

PRAIRIE AND QUÉBEC MÉTIS TERRITORIALITY:
INTERSTICES TERRITORIALES AND THE CARTOGRAPHY OF IN-BETWEEN IDENTITY

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a historical and contemporary exploration of Prairie and Québec Métis. The Métis, individuals of mixed Native and non-Native ancestry, have been constitutionally recognised as Aboriginal people(s) in Canada since 1982. They are the result of the numerous episodes of *métissage* that have occurred in the course of Canada's history. *Métissage* emerged early in the French Regime, as the intermingling of "Indian" and "white" blood was an inescapable outcome of the fur trade economy. In spite of this long history and recent official recognition, the mixed cultural origins of the Métis have challenged many aspects of Canadian society — its conception of aboriginality, its ethnic classifications and policies, and its conception of territorial integrity. On the other hand, the Métis also represent an opportunity for Canada to question its conceptions of aboriginality and to outline possible paths of reflection about the country's socio-political landscape.

This thesis approaches these paths indirectly by exploring the historical importance of Métis geographies in the development of Canada. More specifically, it aims to identify the changing patterns of Métis territoriality — the changing Métis sense of identity and territory.

My historical exploration is largely based on an investigation of colonial maps, on which I have sought territorial markers (material, political, and symbolic) that identify the existence of *métissage* and the Métis. The visual nature of maps makes them influential territorial discourses and efficient means by which Métis geography and territoriality can be identified as well as the mental conceptions Canadians have of the country. This study of colonial maps is complemented by the analysis of Métis oral tradition as revealed by stories, individual accounts, songs, and place names. I also investigate the ways in which contemporary Métis conceive of history and the future, and how this affects (or supports) their self-identification. This contemporary inquiry is primarily based on Métis maps, Métis official web sites, and interviews I conducted with Métis living in different regions in the province of Québec.

Both historical and contemporary examinations reveal real regional distinctions between Prairie and Québec Métis, although there have been significant social and familial connections between the two groups. Both Métis peoples also share common characteristics. The most important one is "in-betweenness," which appears to be a principal feature of Métis past and present territoriality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Portraits of In-betweenness.

la mêtis [est] cette ruse de l'intelligence au sens où les anciens Grecs l'entendaient. Faite de roublardise, d'habileté, d'audace, d'observation, la mêtis est par définition l'intelligence des faibles devant les forts ou les puissants. Ses liens la rattachent à l'origine, à la dimension prélogique, à l'intuition.

— Fulvio Caccia, La République Métis.

Were *métissage* broadly defined, I would conceive of it as an ongoing process, both the result and the cause of the encounter and interaction of at least two worlds that mix with each other and that tend to create overlapping spaces, if not a “new order” marked by plurality. Generally defined in biological terms, *métissage* also involves social-cultural and intellectual dimensions, and is inscribed into discourse and ideology (Laplantine & Nouss, 1997, p. 7-11).

Complex versions of *métissage* had emerged in Canada as early as the French Regime, as the intermingling of “Indian” and “white” blood was a *sine qua non* of the fur trade economy. This dominant economy entailed many episodes of *métissage*, which were all similar in their motives (sexual, commercial, and political), while distinct because of the different people involved and the different contexts in which they took place. In *la Nouvelle-France*, colonial officials conceived of a “French” and “Catholic” Métis who would be the foundation of a new nation and would prevent officials from depopulating “*la Vieille France*” at the expense of a new one (Dickason, 1985; Perreault, 1982). Later, the Métis offered their own version of themselves in the Northwest in the late 19th century in Louis Riel’s *République métisse*, which was intended to support a “supra-identity” that would recognise both Indian and Euro-Canadian constituents without choosing or rejecting either.

Thought about *métissage* has never ceased in Canada and has intensified over the last decades with the rise of post-colonial and, more broadly, post-modern studies (van Schendel, 1994, p. 103). Along with the concept of *métissage culturel*, post-modernists have been looking at concepts such as transculturalism, “mixed race,” liminality, hybridity, and in-betweenness, all

of which have provided fresh ways¹ of understanding identity within a contemporary context marked by globalisation and the calling into question of national boundaries and identities.

This recent shift in the conception of *métissage* suggests the ambivalence about identity that faces any individual in a cross-cultural encounter, as well as the diversity, “unboundedness,” and mobility of métis identity. *Métissage* is now understood to reject a purity of origin and to be a source of plurality. This plurality suggests that the roads linking *métissage* to métis people(s) are numerous, and that they do not necessarily converge. In this light, recent studies of the Métis in Canada have modified their investigations in two major ways. In the first place, many scholars have revisited the Métis past to offer revised versions of Métis identity, and to show, for instance, the heterogeneous nature of *la Nation métisse* at the *Rivière Rouge* colony or the instrumental and changing constitution of the identity of proto-Métis,² who self-identified sometimes as “Indian” and sometimes as “White” depending on the context or circumstances (Ens, 2001; St-Onge, 1985). Second, scholars have closely examined the evolution of the term “Métis” itself, revealing its shifting meaning through time and space and the use of parallel terms such as *Bois-Brûlés* and Half-breeds. From this evolution, some have pointed out social groups that have never been labelled “Métis” or have never defined themselves as such, but have developed separate senses of identity after experiencing a process of *métissage*, either biological or cultural. Martin Dunn provides many examples of Métis before the term was coined: *Canayen*, *Coureur de Bois*, *Gens libres*, Home Indian, Home Guard Cree, Labradorian, *Malouidit*, Pedlars, Rupertlander, *Voyageur*, and so forth (May 27, 2002a). Contemporary Métis also reflect such plurality and propose more than only one definition of who they are. I will further discuss that below.

It seems from this last enumeration that almost any human could claim métis identity. Obviously all do not do so. *Métissage* does not automatically lead to the genesis of Métis

¹ The concept of hybridity is not new, as De Grandis and Bernd argue (2000), and appeared in various formulations as early as the 19th century. This recalls the argument of those who do not see an absolute epistemological rupture between post-modern and modern (Canclini, 1995, p. 9; Harvey, 1989), or even between the latter and traditional (Somers & Gibson, 1994).

² The term “proto-Métis” is problematic. The word “proto” may suggest that these Métis were only a “phase” in the creation of Red River Métis. This is a position that would be rejected by many contemporary Métis. On the contrary, I use this term — for lack of a better one — to note the existence (and persistence) of other groups of Métis outside Red River. One may consider the Red River Métis as proto-Métis as well.

peoples. In spite of the *métissage* that occurred in Québec³ and of what van Schendel calls the minority figure of the métis in Québec identity formation — historically played by the *coureur de bois* and the *voyageur* — today Franco-Québécois (the first *Canadiens*) do not define themselves in Aboriginal terms (1994). Similarly, the *métissage* processes that Canadian First Nations have faced for centuries, has not prevented Native people from defining themselves in opposition to the dominant society, while reducing *métissage* to an inconsequential phenomenon.

Frederik Barth (1969) offers a meaningful theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic evolution of ethnicity, the concept of collective identity. For him, what defines ethnic groups has less to do with the development of a specific set of cultural traits or visible cultural symbols (language for example), than with ascription and/or self-ascription, with ethnic categorisation. Ascription alone — whatever the demographic, cultural and political changes — allows the persistence of social or ethnic boundaries. The perception of ethnic boundary maintenance, based on (self)identification, appears to be a relevant point of departure for exploring Métis identity.

1.1 Problematic, objectives and conceptual frame.

Canada's official definition of Métis people(s) is at odds with post-modern ambivalence, for it draws a specific social category for the Métis.⁴ The country recognises the Métis as Aboriginal peoples,⁵ a recognition that is officially entrenched in the Constitutional Act of 1982. As a result, people who define themselves today as Métis, and associate themselves with original Métis cultures, are spread all over the country, from Labrador to British Columbia, well beyond the prairie area traditionally recognised as Métis (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996, p. 199-270). One must consider Métis political activism as a major explanation for the persistence of a Métis category in Canada. For example, the Native Council of Canada — a

³ According to the Québec botanist and ethnologist Jacques Rousseau, 40% of French people in North America could find at least one Native ancestor in their genealogy (Smith, 1979, p. 116, quoted by Perreault, 1982, p. 86).

⁴ There is no equivalent in the United States as "Métis" is neither an official nor an academic category.

⁵ There is some opposition to this general agreement. For Thomas Flanagan (1985; 1991a), Métis did and do not qualify as Aboriginal people for they were treated differently from the Natives and received scrip to extinguish any Aboriginal rights they could have received from their Indian forebears. This confirms the fact, however, that the

national organisation representing Métis and non-status Indians, now the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples — had a great deal to do with the entrenchment of Métis in the 1982 Constitutional Act.

For my purposes, thus, I consider Métis any contemporary Canadian people of mixed Indian and non-Indian ancestry who self-identify as Métis. Ascription is central to this broad definition, which, I have to admit, is not everywhere accepted (Sawchuk, 1998, p. 14 & 19), an issue that I will address again in this chapter and will discuss at length from chapter 5 to the end.

1.1.1 Métis Geography(ies).

Why Métis are considered Aboriginal is a question that is embedded within the history and geography of Canada. Beginning in the late 17th century, the fur trade became a dominant socio-economical activity in Canada (Harris, 1987, p. 87), and largely took place at the margins of the reach of colonial settlements: this obliged Euro-Canadians to confront a land about which they knew little, and which belonged to Natives (Innis, 1999). Samuel de Champlain realised this early in the 17th century when he was stopped by the Algonkin chief Tessouat at *Île des Allumettes* on the *Outaouais* River, and prevented from heading further west. In the 18th and 19th centuries, factors and traders would experience similar constraints in Rupert's Land and on the prairie. As long as the fur trade lasted, so did the Native influence.

There is no need to review how power gradually shifted from Indian to Euro-Canadian hands. As Euro-Canadians settled in the lands largely abandoned by the fur trade, Native influence had declined proportionally. Even earlier, the trade had greatly modified Native populations and territorial patterns, as many authors, such as Denys Delâge (1985) and Arthur J. Ray (1998), have shown. However, this shifting of control over land and resources (human and physical) was gradual and had been preceded by a relatively long period of interdependence — a *middle ground* to use an expression popularised by Richard White (1991) — perfect soil for *métissage* to create in-between spaces or, in other words, *Métis geographies*. A “Métis geography” would be, then, a spatial and social structure resulting from the encounter of distinct

Métis were recognised as a distinct “Native” people before 1982. Hence my general use of the term “Aboriginal” throughout the thesis to identify both pre-1982 and post-1982 Métis alike.

cultures (two or more) and the mutual and more or less symmetrical interpenetration of the basic components of these cultures: spatial behaviour, resource planning, or patterns of exchange. In *Nouvelle-France* as in Rupert's Land, such a Métis geography was the result of the overlap and interconnection of many geographies, which all had deeply structured spaces: Indian and colonial geographies, of course, but also those of the fur trade, and to a certain extent, of missionaries — primarily Jesuits for *la Nouvelle-France* and Oblates for Rupert's Land (Sawchuk, 1978, p. 18). What had made Métis geographies so influential is that they had become more than the result of such mixing; they had also become central elements of such interaction. The development of cart trails by the Prairie Métis is one example among other as these trails were essential to pemmican production (a principal source of food for the fur trade companies' employees in the West), which was mainly a Métis business in the mid-1800s, and "rivalled the rivers as transportation routes" (Sealey & Lussier, 1975, p. 21).

Despite the official recognition of the Métis as Aboriginal people(s) in Canada, it would be quite misleading to assume that such recognition settles the problems raised by the integration of the Métis within Canadian society. Actually, this recognition is quite equivocal, and leaves the question of Métis definition undetermined. This ambiguous situation — which stems primarily from the nature of Métis identity based as it is on the intermingling of two cultures — challenges many aspects of Canadian society as a whole: its conception of aboriginality; its ethnic classifications and policies; and its conception of territorial integrity. On the one hand, these challenges feed a certain fear in Canada that issues bearing on Aboriginal rights will never end, and that Métis claims will proliferate,⁶ for the *métissage* between Indians and mainstream society seems to be an on-going process. On the other hand, Métis reality reminds Canadian mainstream society and First Nations of the importance of *métissage* in the making of the country and in the structuring of their relationship today and in the future. In other words, Métis also represent an opportunity for Canada to question its actual form, made of social(-racial) categories sealed under "purity," and to outline possible paths of reflection towards the renewal of its social-political landscape.

My fundamental objective here is to approach these paths indirectly by exploring the historical importance of Métis geographies in the development of Canada.

⁶ From Arthur J. Ray, *ad verbatim*, 2001.

1.1.2 Métis territoriality(ies).

There are many ways of studying Métis geographies. Some scholars have focused on the role of the Métis within the fur trade economy in the Northwest during the 19th century and on the specific spatial patterns related to it. However, such studies do not necessarily place identity at the centre of investigation, as does the notion of territoriality. I define territoriality as a social and historical process, which tends to appropriate and delimit space using social markers (political, material and symbolic) that make sense for a specific group of people. Social markers and the spatial limits they draw are recognisable by each group member and, therefore, are also markers of identity (DiMéo, 1991, p. 129, 145 and 184; Sack, 1986, p. 26; Sörlin, 1999, p. 109). As an on-going reality, territoriality is both the process by which a people appropriate space and create territory through their socio-cultural markers, and the process by which they redefine, at least partly, their identity and sense of belonging in relation to that territory. In other words, whether evenly or not, territory and identity can, simultaneously or asynchronously, affect each other (Raffestin, 1983).

Therefore, I define my objective in more focussed and concrete terms. I want to establish the changing patterns of Métis territoriality — the changing Métis sense of identity and territory. Those who call themselves Métis today are my starting point and I will try to establish links between these contemporary Canadian Métis groups and past Métis geographies. Given the importance of “shared experience” in collective identity definition (Marden, 1997, p. 55; Rokkan & Urwin, 1983, p. 67), it is relevant to consider how these contemporary identities are grounded (or how they “ground” themselves⁷) in the past.

