection. The Canadians of Red River sighed for the success of their brethren’s cause. Patriotic songs were chanted on every side in praise of Papineau. *In the plains, the half-breeds made a flag, called the Papineau standard, which was waved in triumph for years, and the rebels’ deeds extolled to the skies.* (Ross 1856, cited in O’Toole 2010a, p. 147; our emphasis)

Hence, not only peoples but also political ideas and solidarities among the “Half breeds” (or “Métis,” “Metifs,” “Bois-Brûlés,” or “Chicot”) appear to have travelled on an East-West bi-directional continuum. In fact, the Riel migration of 1837–38 echoes an earlier displacement involving again the Métis family, only this time in a West-to-East direction. Here it is interesting to note that the oral tradition of Lalonde offers an explanation as to why Riel left the North West for the safety of Berthierville in 1821–22, a location in Québec

⁴⁵ The mention of “provisional government” planned by Bois-Brûlés and Canadiens populations in Oregon (and the West coast in general) echoes another “national” project reported in 1836 by William Nourse, stationed in Sault Ste. Marie, describing to the HBC agent at Lachine the object of a war party including many Half breed officers under the command of “general Dickson” arriving from Buffalo. The party wished to reach Red River in hopes of gathering along the way Indians and Half breed warriors with the plan to create a new territory in California, under a military government that would be reserved only to those with “Indian blood” (HBCA, B.134/c/31, pp. 228–229). Clearly, the “political consciousness” of “Half breeds” extended well beyond the scope and magnitude of the Red River colony.

where we find a significant number of children recorded as “Métif” in baptismal records.⁴⁶ The presence of fur trade conflicts that were getting increasingly violent is Mrs. Lalonde’s explanation—conflicts we know the British authorities wished to subdue especially after the bloody events of *La Grenouillère* in 1816 (Ens 2012, p. 109). Indeed, the repercussions of the Métis “nationalist” violence⁴⁷ were clearly felt all across the fur trade network following its 1821 restructuration benefiting the Royal Chartered Hudson Bay Company (against its economic rival, the North West Company), and surely influenced the migrations experienced by Métis families like the Riels, or even the Pauls and Lépins, during this period. In coming East again in 1873, Louis Riel Jr. would thus have experienced a *second* migration as a *political refugee*, this time seeking protection against *les Anglais* among the Eastern Métis and voyageur families of the Outaouais, such as the McGregors and Riels, whom, as Mrs. Lalonde suggests, were part of the “family pack” Louis trusted against the bounty hunters who were tracking him (BAnQ-G 1980, pp. 37, 38, 44).

Conclusion

In the first part of this essay we have problematized Métis neo-nationalist discourses that deny the existence of Métis in the eastern provinces of Canada. After exploring the juridical treatment of Métis identity through the *Powley* and the *Daniels* decisions, we examined the influence of the Métis neo-nationalist doctrine to show the presence of a fallacy at its core. This fallacy, we have suggested, leads supporters of that doctrine to resort to abusive generalizations, impugning motives to the whole of the Canadian Justice system and non-Prairies Métis alike, accused of being “fake Métis” and part of

⁴⁶ Berthierville in Québec had a long-standing relation with the Catholic Métis families of the Northwest. Father Pouget and other priests in this parish were baptizing Métif/Métive adults and children at the demand of these families travelling to Lower Canada. The Métis are in fact reported as asking Lord Selkirk to have Catholic priests sent to them. Selkirk, although a “Heretic,” is reported as making this request to Monseigneur Plessis of Québec rather than seeing this continuous exodus of Métis from the Red River colony to Lower Canada (Moreau 1889, 105).

⁴⁷ Gerhard J. Ens illustrates well how the subject of Métis nationalism gave rise to two opposing narratives held by the rival fur trade companies. Evidence demonstrates that the NWC manipulated symbols such as the infinity flag to mobilize the Métis and Canadian freemen against HBC interests (which later blamed the Métis for the violence that erupted), while the HBC officially denied that such a “Métis new nation” ever existed so as to ensure that the accountability for the Semple massacre could fall squarely with the NWC. As Ens argues, these symbols nevertheless had an impact on many generations to come, who were increasingly vocal about their autonomy and rights to the land. Another contemporary primary source offers a similar portrait of the NWC manipulations over employed Métis (Beltrami 1824, pp. 203–205).

this disenfranchised “soup kitchen” (Andersen 2014). Based on historical evidence, we have demonstrated that such a doctrine does not stand the scrutiny of Métis leader Louis Riel’s inclusive vision of Métis nationalism. We have shown that as one of the founders of Métis nationalism, Louis Riel mentions explicitly the existence of Métis with equal rights in the eastern provinces of Canada. We have also shown how Métis leader Gabriel Dumont’s self-understanding as a “Métis” refutes the straw man argument, which consists in accusing descendants of Métis who do not adhere to a neo-nationalist identitarian doctrine of encouraging a racist and neo-colonial “mixing” mindset tantamount to cultural appropriation.