This investigation of Métis territoriality fills a gap in the scholarly work on the Métis, mainly conducted by historians and ethnographers. For these scholars territoriality is at most partially expressed or defined, and often is unconsidered. If territoriality is an important notion in

⁷ According to the RCAP: “Individual identity is a matter of personal choice. One can identify with any people or nation, whether or not there is an objective reason for doing so and whether or not that people or nation agrees. For acceptance of that identification, however, it is necessary to win the approval of the people or nation with which one identifies. It would be inappropriate for anyone outside that nation to intervene. Therefore, when a government

geography (Sack, 1986), very few geographers have studied Métis people. Territoriality is best considered, albeit incompletely, through studies of the land and scrips question (Flanagan, 1991; Sprague, 1980a & 1980b; St-Onge, 1985) and through ethnohistorical studies. The debate encompassing the land and scrips controversy, which is still central for Prairie Métis land claims (especially in Saskatchewan and in Manitoba), focuses on a fundamental question: "Had the Métis been fairly compensated for the land they lost following the establishment of the Province of Manitoba and its annexation to Canada in 1870 through the land or money scrip system, or, rather, had they been deceived in this matter?" Whatever the answer to this question, territoriality would appear to be a key notion, since one can hardly talk about land reserved to "Métis" without referring to individuals who claim this identity and feel a sense of belonging to this land. Yet, territoriality, as situated within the debate, appears to be secondary and is reduced to its political dimension as the land base of the Métis Nation, with little regard to its material and symbolic dimensions. A similar comment can be made about ethnohistorical studies. In exploring the mechanisms of boundary making (social and geographical) that give birth to Métis ethnogenesis within the fur trade economy, ethnohistorians treat territoriality only in terms of its bounded materiality (Ens, 2001).⁸

In order to facilitate the reading of territorial marks, I propose to group them into three different if interacting socio-cultural dimensions: political markers, which entail the collective awareness of space appropriation (its more or less formal and institutionalised organisation), a *vouloir-vivre ensemble* as Guillorel (1999, p. 64) would define it; material markers, which reveal the use of space, sometimes as a result of survival and adaptive strategies (land exploitation, economic activities, settlement patterns, and infrastructures); and symbolic markers, which organise space in terms of representations, ideologies, and norms.⁹

whishes to know a nation's membership for the purpose of engaging in a nation-to-nation negotiations, it can legitimately consider only two criteria: self-identification and acceptance by the nation" (p. 202).

⁸ I must admit that they could hardly do otherwise. Their primary source of information comes from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which was, of course, economically focused.

⁹ This selection is not intended to be exhaustive. Other important types of transactions between individuals, such as social class and gender transactions, were set aside as generally irrelevant to ethnicity; whatever the differences between male and female identities are, they are subordinate to what defines ethnic group identity. The only exception to that would be in an ethnogenesis or ethnic change context. Social classes within the fur trade economy could have played a major role in the rise of Métis identity as much as the importance of Native women (Brown, 1980; van Kirk, 1980). That said, my goal is not to describe Métis ethnogenesis or ethnic changes, but rather to seek indications of Métis existence on the maps.

A question remains: how can one recognise social markers that are exclusively Métis? Métis “in-betweenness” helps elucidate this question as it is a key component of Métis identity. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (hereafter RCAP) describes the Métis as being neither “Indian” nor “European,” but partly both (1996, p. 220). Earlier, Louis Riel proposed his own definition:

C'est vrai que notre origine sauvage est humble, mais il est juste que nous honorions nos mères aussi bien que nos pères. Pourquoi nous occuperions-nous à quel degré de mélange nous possédons le sang européen et le sang indien? Pour peu que nous ayons de l'un ou de l'autre, la reconnaissance et l'amour filial ne nous font-ils pas une loi de dire: "Nous sommes Métis" (Ouhmet, 1889, p.78).

An outsider observer, Henry Youle Hind, gave a similar, albeit Eurocentric, depiction: “The half-breeds of the north-west are a race endowed with some remarkable qualities, which they derive in great part from their Indian descent, but softened and improved by the admixture of the European element” (1860, vol. 1, p. 178-179). Riel and Hind’s definitions support the accepted ideas of that time about “blood” and race or about the dichotomy between “primitive” and “civilised” people, but once “translated” (blood is “culture” in Riel’s definition) they reveal the plurality and ambivalence related to métis experience. In-betweenness imposes itself, thus, as the theoretical and practical base of Métis territoriality, and affects the character of Métis territorial markers.

Recent post-modern theory has mainly treated in-betweenness (along with hybridity, and liminal spaces) as a means of displacing hegemonic discourses about identity (Johnston *et al.*, 2000, p. 364). The two Métis uprisings (1870 and 1885) in the North-West would be suitable examples of such resistance, for behind them was another version of the socio-cultural categorisation in the West, a more encompassing vision fitting both Indian and Euro-Canadian, and an alternative to the Canadian binary of primitive and civilised people (van Schendel, 1994, p. 113). However, one must wonder if the intention behind these uprisings was to offer alternatives, or if it was, more simply, to seek recognition for the people they thought they were, that is Métis. Whether the Métis saw themselves as “résistants” is a fundamental question here, since Métis views are my point of departure. Katharine Mitchell argues that the emphasis on resistance by cultural theorists is too abstract and excludes material and power relationships from the equation. For her, liminal spaces do not always challenge dominant hegemonies, and occasionally can accentuate them (1997). While the *coureurs de bois* did confront established

colonial conception of *métissage*¹⁰ and feed the fear that a métis power would arise at the margins of colonial influence, their role as middlemen in Native lands had greatly benefited colonial mercantilist purposes in North America (Dickason, 1985; Perreault, 1982, p. 90 & 92; White, 1991, p. 69). On the other side, the Native also made a great use of the intermediate nature of the *coureurs de bois*, appointing a few of them Chiefs to promote their geopolitical interests (Hébert, 1984, p. 432; White, 1991, p. 213).

And yet, in-betweenness has been a site of resistance. Challenged in the core of their social ideology and in their geographical vision of control over land (resources and people), colonial authorities opposed the infiltration of the “other”, the Savage, into European social definitions. As François Laplantine and Alexis Nouss point out, *métissage* goes along with its opposite, *antimétissage*: “Pas de métissage sans antimétissage [...]: une culture métisse doit sans doute souffrir ses contradictions pour affirmer sa nature. [...] non pas résoudre ses contradictions mais vivre avec s’avère la meilleure manière de les dépasser” (1997, p. 57-58). These authors add:

Ainsi donc, dans l’antimétissage — qui est la fascination de l’homogène, de l’identique et de la plénitude ontologique —, on rejette, on réprouve, on rompt. Mais que rejette-t-on au juste? On rejette ce qui est vécu comme insupportable: l’altérité, le doute sur sa propre identité comme sur la réalité (idem, p. 86-87).

In this light, one would say that it was under the seal of *antimétissage* that the Dominion of Canada (notably the provinces of Ontario and Québec) refused in the late 19th century to examine Louis Riel’s *République métisse*, which proposed to exceed French-Canadian/Anglo-Canadiens and savage/civilised dichotomies and to affirm itself as the model of a new Canadian Nation (Caccia, 1997, p. 26; Morisset, 1983a, p. 280; van Schendel, 1994, p. 113).¹¹ It seems that each episode of *métissage* confronted a colonial reaction that aimed to diminish (or wipe out) its influence.

¹⁰ Again, whether or not these *coureurs de bois* bore Indian genes is not of great importance here. What matters is that they seemed to be culturally *métissés*. Their “indianised” behaviour — at least once they were out of the Saint-Lawrence valley’s colonial influence — represented a high potential for the genesis of intercultural collectivities at the margins of the colonial settlement areas (Peterson, 1978 & 1985).

¹¹ It is obvious that Confederal authorities did not think they were resisting an established reality. The events of 1870 and 1885 were not called “uprisings” at the first place, but rather “rebellions,” supposing opposition to Confederation’s established order.

These episodes of resistance remain the best indicators of the importance of Métis geographies. Alone, Métis geographies hardly seem determinant in the course of Canadian history: after all, Métis peoples can still be seen as minorities within mainstream society (and even, as revealed by the report of the RCAP, within Aboriginal societies). However, placed within the context from which they emerged, these episodes of *métissage*, to which the colonial establishment reacted so strongly, expose themselves as keystones of Canadian history. “There can hardly be a more revealing way to decipher the basic nature of this state [Canada] than to examine its political and symbolic behaviour with respect to the issue of *métissage*, whether somatic or cultural” (Morisset, 1983a, p. 281).

1.2 Methodology, complications and reaction.

In order to understand the Canadian social-political landscape, to outline significant episodes of *métissage-antimétissage*, and to explore Métis territorialities, I will focus my analysis on historical and contemporary maps. I will scrutinise these maps for evidence of Métis social and territorial markers, be they political (boundaries), material (infrastructures, settlement patterns, and economic activities) or symbolic (religious symbols, or place names).

1.2.1 Maps: social representations and discourses about space.

Maps are spatial discourses that provide both the means (technical and cultural) and the motives (a territorial claim for instance) to articulate a geographical knowledge — a peculiar set of selected and hierarchically organised geographical facts. The discursive nature of maps indicates that knowledge is shaped by the “truth,” representations, practices, codes, and rules recognised and authorised by the society within which the cartographer lives. Since they are socially and contextually constructed documents — the expressions (often unconscious) of a society’s culture, norms, and ideologies — maps hold social markers that comprise territoriality (Harley, 1989a, p. 1-20).

Most of the maps I am working with were made by officials for colonial governments. Métis peoples did not produce their own maps before the 1970s. However, until the late 19th century, these colonial maps depended heavily on the geographical information provided by Natives (Harley, 1992, p. 526; Ruggles, 1991, p.61-68) and Métis (Hind, 1860, vol. 1, p. 181): “During our residence in the settlement [at the *Rivière Rouge*] and on our exploratory excursions I employed many of the half-breeds, and was thrown of necessity so much among them [...]” (Dawson, 1859, p. 24). Because of the Aboriginal contribution to colonial maps, one can identify numerous social markers of Native and Métis peoples on these maps.

Despite their colonial bias, early maps of Canada offer some advantages for my purpose. The first is visualisation. Maps, as opposed to other sources of colonial records (official documents, and correspondence letters), reveal their message more directly, because they are made of images rather than words. Using visual perception studies, Jacques Bertin (1967) showed that an image is instantaneously envisioned as a whole. The visual nature of maps makes them influential territorial discourses and efficient means by which Métis geography and territoriality can affect the mental conception Canadians have of the country (Harley, 1987, p. 4). Related to this is the second asset of these maps. Because maps convey images of Métis territoriality, although their function is to promote a Euro-Canadian geographical vision often at odds with Métis fact, they confirm *métissage* and Métis as inescapable realities of Canadian geography.

Maps offer another advantage for exploring métis territoriality. Produced at many spatial scales, they allow me to vary the angle and intensity by which I examine Métis territorialities. The relevance of scale differentiation has arisen recently in interdisciplinary studies related to Métis (Brown, 1980, p. xx; Brown, 2001, p. 60). Historians and ethnologists first tried to understand Métis identity in a broad sense and at a variety of scales — provincial, regional, national, and even continental (Brown, 1980; Howard, 1952; Giraud, 1945). Since the mid-1980s, they have tended to work on a local scale and to study particular communities in detail (Payment, 1983, 157 p.; St-Onge, 1985, p. 149-173). More recently, some authors have come even closer to the subject by exploring Métis identity through family histories (Devine, 2001, p. 131; Podruchny, 2002; Thistle, 1997). However, scale interaction has never been a major

component of these studies, as scholars have limited themselves to explore one scale at a time. By focusing as much on local, regional and national scales, my work is an attempt to fill this gap.

In selecting the maps analysed here, I did not focus on original and little known maps. As the context of map production is so important for the analysis, it seemed better to look for maps that have already been discussed or analysed before. The originality of my research is to identify the importance of maps in reflecting and shaping Métis geographies and territorialities. This importance may be easier to observe with maps published widely for they were more likely to reach contemporary readers and to affect their perception than were marginal maps. Another advantage is that these maps can be easily found today in various locations, including Internet for some of them. I have consulted maps in four archival institutions: the National Archives of Canada (NAC, Ottawa), Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA, Winnipeg), *la Bibliothèque nationale du Québec* (Montréal), and *la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Paris).¹² In spite of the considerable number of maps held by each of these institutions, I am confident that my map selection is fairly representative of the periods and regions examined. The NAC were particularly useful in selecting maps. The archives have most of their map collection on microforms. These microforms make the map collection easier to consult — maps are visible, although not in detail — and help identify cartographical trends.¹³

1.2.2 Métis “cartography.”

One can hardly identify a Métis map produced before the 1970s. Of course, Métis had previously produced sketch maps, as Hind noted in the 1850s (1860, vol. 1, p. 143). However, these maps, like most orally communicated Native and Métis geographical information, were integrated into colonial maps. In the process, all their information was “translated” into colonial (intelligible) knowledge and cartographic conventions and became part of a colonial spatial

¹² The latter institution was visited during my master's research in 1996-1997, which focused on *la Nouvelle-France's* cartography.

¹³ In spite of the time I spent consulting maps in the HBCA, I ended up choosing only one map from there. The main reason for this was financial and practical. I found it easier and less expensive to order copies of maps from the NAC. I also considered that the maps found in the NAC were as representative as those in the HBCA. The Aaron Arrowsmith's map of 1802 (examined in chapter 2), for example, was found in NAC, although it was produced from the HBC's cartographic material kept in London, England.

discourse (Belyea, 1992, p. 270). This suggests both the care with which colonial maps have to be analysed, and the limits of what map analysis can reveal.

Métis historical territoriality can only be partially made visible by official maps, and map analysis needs to be complemented by other investigations of the changing spatial-temporal context within which the Métis lived and understood themselves. This leads me to explore many oral components of Métis culture: narratives and oral histories, songs, and toponyms, all possible expressions of Métis mental cartography/geography. They can be found in many sources: Oblates' letters and reports, scientific explorations (Palliser, Hind, and Dawson), toponymic gazetteers and dictionaries, and Métis accounts.

1.2.3 The Canadian Métis today and methodological complement.

Although my description of the Métis in Canada may appear homogeneous, I will have to investigate very real regional distinctions. It is also clear that all Canadian Métis do not share the same social markers. These differences occurred at different scales: between the Red River Métis and the other northern and western communities for instance (Devine, 2001; Foster, 1985; Ray, 1982; Thistle, 1997). Henry Youle Hind even observed such diversity among the Métis buffalo hunters:

There are two distinct bands of buffalo hunters, one being those of Red River, the other of the White Horse Plain, on the Assiniboine. Formerly these bands were united, but, owing to a difference which sprung up between them, they now maintain a separate organisation, and proceed to different hunting-grounds (1860, vol. 1, p. 179).

Contemporary Métis are diverse as well, a diversity that complicates to a great extent their integration within Canadian socio-cultural and spatial structures and that has barely been acknowledged by governments (Sawchuck, 2001). A question then naturally arises: "Who are the Métis"?¹⁴ According to the Métis National Council (MNC), which mainly represents Prairie

¹⁴ Many authors tried to answer this question over the years: Bell (1989), Boisvert & Turnbull (1985), Brown & Peterson (1985), Foster (1985) RCAP (1996), *etc.*

Métis,¹⁵ “Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation” (November 11, 2002). This definition, adopted in Edmonton on September 27, 2002, clearly states that the only Métis who should qualify under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution are those related to the 19th century Métis Nation of the Red River area, and generally excludes other groups using the “Métis” label in Canada, often called the “Other Métis.” This position is predominantly political, a form of advocacy for Prairie Métis rights and land title recognition, which are in an advanced stage of negotiation.

The “Other Métis” propose a broader definition de-centered from Red River:

Metis people [...] are located in all of the provinces and territories of Canada. These persons, who may or may not be entitled to status under the Indian Act, are Metis culturally, historically, and for purposes of constitutional recognition. Some of this group are a distinctive mixed blood population, others are closely identified with the history and culture of the French/Cree Metis in southern Manitoba and central Saskatchewan in the 1860s (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, September 17, 2002).

Although these Métis do not all refer to a common focal point at Red River, as does the *Métis Nation*, they are nevertheless nationally represented by the *Congress of Aboriginal Peoples* (CAP), which recognises one Métis organisation per province or territory. Right and land title claims of these Métis are largely weakened by the literature. This literature argues, for example, that although *métissage* had occurred in the East, the Métis did not persist as a distinct people in this region, and that children of mixed marriages became members of either “White” or Indian society (Dickason, 1985; Hébert, 1984, p. 432; Peterson, 1985). On the other hand, this literature also points to the problem of historical sources and to the fact that they are generally written — to which the largely illiterate Métis did not directly contribute. The Métis population in *Nouvelle-France* is a case in point. This population had been officially ignored in records¹⁶ because it was closer to the “sauvages” than to the “civilised” and catholic French, and was not well accepted by colonial authorities (Dickason, 1985, p. 25; Perreault, 1982, p. 82; RCAP, 1996, p. 200). If, for

¹⁵ Five provincial Métis organizations are represented: the Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia, the Métis Nation of Alberta, the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, the Manitoba Métis Federation, and the Métis Nation of Ontario (Métis National Council, April 29, 2002). Many Métis in British Columbia and in Ontario are not members of any of these organisations.

¹⁶ Registering of mixed marriages by priests and missionaries when made under the Catholic Church would be a good example; marriages *à la coutume du pays*, made under Native “authority”, were generally passed over in silence (Dickason, 1985, p. 22, 23; Hébert, 1984).

Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown, the enlargement of the use of Métis beyond the historical Red River area raises legal complications,

On the other hand, [it] recalls Marcel Giraud's suggestion that the processes and conditions which caused the métis to coalesce at Red River as a self-conscious ethnic group were rooted in both an historic past and a wider geographical frame, just as the processes of ethnic formation or "métisation" continued after 1885, often independent of the Red River métis (1985, p. 5).

From this, it would seem inappropriate to invalidate Other Métis claims automatically, a conclusion reinforced by the place occupied by these Métis in the report of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996, p. 255-264).

These different views among contemporary Métis stem to a great extent from flaws characterising the official recognition of Métis in the Constitutional Act of 1982 (Sawchuk, 1985). As pointed out by Catherine Bell, there are two principal and complementary issues with regard to the constitution and the Métis. First, the wording of the constitutional text does not make clear whether Métis are considered as many different peoples or as only one. Second, as mentioned above, it does not provide a clear definition of who qualifies as Métis, be they one people or many (1989, p. 1-59). However, the judgment of September 2003 of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Powley's case,¹⁷ which was ruled on favour of Métis Aboriginal rights in Ontario, confirms that "Métis" includes more than people of Red River descent (Teillet, 2003).

It is not my intention to add anything to these legal and definitional issues. They are worth addressing only because they affect the nature of Métis claims and identity across the country. Moreover, since my point of departure is the peoples who self-identify as Métis, I consider the experience of Other Métis as relevant as those of the Métis Nation, and will study them accordingly regardless of legal issues.

This position cannot hide, however, the fact that the Métis Nation is the most documented and, consequently, easier to detect and explore (through maps of the prairie in the 19th century for instance) than the Other Métis, since written history does not present any direct evidence of

¹⁷ The Powleys are Métis from Sault-Sainte-Marie, Ontario, who were charged for illegal hunting after they shot a moose in 1993. They have always argued that they hunt only for subsistence and that, as Métis, hold Aboriginal

the latter. The nature of the historical records is certainly unsatisfactory (RCAP, 1996, vol. 4, p. 255) and I am obliged to find a way to fill historical gaps. An exploration of oral history seems relevant; if official records (written source of collective memory) have revealed little,¹⁸ information may be found in community or family oral memory. Again, little has been done to gather and record the oral memory of these Métis peoples. Interviews become the inevitable methodological tool. It is unlikely that these interviews provide indisputable historical evidence, although they do lead us to a better understanding of the Other Métis' use of history for nationalistic discourse (mostly an unconscious phenomenon). I agree with the Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi that "the history of a given territorial unit is important for a population independent of any scholarly or academic historical standards" (1996, p. 47). Métis peoples may exist whether or not academics recognise them as such.

It was obviously not possible to conduct interviews all over the country, not even in the Eastern part of it (where most of the Other Métis live), which, at least, would mean interviewing people in Labrador, New-Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Québec. This was not feasible. Consequently, without changing any of the thesis objectives, I decided to limit my study to two Canadian Métis peoples, who seem fairly representative of the Canadian Métis as a whole: *the Prairie Métis and the Québec Métis*. The selection of these two groups of Métis not only reduced the number of interviews, but also helped to focus map analyses. The Prairie Métis were an unavoidable choice, since they are the most numerous group in the country and the centre of the *Métis Nation*,¹⁹ whose long-standing historical existence is well recognised (RCAP, p. 206 & 232). I chose the Québec Métis for two main reasons: 1) they live in the space where some older ancestors of the earliest members of the Métis Nation originated (*idem*, p. 258); 2) and, the geopolitics of contemporary Québec gives a very special flavour to the situation of Other Métis in Canada. They are "a minority within a minority within a minority" (*idem*, p. 264) for they live in the only Canadian territory where three forms of nationality are expressed: the Canadian, *Québécoise/Canadienne*, and Aboriginal identities. The Québec Métis float among these nationalisms.

rights under Section 35 of the Constitution. This was the first time that Métis Aboriginal rights were *de jure* recognised by the highest court of the country.

¹⁸ It is not impossible that these records have the potential to reveal more than they seem to do, but a huge reexamination of them would probably take years to achieve.

¹⁹ The actual limits of the Métis Nation are not well settled and are a matter of discussion (RCAP, 1996). However, all Prairie Métis are part of it as opposed to Ontario and British Columbia Métis whose participation in the Métis Nation is partial and sometimes uncertain.

Throughout the thesis the reader will find that my arguments are based on very few primary sources and on basic archival work. I mostly rely on secondary sources, be they contemporary (such as oblates, travellers or scientist writings) or recent academic studies on Métis issues. The broad scope of my thesis is the rationale for this. It seemed impossible to do in-depth archival research for a thesis that covers most of Canadian history and two different fields of exploration, that is the Prairie provinces and Québec. It was appropriate, then, to take advantage of the considerable secondary sources. My approach, indeed, has the disadvantage of bringing little new evidence on the Métis for I mostly build my argumentation on others' work and conclusions. On the other hand, it has the advantage of offering a synthetic picture of what I consider to be an important geocultural layer of Canadian history and society, the Métis geography. The originality of my thesis lies with the historical exploration of this fundamental and recurrent geocultural layer of Canadian reality. Obviously, if my study had been limited to one specific time-space or one *métissage/anti-métissage* episode, it could hardly have emphasised the recurrence of Métis influence in Canadian society.

1.3 Thesis outline.

The maps and the cartographical shifts they reveal are the rationale behind my periodisation of the evolution of the Métis sense of territory and identity. This is the reason why, for example, I do not use the milestone date of 1821 — which is common for specialists of the fur trade²⁰ — for starting my exploration of the 19th century Métis in the Northwest; I rather use 1819 as it was the year Peter Fidler's map of the Red River district was published. Yet, my periodisation is broadly in accordance with Canadian historiography, exposing maps as products of specific socio-cultural contexts.

²⁰ See, for examples, Binnema *et al.* (2001), Brown (1980), Innis (1999), Judd & Ray (1980), and Ray (1998). This date corresponds to the merger of the HBC and its rival, the North West Company. This merger greatly affected the fur trade labour system, and following from that, the Métis who were an important part of the fur trade employees. According to Philip Goldring, the work force was cut in half in 1821 and was below 800 men, although it grew consistently thereafter (1980, p. 12).

This thesis comprises a historical part (chapters 2 to 4) and a contemporary section (chapters 5 and 6). Chapter 2 exposes cartographically the emergence of the Métis geographies in Québec (during the French Regime) and in the Northwest (post-Conquest), and its subsequent disappearance in Québec under British cartographical authorities. Maps prove to be central to the inscribing of the idea of *métissage* into European spatial discourse and ideology. Chapter 3 is devoted to the territoriality of the Prairie Métis during the “golden years” of the 19th century. The chapter is based on the juxtaposition of two methods of investigation: first, it explores Métis territorial markers as they are represented on colonial maps; second, it analyses Métis oral narratives in search of a more “internal” expression of the Métis sense of identity and territory. These two investigations establish the Métis reality as a dominant feature of the geography of the Northwest in the 19th century. Chapter 4 exposes the social and spatial marginality into which the Métis were confined during the first half of the 20th century. This period of Canadian Métis history is not explored in detail, the reasons for which are also given. Using Métis maps and the interviews I conducted with Québec Métis, I will see in chapter 5 (Prairie Métis) and chapter 6 (Québec Métis) how the contemporary Métis sense of territory has been affected by the rise of Canadian authorities’ interest for the socio-economic fate of the Métis and non-status Indians in the 1960s. In turn, I will also examine how this sense of territory affects the way the Métis self-identify today. If the Québec Métis sense of territory and identity confirms “in-betweenness” as the main criterion of definition, it seems that Prairie Métis self-definition relies more and more on a historical belonging to a specific territory.

* * *

The reader will find two chapters written in French (chapters 2 and 6). This is the result of a compromise between writing the thesis entirely in English — a language that still challenges me and often prevents the full expression of my intentions — or in French (my mother tongue), which proved to be difficult in the geographical and cultural context of this thesis. In spite of the difficulties of writing in two languages, this compromise turns out to be a “linguistic middle ground” that well suits a thesis on *métissage*.

Chapter 2: Le(s) métissage(s) en question: les réponses coloniales et cartographiques au Québec (1632-1857) et dans le Nord-Ouest (1785-1813).

Il eft fans exemple qu'aucun [des Sauvages] ait jamais pris la moindre liberté avec les Françoises, lors même qu'elles ont été leurs Prifonnieres. Ils n'en font pas même tentés, & il feroit à fouhaiter que les François euffent le même dégoût des Sauvageffes.

— *Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix*, Journal d'un voyage fait par ordre du roi dans l'Amérique Septentrionale.

Au milieu des établissemens français, les Indiens résidents furent toujours le très petit nombre. Et voilà qui dispose, de ce prétendu métissage des premiers colons de la Nouvelle-France avec les Peaux-Rouges du Canada, métissage dont la légende continue de courir en des milieux savants.

— *Chanoine Lionel Groulx*, La naissance d'une race.

Le Canada des premiers temps fut marqué par un décalage temporel fondamental entre l'expérience concrète d'un métissage biologique et culturel et l'introduction abstraite et réfléchie de cette expérience dans l'univers mental colonial. Alors que la traite des fourrures et l'interpénétration de l'univers européen et du monde autochtone qui en découle sont à l'origine d'un métissage *de facto* (Delâge, 1991, p. 17; Perrault, 1982, p. 86), les préconceptions anti-métisses freinèrent considérablement l'infiltration de l'Autre dans l'identitaire européen.

Par ailleurs, l'intensité et les formes prises par cet anti-métissage furent multiples, fluctuantes et ambiguës (l'épigraphie en témoigne). S'il était commodément admis que le Sauvage puisse se métisser, il n'était pas dit qu'il en allait ainsi de l'être «civilisé», fut-il Français, Britannique ou Canadien. À l'évidence, l'idéologie des peuples primitifs, laquelle prône la civilisation de ceux-ci, fut au cœur de l'anti-métissage en Amérique septentrionale.