In the second part of this essay, we took up the challenge to find any historical “evidence” to support the claim that Louis Riel made about the existence of Métis in the Eastern provinces of Canada (in this case, Québec). In other words, we took up the challenge of second-guessing the voice of Louis Riel on such a question. By reviewing the evidence, we have reached the conclusion that dismissing the historical existence of Métis (or even “Bois-Brulés”) in the Eastern provinces of Canada would be erroneous. Louis Riel is reported as visiting communities in the Outaouais region, which both historical documents and oral traditions depict as inhabited by network of Métis/Half breed families.

We came to that conclusion first by presenting the oral history of Métis Elder Mrs. Violet Lalonde, which tells how Marie-Louise welcomed and protected her nephew Louis among her people: the Métis. We then provided three additional testimonies from Métis Elders from Maniwaki and Val-des-Bois. Researching the story further, we have shown the coalescence of local Outaouais Métis families with Métis families from Sault Ste. Marie, Red River, and the Northwest Territories. We have added numerous anecdotes, such as when members of the Lépine and Paul families were both arrested together at Lake Winnipeg in 1819 during the fur trade conflict, illustrating long-standing solidarity among the *Canadiens* and the Métis families we later find in the Outaouais.

We then suggested that Louis Riel did not visit just any “countryside” north of the Ottawa River during his exile, but rather took refuge in a region inhabited by a network of Métis families, all from fur trade extraction, among which we find the Lépinés, the Riels, the McGregors, the Nauds, the McPhersons, the Davids, the Pauls, and the McDougalls (among others). We have, moreover, offered evidence that ethnonyms such as “Métis,” “Bois-Brulés,” “Métifs,” and “Half Breeds” were all used historically to describe the Métis of the Outaouais. We have even added a rarely documented case of self-

ascription involving differentiation between “half breed” and “Indian” identities. Illustrating the political realities of the Métis located in the Outaouais hinterlands, we have presented the correspondence of Father Nédélec who attempts to negotiate the entry of the Métis to the Témiscamingue reserve in the 1890s (thus in Québec), asking for two seats for the Métis *qua* Métis at the Band council. Finally, we have discussed evidence suggesting that Métis culture was experienced along a bi-directional East-West continuum, which included the migrations of Métis families and the exchanges of political ideas between Lower Canada and the West.

On the basis of this evidence, we feel comfortable asserting that there is a *living* and ongoing history that justifies the usage of the term “Métis” by the descendants of the Métis of the Outaouais. Together, the evidence compiled and reviewed in this essay offers compelling reasons to assert that the Outaouais Métis are bearers of a distinct identity—an identity that many of their descendants still value today. Clearly, the terms “Métif” and “Bois-Brûlé” were in usage in the Outaouais region in both a distinctive and a collective fashion. Moreover, evidence demonstrates the rejection by colonial authorities of Métis (*qua* Métis) from the Témiscamingue reserve, proving the assimilative pressures endured by Métis families of the Outaouais hinterland. The sum of this evidence helps us to dismiss the hasty accusations of “ethnic fraud” ascribed to *all* Eastern Métis—problematic accusations, we suggested, nourished by an equally problematic fallacy held by a number of academics, and in turn echoed by the formulation of an exclusionary Métis neo-nationalism, which has led to questionable “tactics” on social media masquerading as virtuous acts of activism (including impugning motives, unjustifiable generalizations, character assassination, and various psychologisms targeting the “other Métis”).

In closing, we believe that the history of the Métis in the eastern provinces of Canada should be important to all Métis, Québécois, and Canadians alike. This history reveals enduring traditions, solidarities, and even connections between the East and the West. In short, we hope for a more constructive dialogue on these issues that keep dividing Métis identities. But for such dialogue to happen, mutual respect, empowering forms of recognition, and a commitment toward the co-existence of the many ways of being Métis must replace the deplorable “tactics” mentioned in this article. Indeed, we are under the impression that Eastern Métis Elders won’t open up, and younger generations of Métis won’t take pride in their heritage if confronted by scholarly work that continues to downplay their “authenticity” because they are not rooted historically in the Prairies, or because they do not fit the exclusionary identitarian definitions recently promulgated by Métis neo-

nationalism (Andersen 2014; Adese 2016). We feel it would be a terrible loss to artificially cut-off the many transregional and interconnected aspects of Métis culture and history. We can only hope that the oral tradition shared by Violet Lalonde will invite a renewed appreciation for Métis culture in Québec. As a symbol, Marie-Louise embodies to our people the virtues of independence and fearlessness. She is, moreover, a welcome example of an empowered Métis woman in a world of heroism too often dominated by male figures. Finally, Marie-Louise incarnates the spirit of North-Eastern forests, lakes, and rivers that could still protect a Métis relative who sought refuge at a time when the Prairies was under increasing pressure. As a midwife and a spiritual healer, we hope that her inspirational power will help foster the rebirth of Louis Riel's political vision in achieving a greater unity among Métis peoples.

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BMS of Notre-Dame, Ottawa, Ontario.

BMS of Pointe-Claire, Québec.

BMS of Saint-Grégoire-de-Nazianze, Buckingham, Québec.

BMS of Saint-Jacques, Québec.

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