La carte représente l'essence même de l'ambiguïté coloniale envers le métissage. D'une part, parce qu'elle se veut un compte-rendu objectif de la réalité géographique, la carte ne peut éviter d'enregistrer la manifestation naissante de la géographie métisse. D'autre part, parce qu'elle est une production socio-culturelle, elle est sujette aux préconceptions anti-métisses.

Dans un tel contexte, on comprend pourquoi la réalité métisse fait l'objet d'un manque flagrant de documentation, tant cartographique qu'historique, et qu'il soit d'ordinaire difficile d'identifier avec certitude les marqueurs territoriaux qui, sur la carte, devraient définir les frontières sociales et géographiques de l'identité métisse¹. En conséquence, l'objectif fondamental de ce chapitre sera d'illustrer, avec le concours de la carte, l'émergence de la géographie métisse, source de l'intermédialité et de la territorialité des populations sang-mêlées du Canada. Nous verrons aussi que la représentation cartographique de cette géographie est inégale dans l'espace-temps, car elle est parfois faite d'avancées appréciables et, d'autre fois et selon les cas, de reculs considérables. Au bout du compte, il apparaît que la carte eut un rôle essentiel à jouer dans l'intellection du métissage.

Notre exploration cartographique de la géographie métisse se fera en trois temps. Elle s'attardera, d'abord, à la cartographie de la Nouvelle-France. Dans un deuxième temps, notre analyse se concentrera sur la région des Prairies de la fin du XVIII^e siècle et du début du XIX^e siècle. Enfin, nous ferons un retour sur le territoire québécois pour scruter l'attitude du colonisateur britannique à l'égard de la cartographie et du fait métis.

2.1 Le métissage et la cartographie en Nouvelle-France (1632-1755).

La France entretient l'ambivalence dans ses rapports au métissage et à l'être métis en Amérique du Nord. Alors que le Métis remet dangereusement en question les conceptions socio-culturelles coloniales, il représente aussi un rouage essentiel à la présence française en Amérique. Ce double sens fait de lui un être à la fois redouté et un allié obligé, ce qui rendra les autorités coloniales incapables d'appliquer une politique arrêtée et cohérente à son égard. Cette valse hésitation coloniale trouve sur la carte son expression géographique.

¹ Les archéologues ont déjà soulevé ce type de problème dans l'analyse de la culture matérielle de certaines populations anciennes. Il est en effet parfois difficile d'identifier l'origine ethnique de certains artefacts, car ceux-ci sont souvent marqués d'influences culturelles multiples dues à des échanges interethniques. La théorie barthienne de l'ethnicité admet effectivement que les frontières sociales puissent se maintenir même si les critères culturels définissant un groupe se modifient.

2.1.1 Le métissage en Nouvelle-France: l'entre-deux d'un passage.

Aux yeux d'une Europe en expansion, le débarquement de Christophe Colomb sur l'île d'Hispaniola fut davantage une déception qu'une découverte. L'Amérique était une anomalie géographique, un obstacle sur la route des Indes et du Cathay — la Chine du Nord (Broc, 1980, p. 159; Litalien, 1993, p. 53; Morissonneau, 1996, pp. 222 & 225). Alors que les richesses aurifères incas consolèrent quelque peu les Conquistadors, l'Amérique septentrionale souffrait la comparaison, ce dont témoigne Jacques Cartier lui-même en 1534 lorsqu'il considère la Basse-Côte-Nord comme «la terre que Dieu donna à Caen»².

En raison d'un tel constat, il fallait bien contourner cette Amérique-obstacle, ou mieux encore, la traverser de bord en bord de manière à accoster enfin sur le littoral de cet Orient tant recherché. De cette pensée naîtra l'utopie géographique fondatrice de la Nouvelle-France: le Passage vers l'Ouest (la fameuse *Rivière de l'Ouest*)³. De continent-obstacle qu'elle fut d'abord à l'esprit d'outre-mer, l'Amérique devint, sans trop attendre, une terre de passage.

Le passage vers l'Ouest constitua l'impulsion première aux efforts de colonisation en Nouvelle-France (Morissonneau, 1996). Il appartenait à la France d'être la seule puissance coloniale à explorer, à prendre possession et à occuper les pourtours de ce passage dont le fleuve Saint-Laurent était tenu pour porte d'entrée. Cette considération géopolitique dicta, plus que les impératifs économiques, du moins au départ, l'implication coloniale dans le commerce des fourrures (White, 1991, p. 127). La traite fut une condition *sine qua non* aux alliances franco-indiennes, et de ces dernières dépendait la pénétration du fait français en Amérique et l'exploration du passage. Or, il ne saurait y avoir une pénétration française du continent sans l'essor d'un espace social d'accommodation mutuelle entre Amérindiens et Français, sans ce que Richard White a nommé le *middle ground* (*idem*).

² On peut supposer que les pêcheurs bretons et basques, lesquels exploitent les bancs de Terre-Neuve et du golfe Saint-Laurent au moment où Cartier explore l'«inconnu», ne partagent pas les dires du marin de Saint-Malo. Les paroles de Cartier ne traduisent pas les pensées du pêcheur de morue, mais celles de l'élite française — le roi en premier chef. Or, c'est cette élite qui produit les cartes de la Nouvelle-France.

³ Les Anglais eurent leur *Passage du Nord-Ouest* aux confins de l'Arctique, parce que les Français avaient opté avant eux pour le fleuve Saint-Laurent (Pastoureau, 1992, pp. 107 et 110).

2.1.1.1 Le Métis, une stratégie d'implantation coloniale: la création mentale d'un peuple nouveau.

Explorer et occuper le territoire n'exclut toutefois pas la nécessité de le peupler. Samuel de Champlain ne fut pas qu'un explorateur et un géographe, il fut aussi un administrateur colonial. Bien sûr, force est de constater que l'Amérique n'est pas tout à fait inhabitée. Cela dit, ceux qui la foulent depuis quelques millénaires ne sont que des païens et sauvages qu'il faudra convertir. Ce faisant, ils deviendront chrétiens, civilisés et sujets du roi de France.

La conversion du sauvage représente un double avantage. En plus d'assurer la suprématie du fait français, elle permettra de surmonter un problème majeur à la colonisation, celui de la faiblesse des effectifs européens. La colonisation de la Nouvelle-France a un prix que les autorités coloniales se refusent à payer, soit celui de dépeupler la vieille France en retour (Havard, 2003, p. 59). Afin d'éviter un tel écueil, on aura tôt fait d'entretenir une stratégie d'implantation humaine sur le mariage mixte entre Autochtones et non-Autochtones. L'idée derrière une telle stratégie de métissage est de fonder une nouvelle race (Dickason, 1985, p. 21; Trudel, 1960, p. 279). Le Métis, s'il est permis d'en parler ainsi, était voué à devenir un rouage important de l'entreprise française en Amérique septentrionale, à devenir un «pion» tactique sur l'échiquier longitudinal du passage vers l'Ouest.

Néanmoins, la conception intellectuelle que se faisait la France du métissage et des Métis fut bien fragmentaire. Il ne s'agissait pas de n'importe quel métissage ni de n'importe quel Métis. L'idée que le Métis puisse être à l'image du «sauvage païen» peuplant cette Amérique «primitive» n'était certes pas ce que les métropolitains avaient en tête. Le Métis officiel se devait d'être socialement et religieusement conforme, c'est-à-dire, à la fois d'allégeance française et catholique (Trudel, 1960, p. 278)⁴. Le père de Charlevoix rappelle ici le sérieux des mesures coloniales à l'égard de la religion:

⁴ Ils sont pourtant nombreux ces protestants qui retrouvent refuge dans villes protestantes et côtières de la France (La Rochelle, Brest, Saint-Malo *etc.*) et qui souhaitent fuir à jamais la répression religieuse qui a cours en Europe. L'accès à la vallée du Saint-Laurent leur sera refusé. Il ne saurait y avoir de Nouvelle-France digne de ce nom qui soit terre d'asile des «hérétiques» huguenots (Jacquin, 1987, p. 101; Pastoreau, 1992, p. 116). Cette nouvelle contrée sera catholique ou ne sera pas.

La Cour avoit donné des ordres très-précis pour empêcher qu'aucun Protestant ne passât dans la Nouvelle-France, & qu'on n'y permît l'exercice d'aucune autre Religion, que de la Catholique. [...] Les Missionnaires de leur côté se persuadoient qu'en fixant le centre de leurs Missions dans un Pays, qui étoit en même tems celui du Canada, il leur feroit aisé de porter la lumière de l'Evangile dans toutes les parties de ce vaste Continent [...] (1744a, [tome I], pp. 180 et 186)

Un tel métissage ne reposait pas sur une logique interculturelle. Il se présentait davantage comme une manœuvre d'implantation coloniale et comme une stratégie d'assimilation culturelle de l'élément indigène (Havard, 2003, p. 542). Paradoxalement, on peut qualifier cette conception coloniale de la relation autochtone/non-autochtone de profondément anti-métisse.

2.1.1.2 Le Métis, une réalité hors contrôle?

Une telle conception coloniale s'accorde mal à ce qu'on appellera la réalité des *marges coloniales*. Ces marges sont les régions géographiques adjacentes aux principaux lieux de la colonisation française — la vallée du Saint-Laurent et l'Acadie —, soit le Royaume du Saguenay, l'Outaouais, les Abitibis, la Mauricie, le Témiscouata *etc.* À ces marges plus immédiates, il faut aussi compter celles comprises dans les *pays d'en haut* — la région des Grands-Lacs, les bassins de la Grande Rivière (Mississippi), de l'Illinois, de la Belle Rivière (Ohio) et de la Ouabache (*Wabash River*) — et celles qui gravitent autour de l'embranchement des rivières Rouge et Assiniboine. L'Autochtone est, dans ces marges géoculturelles, une figure dominante et exerce une influence indubitable. Cette influence se traduit d'abord en termes matériel et politique. Comme le révèle Conrad Heidenreich, la pénétration européenne du continent ne fut possible que grâce à l'adoption des méthodes de transport existantes en Amérique du Nord, notamment le canot d'écorce (2001, p. 239). L'influence matérielle prend aussi une dimension démographique, laquelle est nettement à l'avantage de l'Indien. Contrairement aux treize colonies anglaises, la pénétration coloniale du fait français à l'intérieur du continent se fait au compte-goutte, quelques Européens à la fois, lesquels se retrouvent ainsi dispersés sur un vaste espace autochtone (Delâge, 1995). Cette réalité démographique eut d'ailleurs une incidence sur l'influence autochtone sur le plan politique. Trop peu nombreux pour s'imposer par le nombre, il ne resta aux autorités coloniales qu'une seule alternative à l'obtention des droits de passage nécessaires à la pénétration continentale, soit celle de gagner la confiance

des nations autochtones par voie d'alliance et de s'impliquer ainsi dans les conflits intertribaux existants (Heidenreich, 2001, p. 241).

L'exploration du continent met à jour un autre type d'influence, informationnelle celle-là, et qui s'avère centrale à l'édifice cartographique européen. À la fois orale et cartographique (Lewis, 1998; Harley, 1992), l'information géographique des populations indigènes est à la carte coloniale ce que les dévotions sont aux missionnaires. L'expérience directe qu'a l'Europe de l'intérieur du continent est alors beaucoup trop modeste pour appuyer à elle seule la production cartographique. Ainsi, même un explorateur de la trempe de Champlain dut recourir aux truchements⁵ — notamment Étienne Brûlé et Jean Nicolet — et à des informateurs autochtones.

Enfin, tout aussi crucial à notre propos est l'attraction qu'exerce l'univers symbolique autochtone sur l'élément eurogène. Malgré tous les efforts investis par les pères missionnaires à la conversion autochtone, il semble y avoir davantage de Français qui s'ensauvagent dans les marges coloniales que d'Indiens qui se christianisent dans l'ensemble de la Nouvelle-France (Jacquin, 1987; Trudel, 1960, p. 280). Les marges coloniales devinrent l'espace de prédilection d'un «colon» bien singulier, soit le *coureur de bois*⁶. Bien que le gros de ses activités soient concentrées dans les pays d'en haut, le coureur de bois opère également dans les régions périphériques du Québec (Johnson & Martijn, 1994, p. 33). Cet individu qui prend souvent femme parmi les Premières Nations, devient particulièrement perméable aux manières de faire et de penser autochtones, ce qu'affirme le père de Charlevoix: «M. de Dénonville revient en fuite aux Coureurs de Bois, dont il dit que le nombre est tel, qu'il dépeuple le Pays des meilleurs Hommes, les rend indociles, indisciplinables, débauchés, & que leurs Enfants élevés comme des Sauvages» (1744a, [tome I], p. 371 & 532-533).

Le jésuite, comme tous les missionnaires et les commentateurs français de l'époque, a possiblement exagéré l'ensauvagement du coureur de bois (Beaudet, 1994; Delâge, 1991, p. 21). Faut-il s'en étonner? Après tout, l'univers mental européen, du moins celui dont l'élite se fait le

⁵ Français qu'on envoie parmi les tribus autochtones pour qu'ils puissent en apprendre la langue et servir d'interprètes à la solde coloniale.

⁶ De manière spécifique, le coureur de bois est un traiteur indépendant — lequel sera souvent associé à la traite illégale (Nute, 1955, p. 7) — qui commerce avec les Indiens des marges coloniales. Nous faisons toutefois un usage générique et incluons par ce terme, en plus du traiteur indépendant, tous les engagés (employés de la traite) et les truchements ayant vécu parmi les populations autochtones (Beaudet, 1994, p. 2-3). C'est cette acceptation générale qui prône aux tous débuts chez les commentateurs européens (Dickason, 1996, p. 84 ; Jacquin, 1987, p. 177).

porteur officiel, a du mal à concevoir l'existence d'une culture d'entre-deux comme celle qui se développe dans les marges coloniales. Les missionnaires et les administrateurs — qu'ils se trouvent à Paris, à Québec ou à Michilimackinac — perçoivent la rencontre franco-indienne comme le résultat d'une mise en opposition entre le monde civilisé et l'état primitif et sont convaincus de la supériorité matérielle, culturelle et spirituelle du premier (Delâge, 1992, p. 151). Ils ne savent donc pas trop quoi penser de cet individu déjà trop indien pour être considéré civilisé, mais encore suffisamment européen pour ne pas être confondu complètement au «pur» sauvage américain.

Cela fait-il du Canadien un Métis? Encore faudrait-il que tous les Canadiens aient été coureurs de bois. Plusieurs d'entre eux, la majorité en fait, furent d'abord et avant tout des «habitants». Si, comme l'affirme l'historienne Louise Dechêne (1974) dans *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVII^e siècle*, plusieurs colons du Canada s'engagèrent dans la traite des fourrures, ce ne fut généralement qu'une mesure temporaire visant à amasser le capital nécessaire à l'implantation permanente et agraire dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent (*idem*, p. 487). C'est donc que la course des bois, aussi importante fut-elle à l'exploitation de la ressource pelletière, aux relations franco-indiennes et à la pénétration continentale, n'en fut pas moins un fait marginal, et cela même au début alors que les effectifs coloniaux accusaient un net déficit féminin dans le ratio homme-femme (Dechêne, 1974, p. 98-99; Dickason, 1985). Le métissage et l'influence autochtone n'affectèrent pas tous et chacun de la même façon en Nouvelle-France. Si l'influence matérielle autochtone pénétra profondément les mœurs des colons du Saint-Laurent et de la baie Française en Acadie (Delâge, 1992, p. 110-136; Moussette, 2002) — comme en témoigne l'usage du canot d'écorce, des raquettes et de la «traîne sauvage» (Eccles, 1983, p. 24) — l'assimilation symbolique de la culture autochtone eut un impact beaucoup plus limité. Comme l'indique le sociologue Denys Delâge, la plupart des colons français au Canada n'abandonnèrent point leur religion pour adopter et pratiquer une spiritualité autochtone. Les individus ayant emprunté, ne serait-ce que partiellement, les coutumes, les religions et les modes de pensée autochtones représenteraient donc l'exception plutôt que la règle (1995, p. 60 & 62).

Aussi marginal fut-il, le métissage symbolique ne fut pourtant pas un phénomène sans importance. Pour Nicolas van Schendel, le coureur de bois a joué (et joue toujours!) un rôle aussi considérable dans l'imaginaire identitaire canadien que l'habitant. En fait, pour l'auteur, la canadianité repose dès le départ sur une dialectique identitaire: d'une part, l'identité mosaïque,

qui juxtapose et fait cohabiter des ethnicités distinctes et étanches (le Français, le Canadien, ou l'Indien) et personnifiée par cet habitant enraciné et isolé dans les argiles péri-glaciaires du Saint-Laurent; et d'autre part, l'identité métisse du coureur de bois, figure marginale qui se construit sur les chevauchements culturels et l'ouverture à l'Autre ou au sauvage. Le coureur de bois décentralise donc la territorialité canadienne en ramenant les marges autochtones dans l'univers territorial et identitaire du Canadien.

Métis ou pas, le coureur de bois pose bien des problèmes, d'ordre conceptuel comme mentionné ci-dessus, et d'ordre politique. Non seulement le coureur de bois ensauvagé est-il un être imprévu et «illégitime» aux yeux des métropolitains, mais de plus, son intermédialité lui permet de s'imposer dans l'univers d'entre-deux de la géographie métisse. Essentiellement laissé à lui-même — si ce n'est que de la présence spirituelle somme toute modeste des missionnaires — le coureur de bois est pourvu d'un pouvoir croissant dans les marges coloniales qui n'est pas sans créer un sentiment de crainte en France (Perrault, 1982, p. 92 ; White, 1991, p. 69 & 214). Ainsi, après l'avoir reconnu coupable de détournement d'intentions coloniales, les intendants de la Nouvelle-France tentèrent périodiquement de mettre un terme à la domination du coureur de bois en limitant ses pérégrinations dans les marges coloniales (par l'émission des *congés*, ces licences de traite, par exemple) et en sanctionnant les contrevenants (Dickason, 1985, p. 25; Innis, 1999, p. 67; Jacquin, 1987, p. 174; Perreault, 1982).

Manquant de cohérence et de continuité, de telles mesures disciplinaires et coercitives n'atteignirent jamais l'effet dissuasif qu'on leur souhaitait et ne réussirent, au mieux, qu'à favoriser l'émergence d'un commerce illégal avec les colonies britanniques au sud (Eccles, 1983, p. 137). En réalité, la France se rendit compte, graduellement, qu'elle ne pouvait mettre un point final au coureur de bois et redéfinir la géographie métisse selon les termes de ses propres idéologies spatiales et ethniques sans risquer de voir son empire américain s'écrouler (Havard, 2003, p. 782; White, 1991, p. 318). Éliminer le coureur de bois se traduirait presque aussitôt en pertes stratégiques dans les contrées où s'exerçaient l'essentiel de la traite et les alliances franco-indiennes. C'est ce contexte qui explique en grande partie l'incohésion des mesures établies pour contrer les activités du coureur de bois et l'irrégularité avec laquelle ces mesures furent appliquées (Perrault, 1982, p. 90-93).

En somme, le coureur de bois constitue une anomalie dans la conception que se fait la France de sa relation au monde autochtone. Qu'un individu (ou un groupe d'individus) puisse s'immiscer entre l'Indien et l'Européen et tirer profit de cet entre-deux n'était pas prévu au programme. Les autorités coloniales réussissent bien un peu à ramener un tel individu sous contrôle colonial, à bénéficier de son intermédiation et à faire ainsi des gains géopolitiques et géoculturels sur les territoires de traite (Delâge, 1992, p.146; Havard, 2003, p. 407; White, 1991, p. 215 & 231). Mais à ce petit jeu, comme nous l'avons dit en introduction, l'Indien ne s'en laisse pas imposer, car lui aussi tire avantage de l'influence du coureur de bois qu'il va même jusqu'à faire chef dans certains cas (Hébert, 1984, p. 432; White, 1991, p. 213)⁷. C'est donc dire que l'être métissé est une arme à double tranchant qui ne se laisse pas aisément manipuler (Delâge, 1992, p. 146).

2.1.2 La cartographie du métissage?

La cartographie française du continent affiche une semblable anomalie. De manière générale, elle est le reflet du projet géographique colonial et des perceptions spatiales et ethniques qui le supportent. Les cartes s'adressent à un public européen et la plupart d'entre elles sont même produites en France par des «géographes de cabinet» n'ayant jamais foulé l'Amérique. Les éléments européens et amérindiens sont très bien différenciés dans l'espace, mais aussi hiérarchisés de manière à présenter la civilisation européenne comme il se doit, c'est-à-dire au dessus du monde primitif américain. En ce sens, la carte crée *«an artificial image that gave America an European Identity. [...] cartography helped to invent America in the European consciousness»* (Harley, 1992, p. 530). En revanche, nous soutenons que la carte révèle aussi, en filigrane, une image hybride de la réalité géographique qu'elle représente et qui affiche, au mépris des conceptions coloniales, l'existence d'une géographie métisse.

Évidemment, les cartes néo-françaises répondent à une variété de fonctions et furent donc produites à diverses échelles. Il y a toutefois une dominance visuelle qui s'observe, soit celle des cartes à petite échelle, lesquelles permettent d'apprécier l'expansion spatiale de l'entreprise

⁷ Cela s'entend, le commerce des fourrures ne dépend pas uniquement du bon vouloir du coureur de bois, mais aussi des sphères d'influence que les postes de traite ont pour fonction d'exercer. Toutefois, la présence française dans les

coloniale française en Amérique ainsi que le développement graduel du savoir géographique français. Ainsi, malgré un nombre non négligeable de cartes à grande échelle — plans de Québec (Harris, 1987, planche 49) ou les cartes des seigneuries de Gédéon de Catalogne (1709) par exemple — la plupart des cartes s'attachent à la représentation de superficies plus importantes du territoire. Il en va ainsi des quatre cartes sélectionnées pour cette analyse: la carte de Samuel de Champlain (1632, Figure 2.1), celle de Guillaume Del'Isle (1703, Figure 2.2), celle de Philippe Buache (1742, Figure 2.3), et celle de Didier Robert de Vaugondy (1755, Figure 2.4).

2.1.2.1 Les idéologies socio-spatiales, l'identité mosaïque et les discours anti-métis.

À prime abord, on pourrait dire que l'assimilation de l'Indien ne revêt pas un souci particulier pour le cartographe. Au contraire, l'Indien est fort présent dans la cartographie néo-française. La visibilité de la réalité autochtone est d'ailleurs appréciable sur chacune des quatre cartes ici à l'étude. N'importe laquelle de ces cartes est truffée de toponymes autochtones et de noms de nations. S'ajoutent parfois à cela des commentaires révélateurs, comme celui qu'appose Champlain sur sa représentation: *Lieu ou les fauuaiges font fecherie de framboife, et blues tous les ans*. De plus, nombreuses sont les cartes qui présentent une iconographie assez fidèle à la différence culturelle de l'Indien (les images de tipis qui parsèment la carte de Champlain et de Del'Isle par exemple) et qui intensifie ainsi sa présence cartographique. La cartouche de Del'Isle, laquelle expose des tableaux de la vie quotidienne de l'Indien, est probablement le meilleur exemple de l'importance graphique du fait autochtone sur la cartographie néo-française⁸.

Le fait est que la carte répond à un objectif premier beaucoup plus terre à terre. La conversion de l'Autochtone est un projet de longue haleine et dans l'immédiat, ce qui importe, c'est d'en savoir plus long sur la géographie du continent. La carte de la Nouvelle-France répond d'abord à une fonction de synthèse. Elle sert à rendre intelligible ce vaste continent (Boudreau, Courville & Séguin, 1997) et à établir les stratégies d'établissement en Canada — à définir les

marges coloniales demeure ponctuelle et elle n'arrive que partiellement à contrôler les comportements des Indiens et des coureurs de bois.

⁸ Le lecteur trouvera dans la carte du jésuite italien Francesco Bressani (1657) une iconographie «autochtone» encore plus abondante.

sites où les forts seront construits par exemple (Havard, 2000, p. 17) — en vue d'imposer l'élément colonial à la géopolitique du continent.

Et pourtant, l'assimilation du fait autochtone est au cœur même de la production cartographique. Non pas parce que la carte a pour but de faire disparaître l'Indien — même s'il disparaissait sur la carte, cela ne l'éliminerait pas dans l'espace — mais parce qu'elle est tout simplement le reflet des représentations socio-spatiales existantes⁹. Si la carte constitue un système de savoir, c'est qu'elle s'appuie sur les vérités acceptées et légitimées par la société d'origine du cartographe (Harley, 1992, p. 528). Elle permet donc à la France d'assimiler mentalement le sauvage, avant même qu'une telle conversion ne se produise. La carte anticipe (Clayton, 2000; Harley, 1988). Cette capacité prédictive de la carte est primordiale à une compréhension de l'univers colonial et cartographique à l'époque de la Nouvelle-France.

Cette assimilation mentale pourrait d'ailleurs expliquer pourquoi plusieurs cartographes n'éprouvent aucune difficulté à avouer leurs sources autochtones, ce que fait Samuel de Champlain dans ses écrits (Morissonneau, 1996, p. 225) et Guillaume Del'Isle sur sa carte de 1701: «*Sources du Misissipi suivant le rapport des Sauvages*» (Figure 2.2). Le fait qu'une telle confession puisse mettre en relief l'influence du sauvage sur le Français ne semble pas affecter les cartographes. En fait, à l'instar de Barbara Belyea (1992a) et de Malcolm Lewis (1986), on peut dire que l'information autochtone qui se retrouve sur la carte a été, au préalable, traduite et assimilée, pour être ensuite intégrée au savoir cartographique et géographique européen. Une fois une telle opération mentale réalisée, l'origine de l'information importe peu, en autant qu'elle permette d'alimenter le savoir géographique dont la France a tant besoin pour établir son hégémonie territoriale. Le cartographe ne s'intéresse pas à l'information autochtone pour ce qu'elle pourrait révéler sur l'occupation spatiale et sur la relation spécifique que l'Indien entretient avec l'espace, mais pour rendre intelligible et faire entrer dans l'univers mental européen une réalité qui lui était jusqu'alors étrangère. Faisant appel à l'image, la carte connecte l'inconnu à l'imaginaire européen et est primordiale au processus d'intellection.

Cette assimilation informationnelle se confirme d'ailleurs avec la disparition visuelle et progressive de l'Autochtone — un phénomène que Brian Harley a qualifié sous le terme de

silence cartographique (1992, p. 531). À mesure que se concrétisent la pénétration et l'implantation françaises sur le continent, et à mesure que s'amenuise la dépendance informationnelle envers les premiers occupants, la visibilité autochtone s'estompe. Ce fait est évident si l'on compare la carte de Champlain en 1632 et celle de Vaugondy en 1755 (Figure 2.1 & 2.4). Bien que l'Indien occupe toujours une place considérable sur la carte de Vaugondy — mentions des nations autochtones et nombreux toponymes — cela n'a aucune commune mesure avec l'espace que lui accorde le fondateur de Québec. Champlain représente avec moult détails l'emprise matérielle du monde autochtone sur le continent, comme en témoignent ces icônes représentant des champs en culture et ceux rappelant les habitations amérindiennes (les maisons longues iroquoïennes et les tipis algonquiens).

Une attention plus particulière à la carte de Champlain révèle cependant un élément étonnant qui met en relief la subtilité avec laquelle s'expriment parfois les idéologies coloniales. L'icône représentant les champs en culture rappelle davantage la manière linéaire et géométrique d'organiser les terres cultivées en Europe qu'elle ne révèle les techniques agraires autochtones. L'organisation spatiale des cultures iroquoïennes se faisaient généralement sous la forme de buttes où étaient regroupés l'ensemble des produits cultivés, à savoir les *trois soeurs*: la courge, le maïs et le haricot. De plus, l'agriculture autochtone était généralement accompagnée d'activités complémentaires telles la cueillette, la chasse et la pêche, une réalité que l'icône de Champlain garde sous silence (Rousseau, 1960, p. 45). Il est bien possible que le cartographe ait choisi cet icône parce qu'il le savait intelligible à un esprit européen. Ce faisant, il s'assurait que son lectorat ait une compréhension évidente de l'usage des terres dans ces régions de l'Amérique. En contrepartie, cette image peut aussi vouloir suggérer qu'un Indien cultivateur était en quelque sorte un Indien en phase d'assimilation. Chose certaine, la carte de Champlain établit une hiérarchie visuelle parmi les différentes tribus autochtones et accorde une attention plus approfondie aux populations pratiquant l'agriculture. S'il est difficile d'interpréter avec certitude les intentions du Saint-Ongeais, l'effet visuel reste sans conteste.

La cartouche de Del'Isle (Figure 2.2) peut être ré-analysée sur les bases du même constat. La présence de l'Indien ne se veut ni fortuite et ni la preuve exclusive de l'influence autochtone. Dans une perspective coloniale, elle est l'expression de la suprématie de la civilisation

⁹ Là repose l'essentiel du «pouvoir de la carte», soit sa faculté de jeter de la lumière sur les conceptions territoriales

européenne. Ce qui se retrouve au-dessus de l'Autochtone représente le pouvoir suprême, à la fois temporel (comme en témoignent les armes du Roi) et à la fois spirituel, comme l'illustre ces scènes de conversion et de baptême. Ces scènes exposent le passage ascendant du sauvage à la civilisation.

L'icône de Champlain et la cartouche de Del'Isle établissent la hiérarchie coloniale et la suprématie du fait français sur le fait autochtone. La représentation des forts, ces ambassadeurs du fait colonial au cœur de l'espace autochtone, en offre une autre illustration. Il s'agit d'observer les icônes que Buache utilise pour saisir l'emphase que celui-ci met sur la présence européenne dans l'espace (Figure 2.3); l'icône représentant les forts *Bourbon, la Reine, Maurepas* ou *S^t Charles* ne fait pas la part belle à celui identifiant le *village sauvage de Poskoyac*, situé tout juste à l'ouest du lac Bourbon (près de Le Pas au Manitoba). L'édification des postes de traite avait pour but de surimposer les impératifs coloniaux à la géographie autochtone en tentant d'influencer les comportements spatiaux et commerciaux dans les marges coloniales; les autorités coloniales espéraient ainsi convaincre les nations autochtones de se ré-établir à proximité de ces postes (Havard, 2000, p. 13-14; Havard, 2003, p. 283, 295 & 298). Or, si l'influence des forts tend à se consolider dans le temps — notamment au XVIII^e siècle (Havard, 2000 p. 15 & 17) — il est clair que la carte anticipe et amplifie le succès tangible de l'emprise française des marges coloniales. Contrairement à ce que laissent supposer ces icônes, rares sont les postes de traite qui s'apparentent à des forteresses imprenables, la plupart n'étant que de modestes constructions parfois même inocuppées (Eccles, 1983, p. 7; Havard, 2000, p. 14). Une telle représentation laisse aussi sous silence le fait que ces postes de traite doivent une bonne part de leur existence aux Autochtones qui les acceptent sur leurs territoires (Delâge, 1995, p. 59) et le fait qu'ils sont volontairement situés dans des endroits où les Autochtones sont dominants, c'est-à-dire sur des points de passage, des lieux d'habitation ou de campement et des sites sacrés (Havard, 2003, p. 230-234). En bref, la carte de Buache évoque la suprématie visuelle des forts, et avec elle, celle du contrôle français de l'espace américain; par surcroît, la carte met en scène l'effacement relatif du fait autochtone.

Malgré tout, l'effacement de l'Indien demeure toujours incomplet et sa présence toujours aussi considérable, un fait qui met en relief la vision mosaïque de l'identité, pierre angulaire des

conceptions coloniales en Amérique. En faisant entrer l'Autre, ce sauvage, dans l'imaginaire européen, la carte expose, par la même occasion, des catégories spatiales et ethniques distinctes qui dessinent dans l'espace cartographique des sphères culturelles opposées où l'ouverture à l'Autre semble symboliquement impossible. Il devient ainsi *de visu* difficile de confondre l'espace culturel découlant de la mention des *Chekoutimiens*, des *Piekouagamiens* ou des *Anciens Algonquins* sur la carte de Vaugondy (Figure 2.4), et la sphère symbolique dessinée par la croix (Québec) marquant la présence catholique et coloniale dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent. La toponymie offre un autre exemple de ce cloisonnement ethnique. Alors que les toponymes eurogènes se concentrent surtout dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent et en Acadie, les noms de lieux autochtones sont en dominance sur le reste de l'image cartographique.

L'image mosaïque laisse bien peu d'espace pour autre chose, pour la représentation de cet espace d'entre-deux d'où émerge le fait métis. Cet impact visuel est d'autant plus considérable du fait que le vide est pratiquement inexistant sur ces cartes: il est parfois rempli par des toponymes autochtones, des icônes représentant la végétation (carte de Del'Isle et celle de Champlain), *etc.*; il est d'autres fois camouflé par des éléments satellites de la représentation cartographique tels que la cartouche de Del'Isle ou le carton *Supplément Pour les Lacs du Canada* de Vaugondy. L'espace résiduel, celui-là même où les groupes Métis risqueraient le plus de s'affirmer, est pour ainsi dire évincé de la carte.

2.1.2.2 L'influence de l'Autochtone et l'hybridité cartographique.

Un second regard sur ces sphères culturelles permet toutefois de saisir une réalité concomitante à l'image dominante de la mosaïque, soit une *image hybride*. Si ces sphères sont présentées, comme nous venons de la voir, à la manière de faits cloisonnés et indépendants, force est d'admettre que les limites respectives de ces sphères ne sont pas toujours bien définies et qu'elles ouvrent la porte à un enchevêtrement des faits autochtone et français. Faut-il s'étonner de ce lien à première vue paradoxal entre l'image mosaïque, expression de la différence et des catégories ethniques, et l'image hybride, indice visuel de l'interpénétration culturelle, de l'ouverture à l'autre et de la réalité métisse? Pas du tout selon Sylvie Kandé, un professeur de littérature, pour qui l'idée du métissage des cultures ne peut naître que d'un monde où la différence entre les identitaires est d'abord mise en relief (1999, p. 31). Pour Kandé,

l'identification des cultures doit précéder leur mélange, car l'ouverture à l'Autre suppose d'emblée que l'on s'en distingue. Pareillement, l'intrication visuelle des réalités autochtone et française n'est possible qu'après les avoir différenciées et compartimentées dans leur espace respectif.

Une relecture de la nomenclature toponymique permet de voir en quoi celle-ci est la marque d'une telle hybridité cartographique. Au-delà de la tendance générale, qui fait de la toponymie un élément à la source de l'image mosaïque, on se rend bien compte qu'il existe plusieurs brèches dans les limites spatiales que dessinent les différents univers toponymiques. Ces brèches dévoilent un espace de transition où se mélangent les noms de lieux d'origine différente et qui permet la cohabitation des saints catholiques («Saint-Laurent» en l'occurrence) et «des seins» sauvages — *Tadoussac* signifiant «mamelles» dans la langue algonquienne. Du reste, une telle intrication symbolique culmine dans les marges coloniales les plus immédiates tels le royaume du Saguenay, le Témiscouata, le Richelieu, l'Outaouais, la Mauricie et ainsi de suite.

Le deuxième indice de l'image hybride de la carte est de nature graphique. L'information cartographique autochtone, bien qu'assimilée au savoir européen, demeure identifiable sur la carte coloniale. Selon le spécialiste de la cartographie autochtone, Malcolm Lewis, les endroits de la carte où les détails physiques apparaissent schématiques, où les lacs semblent géométriques et où les réseaux hydrographiques montrent une facture simple et hiérarchique (1986, pp. 9 et 23-27) représentent des preuves indirectes de l'assimilation européenne du savoir cartographique des premiers Américains. Ce que traduisent ces formes géométriques — ces «*Beads on a String*» pour faire usage de l'expression consacrée (Ruggles, 1991, p. 66) — c'est la nature topologique du savoir cartographique autochtone (Lewis, 1980, p. 15; Lewis, 1987, p. 559). Contrairement au modèle topographique de la carte européenne, laquelle s'attache au respect des distances et aux spécificités physiques (les méandres d'une rivière par exemple), la carte amérindienne s'intéresse davantage à l'arrangement relatif des différents éléments physiques qu'elle représente. Ce qui importe à l'Indien, ce n'est pas la distance précise entre deux lacs, mais le positionnement de chacun de ces lacs l'un par rapport à l'autre. La nature topologique des cartes autochtones favorise l'inscription mentale de la carte, une condition essentielle aux cultures orales de l'Amérique. Or, si l'identification de la représentation autochtone est parfois évidente (l'extrême ouest de la carte de Del'Isle ou la partie nord de la carte de Champlain par exemple), elle est

dans d'autres cas incertaine. Que penser, en effet, du Saguenay de Vaugondy ou de l'Outaouais de Del'Isle qui, dans un cas comme dans l'autre, affichent une représentation somme toute incomplète et schématique de régions qui, pourtant, accusent une activité coloniale non négligeable? Que dire encore du réseau hydrographique autour du *Lac Ouinipigon* [lac Winnipeg] sur la carte de Buache, une région dont la connaissance résulte à la fois de l'exploration des Lavérendryes et de l'information autochtone¹⁰? On voit bien que l'image cartographique se situe à mi-chemin entre le caractère géodésique du savoir cartographique européen et la nature topologique des cartes autochtones. C'est justement ce «clair-obscur», cette ambivalence visuelle à l'égard de l'origine de l'information, qui ajoute à l'hybridité cartographique.

Ce n'est pas un hasard si l'intrication visuelle entre l'élément autochtone et le fait français se concentre dans les marges coloniales les plus immédiates — celles qui côtoient le Saint-Laurent (le Saguenay, l'Outaouais, la Mauricie ou le Témiscouata) et celles qui avoisinent les postes de traite des pays d'en-haut et du Nord-Ouest — parce que c'est justement là où s'opère le plus gros de l'interaction entre Autochtones et Européens et que s'exprime en premier lieu la géographie métisse en Nouvelle-France. L'image hybride est à la carte ce que l'identité métisse est au discours colonial, une réalité marginale mais incontournable.

En dépit de sa présence timide, l'image hybride témoigne à elle seule du rôle primordial que jouent les cartes de la Nouvelle-France dans l'avènement du métissage franco-indien et dans l'émergence de la géographie métisse. On doit le métissage à la pénétration française de l'espace autochtone et à un certain équilibre du pouvoir d'influence dans les marges coloniales. Si les postes de traite constituèrent la charpente matérielle et stratégique de cette pénétration, on sait que la carte fut essentielle à la mise en place d'une telle charpente. C'est grâce à l'information géographique que la carte contient que les autorités coloniales sont en mesure d'évaluer le progrès de la marche française dans les marges coloniales et d'identifier les lieux les plus propices (et nécessaires) à l'établissement de nouveaux postes. Dès lors, tous les yeux de la France sont rivés sur l'hybridité cartographique, car elle seule fait état à la fois de la prise de contrôle coloniale et de la subsistance de l'influence autochtone dans ces marges. L'image

¹⁰ On sait que l'information géographique des routes reliant les lacs Supérieur et Winnipeg repose pour beaucoup sur une carte produite par le Cri Ochagach. La Vérendrye a reproduit cette carte en 1728-1729. Il existe plusieurs autres

hybride n'est donc pas seulement en aval des processus de métissage, c'est-à-dire le reflet cartographique d'une géographie métisse préexistante; elle est aussi, en tant qu'instrument principal de la stratégie coloniale, en amont de ces mécanismes d'interaction interculturelle et a sa part de responsabilité dans l'émergence et le développement du *middle ground* franco-indien.

2.2 Le métissage et la cartographie britannique du Nord-Ouest (1785-1814).

Pour l'Euro-Canadien de la fin du XVIIIe-début XIXe siècle, le Nord-Ouest est une vaste contrée riche en fourrures pouvant engendrer une part régulière de bénéfices. À l'instar du Régime français, l'interaction avec le monde autochtone est nécessaire — celui-ci demeure le premier fournisseur de fourrures — et le métissage est toujours une résultante incontournable de cette interaction. À la différence de la Nouvelle-France, toutefois, les processus anti-métis ne résultent pas de positions officielles imposées par un ordre politique supérieur, mais plutôt d'un amalgame bigarré de perceptions personnelles et communes colorées par l'origine sociale de l'individu ou de la collectivité (Van Kirk, 1980).

Le contexte dans lequel s'inscrit la relation Autochtones/non-Autochtones dans le Nord-Ouest confère aussi au métissage une portée symbolique beaucoup moins chargée en opposition. Dans un premier temps, l'occupation du territoire n'est pas épaulée par un projet civilisateur. Les premières congrégations religieuses, catholique et anglicane, n'arrivent qu'à partir de 1818 (pour l'Église catholique) dans la jeune colonie de la Rivière-Rouge. Il faudra même quelques décennies avant qu'elles n'étendent leurs tentacules spirituelles en dehors de la colonie et mettent sur pied des missions volantes et permanentes dans tout le Nord-Ouest. La relation euro-autochtone ne fut donc pas, du moins officiellement, embrouillée par un bagage idéologique imposant l'assimilation du primitif comme une condition *sine qua non* de l'occupation européenne. Dans un deuxième temps, la présence euro-canadienne dans le Nord-Ouest ne se fonde pas sur une entreprise colonisatrice; les colons ne sont pas invités, comme c'est le cas dans l'Est du pays, à venir s'installer et à cultiver les terres disponibles¹¹. En fait, l'arrivée massive de

cartes semblables à celle de Buache et produites à la même époque dont celle de de Bellin (1752), de La Vérendrye (1737) et celle de son neveu la Jemeraye (1733).

¹¹ Il faut préciser que les conditions se prêtent difficilement à une telle entreprise. Si les terres sont fertiles et déjà dépouillées de végétation arborescente, l'isolement et la difficulté que pose le transport limitent les ouvertures aux

colons serait néfaste à une entreprise qui se veut d'abord et avant tout commerciale. En effet, si la traite des fourrures exerce une pression énorme sur les territoires de chasse autochtones et leurs ressources, elle a le mérite de s'appuyer sur les activités et l'occupation territoriale traditionnelles autochtones¹². En revanche, la mise en culture des territoires représentait un risque à l'émergence de luttes d'espace entre eurogènes et indigènes, comme cela fut d'ailleurs le cas aux États-Unis. Dans l'ensemble, la domination de la géographie de la traite des fourrures et l'absence de politique coloniale à proprement dit ont favorisé la concordance et la complémentarité des intérêts autochtones et euro-canadiens dans le Nord-Ouest et ainsi réuni des conditions presque idéales en faveur du métissage.

2.2.1 La géographie métisse: Le Nord-Ouest, une terre de renaissance.

C'est dans ce contexte et sur les cendres du vieux métissage franco-indien — qui s'est étendu à la suite des poussées exploratoires des Lavérendryes, de par les lacs de Bois et de Pluie, jusqu'aux contreforts des *Montagnes de Roches Brillantes* — qu'une nouvelle géographie métisse prendra forme dans le Nord-Ouest. Il faut dire que les cendres laissées par l'abandon des alliances franco-indiennes dans les années post-conquêtes sont toujours chaudes au moment où, au début des années 1760, l'intérêt britannique pour cette région se manifeste et la reprise des activités de traite s'amorce (Giraud, 1945, p. 210). Le père Morice recense quelques-uns de ces Canadiens déjà présents dans l'Ouest avant que n'arrivent les premiers contingents de la *Compagnie de la Baie-d'Hudson* (CBH) et de la *Compagnie du Nord-Ouest* (CNO). Le frère oblat mentionne ainsi Fleurimond, probablement né en 1735 d'une mère siousse, et François Beaulieu, né en 1771 d'une femme montagnaise (1938, p. 13-14): «François avait douze ans lorsqu'il vit arriver le premier blanc du Grand Lac des Esclaves, et, vers la fin de 1792, il dut pour la première fois se séparer de son père, qui allait accompagner Alexander Mackenzie...» (*idem*, p. 14).

marchés où pourraient être écoulés d'éventuels surplus agricoles. Pour l'essentiel, ces colonies se devraient d'être autosuffisantes.

¹² Bien sûr, comme le montre Arthur Ray dans *Indians in the Fur trade* (1998), la traite des fourrures apporta aussi de nombreuses modifications dans les géographies autochtones (migrations, nouvelles activités économiques, etc.). Néanmoins, la traite reposait largement sur le maintien des activités économiques ancestrales autochtones (notamment la chasse et la fabrication du pemmican) et était assujettie à plusieurs autres pratiques d'ordre socio-culturel telles que les cérémonies d'échange de cadeaux.

L'historienne Jennifer Brown a retracé, quant à elle, l'existence avant 1770 d'une quinzaine d'alliances maritales interethniques au sein de la CBH impliquant généralement des officiers. Si ce type d'alliance fut d'abord condamné, il se normalisa vers la fin du XVIII^e siècle, époque à laquelle il se mit à jouer un rôle plus considérable dans la stratégie commerciale de la compagnie (Brown, 1980, p. 52-80). Ce changement d'attitude était commandé par l'amplification, dans le Nord-Ouest, de la compétition commerciale que la France avait amorcée au milieu du XVIII^e siècle. Les traiteurs anglo-écossais, lesquels opéraient à partir de Montréal une variété de compagnies dont plusieurs se regroupèrent en 1783 sous l'enseigne unique de la CNO, étaient à l'origine de cette reprise appuyée de la concurrence. Reprenant les anciennes routes de traite françaises, la CNO fit des mariages interethniques la pierre d'assise de son établissement commercial dans le Nord-Ouest. Il était en effet coutume parmi les bourgeois et parmi les engagés canadiens (qui composaient l'essentiel de la main-d'œuvre) de prendre femme au pays et d'ainsi s'allier aux bandes autochtones (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 4).

Pourtant, ces alliances maritales ne furent pas le gage de l'acceptation sans condition du métissage par l'élément européen. La vie sociale dans l'espace commercial du Nord-Ouest reposait essentiellement sur les mêmes conceptions ethniques et eurocentriques observées en Nouvelle-France, lesquelles plaçaient la civilisation outre-Atlantique au-dessus de l'Amérique primitive. Il suffit de constater avec quelle violence les bourgeois de la CNO traitaient parfois les Indiens pour se convaincre que la relation qu'ils entretenaient avec le monde autochtone ne reposait pas sur des considérations d'égalité (*idem*, p. 90-91). Pareillement, quand venait le temps d'assumer ses responsabilités parentales dans le Nord-Ouest avant les années 1790, le bourgeois de la CBH ne voyait que deux options possibles et opposées: soit qu'il laissait l'enfant à lui-même, c'est-à-dire aux soins exclusifs de la mère et de la bande indienne, ou soit qu'il le prenait en charge et l'arrachait ainsi à l'influence autochtone pour lui fournir une éducation de nature européenne, pour le «civiliser» en quelque sorte (Brown, 1980, p. 156). Quelle que fut sa décision, la dualité culturelle, base même de l'identité métisse, courait moins de chance de s'imposer comme un élément central à l'enculturation de l'enfant. Si la dualité culturelle était davantage le lot des enfants issus du système établi par la CNO, il n'est pas dit qu'elle était valorisée parmi les partenaires de la compagnie. Au contraire, la plupart des enfants métis

avaient peu d'espoir de promotion au sein même de la compagnie (*idem*, p. 45 & 158)¹³. Les rares parmi eux qui parvinrent à monter dans l'ordre hiérarchique furent généralement des fils de bourgeois ayant profité d'une certaine éducation euro-canadienne à l'extérieur du Nord-Ouest¹⁴.

Une chose demeure, les processus interculturels ayant eu cours dans le Nord-Ouest de l'époque ont sans contredit donné forme à une géographie métisse. Par ailleurs, à l'équation socio-culturelle «Européens\Indiens» sur laquelle reposait la géographie métisse en Nouvelle-France, le Nord-Ouest propose un nouvel élément ethnique supplémentaire: le Canadien. Et cet ajout est de taille, au point où le français, de prime abord étranger aux bourgeois anglo-écossais et aux peuples autochtones, deviendra la langue première dans les opérations de traite dans tout le Nord-Ouest (Nute, 1955, p. 5).

2.2.2 L'ethnogenèse et la formation des groupes «proto-métis».

L'un des résultats les plus tangibles de cette géographie métisse est la naissance, au début du XIX^e siècle, de la Nation métisse, sise principalement au carrefour naturel que forment les rivières Assiniboine et Rouge au Manitoba. La Nation métisse est bien documentée et on reconnaît depuis longtemps son importance historique (positive ou négative, selon l'historiographie à la mode) au Canada. Seulement, il s'avère beaucoup plus ardu de trouver des sources historiques décrivant l'existence des communautés de sang-mêlés à l'extérieur de la Rivière-Rouge, soit celles des régions boisées¹⁵ du Nord-Ouest, qu'on trouve généralement le long des routes de traite et à proximité des forts, et que l'on qualifie de *proto-métisses*. Depuis une vingtaine d'années, plusieurs historiens et ethnologues ont tiré profit des théories sociales et du développement de nouvelles méthodes d'enquête (entre autre quantitatives) pour ré-analyser les fonds d'archives, particulièrement ceux de la CBH, et tenter de dégager les mécanismes de délimitation sociale et géographique à la base de l'ethnogenèse de ces groupes proto-métis.

¹³ L'historien Philip Goldring (1980, p. 57) précise toutefois que le rang socio-économique était, plutôt que l'origine ethnique ou raciale, le critère principal donnant lieu à cet ordre hiérarchique.

¹⁴ Pour plus de détail sur le rôle socio-économique des Indiens et des Métis dans l'organisation du travail au sein des compagnies de la fourrure, voir: Goldring, 1980; Grabowski & St-Onge, 2001; Judd, 1980; Judd, 1982; Nicks, 1980.

¹⁵ Par «zones boisées» nous entendons à la fois la forêt boréale (*Woodland*), surtout dans ses parties plus méridionales, et l'espace transitoire (ou écotone) entre la prairie et la forêt boréale — le *Parkland* (Ray, 1998, p. 28; Friesen, 1987, p. 91).

Pionnier en ce domaine, John Foster propose un processus d'ethnogenèse s'articulant en deux phases. Pour la première phase, il fait appel à la théorie sur l'ethnicité de l'ethnologue scandinave Frederick Barth, lequel souligne l'importance des expériences et des comportements communs dans l'émergence d'un sentiment identitaire. Selon Foster, le Nord-Ouest de l'époque offre trois types d'expériences communes: l'hivernement du mâle étranger, son mariage à la façon du pays et son alliance socio-politique avec les frères de son épouse autochtone. L'hivernement est ce qui distingue les *hommes du Nord* et les *mangeurs de lard* et ce qui place bien haut les premiers dans la hiérarchie des engagés de la fourrure¹⁶. C'est généralement lors de ces hivernements que s'organisent les mariages mixtes. Ces mariages deviennent particulièrement importants à ces engagés qui une fois leur contrat terminé décident de rester en permanence dans la région et de profiter de leur statut d'*hommes libres*¹⁷. Non seulement la femme joue-t-elle un rôle essentiel dans l'économie et l'exploitation de la traite des fourrures (Brown, 1980, p. 64; Foster, 1985; Van Kirk, 1980, p. 54-61), elle pave également la voie à l'intégration de l'homme libre dans le réseau de parenté autochtone. Or, c'est cette intégration qui permet à l'homme libre de s'établir dans le Nord-Ouest et de subvenir au besoin de sa famille (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 4).

La deuxième phase de l'ethnogenèse métisse identifiée par Foster concerne l'enculturation de la progéniture sang-mêlée. Cette enculturation dépend grandement de la capacité du mâle étranger à passer d'un univers culturel à l'autre et à se faire influent auprès de l'Autochtone comme du traiteur. Ceux qui réussissent — tous n'y arrivent pas, ce que démontre Heather Devine dans son étude sur les Desjarlais (2001) — se voient donner l'opportunité de s'établir avec leur famille à part des bandes indiennes et à l'extérieur du voisinage immédiat des postes de traite, soit souvent parmi d'autres familles mixtes. Une telle isolation sociale et géographique favorise ainsi l'émergence d'un environnement socio-culturel où les valeurs autochtones côtoient la culture euro-canadienne, environnement propice au développement de l'identité d'entre-deux de l'enfant métis (Foster, 1985). Il est possible aux spécialistes d'observer cette unicité naissante par l'analyse des comportements particuliers de ces enfants dans l'espace.

¹⁶ Le mangeur de lard fait la navette entre Montréal et Grand-Portage à l'extrémité occidentale du lac Supérieur et revient normalement à temps pour passer l'hiver dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent. Les hommes du Nord s'occupent de la seconde portion du voyage, soit la distance qui sépare Grand-Portage des districts éloignés du Nord-Ouest tels que l'Athabaska et le bassin du MacKenzie. L'éloignement de ces régions explique l'hivernement de ces hommes dans le Nord-Ouest.

¹⁷ Ces hommes sont libérés de l'emprise du monopole des fourrures et peuvent ainsi, en toute indépendance, commercer pour leur propre profit.

De par leur nature économique, les archives de la CBH sont particulièrement pertinentes. Parce qu'elles enregistrent les opérations commerciales et comptables affectant la vie quotidienne des postes de traite, et parce qu'elles conservent aussi le nom des individus impliqués dans ces opérations, les archives de la compagnie permettent ainsi de pénétrer la particularité des déplacements des familles mixtes et de saisir la nature unique de leurs interactions avec les sociétés autochtones et euro-canadienne (Devine, 2001; Ens, 2001; Foster, 2001; Thistle, 1997).

Il manque toutefois un élément à cet échafaudage théorique et cela concerne l'apport du père canadien aux processus d'enculturation. Si la littérature sur le sujet a raison de mettre l'emphase sur les valeurs euro-canadiennes dont il est porteur, elle néglige en retour l'influence de son intermédialité dans l'ethnogenèse métisse. Après tout, l'homme libre ne doit-il pas son influence, son indépendance et l'isolement socio-spatial de sa famille à sa capacité d'occuper l'espace entre l'Indien et le traiteur euro-canadien? Il y a tout lieu de penser que l'intermédialité fut élevée au rang de valeur fondamentale dans ces familles mixtes, à tout le moins inconsciemment. Tout compte fait, le Canadien de l'Ouest est aussi un modèle métis pour sa progéniture¹⁸.

Cela laisse présumer la confusion identitaire et territoriale du Canadien de l'Ouest et du proto-Métis qui, en raison de l'environnement socio-économique de la traite des fourrures et de leur intermédialité respective, sont appelés à entretenir des comportements sociaux et spatiaux similaires. Bien entendu, le voyageur du Nord est d'abord décrit comme un Canadien, au même titre que ses compatriotes et parents mangeurs de lard et habitants¹⁹. Il n'est pas originaire du Nord-Ouest comme l'est le proto-Métis et son identité, comme sa territorialité, ont pris racine sur les berges du fleuve Saint-Laurent. Par contre, le voyageur du Nord est un Canadien d'une fibre bien particulière, la même dont étaient tissés les coureurs de bois d'autrefois. L'homme libre présente dans le Nord-Ouest le second épisode du *Canadien métissé*, cette figure marginale de la canadianité. Marginale, bien sûr, aussi longtemps qu'elle reste tapie entre les escarpements du Bouclier canadien et ceux du piedmont appalachien; une fois (dé)placée dans un environnement

¹⁸ On peut supposer qu'il en va ainsi de la mère indienne, laquelle est l'intermédiaire obligé entre son époux canadien et ses frères autochtones.

¹⁹ Tous les auteurs ne sont pas aussi catégoriques. C'est le cas de John Whittier qui, dans son ouvrage intitulé *The Red River Voyageur*, offre une description plutôt métissée du Canadien du Nord-Ouest: «Type of a bardy race was he: brawny and muscular, with a tinge of savage origin showing darkly in his sunburnt skin, his high cheek bones and coarse black hair. [...] His language was a French patois, embroidered with Indian and English words and phrases; and his dress was of the same piebald character (1892, p. 1).

qui prône l'intermédiation, comme c'est le cas du Nord-Ouest, elle a tout lieu de s'affirmer comme une figure prédominante. Autrement dit, l'identité métisse du Canadien ressemble à un gène récessif qui n'attend que les conditions favorables — un endroit où les barrières de l'ethnicité et de l'identité mosaïque peuvent être abaissées — pour entrer en scène.

Le Canadien métissé naît deux fois. Il naît une première fois sous l'égide de l'Église catholique en Canada. Il renaît ensuite sous la tutelle de la société des voyageurs. Cette seconde naissance est d'ailleurs mise en relief par l'historienne Carolyn Podruchny dans une thèse de doctorat portant sur l'univers social du voyageur. Podruchny a su identifier au moins trois sites où avaient lieu des rituels de baptême, dont un premier tout juste à l'Ouest du Grand-Portage sur le lac Supérieur, un site où symboliquement (mais aussi géographiquement!) le mangeur de lard passait dans le domaine du voyageur du Nord (1999, p. 354). Ces baptêmes n'étaient ni plus ni moins que des rites de passage, des zones «liminales» ou de transition pour reprendre les mots de Turner (1967, p. 93-111), enfantant de nouveaux hommes.

2.2.3 La cartographie du métissage: entre l'identité mosaïque et l'identité métisse.

Malgré le fait que l'entreprise cartographique britannique dans le Nord-Ouest ne repose pas entre les mains d'une même et seule entité — qui comme en Nouvelle-France centralise les moyens de production et les savoirs géographiques —, elle montre pourtant des caractéristiques assez homogènes. Ce fait s'explique en grande partie par le contexte de production, lequel est marqué par la dominance de l'aspect économique. La cartographie de la région relève donc d'une fonction principale qui consiste à recueillir l'information géographique nécessaire à l'élaboration des stratégies commerciales dans le Nord-Ouest (Ruggles, 1991) en identifiant les routes de traite, les postes, les populations autochtones *etc.* Ainsi, bien qu'il existe à l'époque quelques cartes à grande échelle (1 : 25 000 max.) et à moyenne échelle, la plupart sont des cartes régionales à petite échelles²⁰, tout comme les trois cartes qui composent cette analyse: celle de Peter Pond (1785, Figure 2.5), celle de Aaron Arrowsmith (1802, Figure 2.6) et celle de David Thompson (1814, Figure 2.7).

²⁰ Ce portrait est évident lorsqu'on se penche sur les cartes de la CBH. Le «Catalogue A» de *A Country so Interesting* de Richard Ruggles est utile (1991, p. 193-236). De ce tableau, on note, entre 1709 et 1813, que près du tiers

Compte tenu du bas niveau de connaissance géographique, les cartographes britanniques, qu'ils soient à la solde de l'une ou l'autre des compagnies de fourrure ou bien employés par le gouvernement anglais (ce qui est le cas de la firme des Arrowsmiths), dépendent passablement de l'apport informationnel autochtone.

Ce qui est nouveau ici, contrairement à la cartographie néo-française, c'est l'ajout d'un troisième ordre culturel représenté par le fait francophone. Bien que celui-ci soit sans surprise marginal, sa présence sur un document britannique n'est pas insignifiante. Elle pourrait être le symbole du pouvoir et du contrôle qu'exercent les Canadiens dans le cadre de la traite des fourrures (Podruchny, 1999, p. 398) ou le signe de leur apport dans l'édification du savoir cartographique et géographique britannique. Bien entendu, la présence de l'élément francophone pourrait aussi être une indication de l'existence et du développement des groupes «proto-métis».

2.2.3.1 L'inscription cartographique des préconceptions ethniques: les transparences idéologiques.

De la manière dont sont apposés sur la carte les éléments euro-canadiens et autochtones, il est clair que la carte du Nord-Ouest suit les schèmes idéologiques laissés par les cartographes français et qu'elle fait de la conception mosaïque de l'identité l'élément central de sa représentation. Que l'on s'attarde à lire la carte de Peter Pond, celle de Aaron Arrowsmith ou celle de David Thompson, on notera, en guise d'exemple, que l'espace du poste de traite n'est pas celui de l'Autochtone. Cela est mis en évidence par les noms affublés à ces postes; une poignée sans plus des forts de traite portent des noms autochtones ou d'origine autochtone («fort qu'Appelle» par exemple). En revanche, ces cartographes ne semblent pas mettre autant d'emphasis sur la hiérarchisation des éléments européens et amérindiens et sur la suprématie des premiers sur les deuxièmes. La représentation des postes de traite ne suggère pas une importance matérielle et symbolique qui soit démesurée relativement à la réalité. Il faut même un regard aiguisé pour discerner la présence de ces postes sur la carte de Thompson.

2.2.3.2 L'inscription de l'hybridité cartographique: le Canadien, le proto-Métis et le portage.

Les cartes du Nord-Ouest présentent elles aussi une image réfractaire aux perceptions ethniques et spatiales de l'Euro-Canadien et qu'on a déjà décrit comme une image hybride. Dans l'ensemble, cette image s'exprime de manière analogue et avec la même subtilité que celle identifiée sur les cartes de la Nouvelle-France, soit à travers l'entremêlement des univers toponymiques et graphiques. Bien que les noms de lieux euro-canadiens se fassent plus importants aux abords des routes de traite et des postes et que les toponymes d'origine autochtone soient légion à l'intérieur des terres, les limites que dessinent dans l'espace ces aires toponymiques demeurent poreuses et diffuses. Il est aussi difficile, par endroit, de discerner la ligne qui sépare visuellement le savoir d'origine autochtone et celui de provenance euro-canadienne. Il y a des régions sur ces cartes où le dessin et les traits n'ont ni la précision topographique généralement associée aux cartes européennes, ni tout à fait la qualité géométrique et schématique des cartes autochtones. Ce fait est particulièrement évident sur la carte de Peter Pond (Figure 2.5). Même certaines régions ayant été explorées et arpentées en personne par le *Nor'Wester* (spécialement la route du portage La Loche et de l'Athabasca) suggèrent partiellement, par l'approximation relative de leur dessin, l'assimilation de cartes autochtones²¹. On pourrait en dire autant de la représentation des rivières Churchill (entre le fort Churchill et la confluence de la *Beaver River*) et Hayes sur la carte de Aaron Arrowsmith (Figure 2.6)²². La carte de Thompson est quant à elle particulière. Dans l'ensemble, la précision du dessin laisse entendre que la carte de l'ancien apprenti de la CBH et alors arpenteur-géographe pour la CNO repose typiquement sur une information géographique découlant d'observations directes et scientifiques; les routes de traite (les principaux cours d'eau), lesquelles forment l'essentiel de l'image cartographique, sont faites d'un dessin précis et détaillé. Un second regard permet toutefois d'identifier bon nombre d'affluents secondaires à peine esquissés — aux formes rectilignes et imprécises — et qui rappellent les conventions cartographiques autochtones.

cartes à grande échelle dominant à environ 60 pour cent (sur un total de 427 cartes).

²¹ En fait, le travail cartographique de Pond fut fait essentiellement de mémoire et repose en bonne partie sur une information mixte, à la fois directe et à la fois de seconde main autochtone (Belyea, 1992a, p. 272).

L'hybridité cartographique du Nord-Ouest est aussi enchérie par l'ajout de l'élément francophone. Cet élément marginal de la carte, qui s'exprime essentiellement sous forme toponymique, s'insère entre les sphères socio-culturelles britannique et autochtone et suggère l'existence, visuellement parlant, d'un espace d'entre-deux. Effectivement, le fait francophone dessine sur la carte un espace liminaire qui s'affirme comme le passage (ou le lieu commun) obligé entre ces deux sphères dominantes, ce que l'ascension du français au rang de *lingua franca* de la traite des fourrures vient confirmer dans les faits. Si la carte d'Arrowsmith contient relativement peu de ce type de noms (il y a bien mention de *Bonnet L.*, de *Malign pt.* et de *Brochet Head* sur le lac Winnipeg et de *LaleCross* [lac La Crosse] *Lake*), la carte de Thompson en est truffée sur l'ensemble de sa surface. On retrouve surtout ces toponymes sur la route entre le lac de Bois et le lac Winnipeg (*Rat portage*, *Terre Jaune*, *Isle portage*, *Bonnet lake*), sur la route du *Portage la Loche* (*Lac la Ronge*, *Lake Isle a La Crofse*, *Loach lake*) et sur le long de la rivière de la Paix (*Grand Marac* [Grand Marais], *Fort Liard*, *Fort du Tremble* et *Fort Vermillon*).

Ces toponymes trahissent ainsi l'intermédiation du Canadien et du proto-Métis. Ce n'est pas un hasard si les toponymes français se concentrent dans les régions dominées par la CNO et qu'ils désignent en majorité des lacs, des rivières et des portages. Ces types d'entité géographique forment dans le Nord-Ouest l'infrastructure de base de la géographie de la traite des fourrures, et conséquemment, constituent la scène géographique où se jouent les interactions interculturelles. Il n'est pas surprenant qu'ils soient aussi, comme l'est le *Portage La Loche*, les lieux de la plupart des *pointes aux baptêmes* identifiées par Podruchny (1999, p. 354). Ces lieux de baptêmes président à l'éclosion de la figure métisse du Canadien du Nord; ils sont à la fois des passages physiques et mentaux d'entre-deux mondes, des espaces liminaires à mi-chemin entre deux bassins identitaires. Lieux d'ethnogenèse, le portage, le lac et la rivière incarnent aussi, du coup, la territorialité naissante des proto-Métis.

Si on connaissait déjà l'importance de l'élément français au fonctionnement de la traite des fourrures (cet élément est une main-d'œuvre et un moyen de communication), on peut maintenant apprécier, grâce à la carte, toute la centralité de cet élément dans l'univers d'entre-

²² Arrowsmith fait un usage appréciable de la production cartographique des employés-cartographes de la CBH dont Peter Fidler. Or, plusieurs des cartes de Fidler sont des transcriptions intégrales de cartes autochtones, notamment celles d'*Ac ko mok ki*, d'*Ak ko we ak* et de *Ki oo cus*, toutes reproduites en 1802 (Ruggles, 1991, p. 63).

deux qui émerge dans le Nord-Ouest de l'époque. La carte révèle le fait français comme un ciment unissant les univers autochtone et européen, comme l'essence même de la réalité métisse dans la région. Ainsi la carte met-elle en évidence un fait que la littérature sur l'ethnogenèse métisse a jusqu'ici sous-estimé et constitue-t-elle une «preuve» visuelle de la participation primordiale du Canadien métissé dans le développement de la territorialité à l'origine des groupes proto-métis.

2.3 Les effacements cartographiques dans *the Province of Quebec (1764-1857)*.

Le Québec d'après Conquête fut marqué par deux événements complémentaires: de un, la diminution constante et presque complète du commerce des fourrures dans les régions périphériques; et de deux, l'avancée des fronts colonisateurs dans ces mêmes régions, autrefois «inhabitées» (Delâge, 1991, p. 24). Partenaire incontournable dans l'industrie de la traite des fourrures, l'Autochtone devint rapidement un obstacle au développement agraire et à l'industrie forestière, ces grands consommateurs de forêt et d'espace (Fortin & Frenette, 1989, p. 31). Le métissage ne pouvait donc que battre en retraite devant l'action concertée de la faux et de la hache.

2.3.1 Ambivalence (anti-)métisse.

Il semble que le métissage n'a jamais été aussi central à l'implantation britannique en Amérique d'avant Conquête qu'il ne le fut pour la France. L'image que la littérature renvoie de l'expérience coloniale anglaise en est une de froideur et de distance à l'égard de l'Autochtone. Si la traite des fourrures fut aussi substantielle à l'économie coloniale de l'Angleterre, elle ne reposait pas sur les mêmes prémisses socio-culturelles et diplomatiques qui, comme en Nouvelle-France, furent à l'origine du *middle ground*. Cantonnés dans l'espace européenisé de quelques postes de traite établis le long des rives arctiques de la Baie d'Hudson, les Anglais attendaient que les Autochtone viennent d'eux-mêmes porter leurs fourrures. Plus au sud, les treize colonies représentaient l'antagonisme territorial de la traite des fourrures. Il s'annonçait déjà inévitable que leur expansion démographique et spatiale se ferait aux dépens des territoires

de traite et autochtones situés à l'Ouest des Appalaches et que l'interpénétration culturelle se retrouverait compromise (Eccles, 1983, p. 5).

Dans de telles circonstances, on est naturellement porté à penser que le Québec d'après la Conquête fut marqué par la prédominance des discours anti-métis. Le tableau est cependant plus complexe et plus nuancé qu'il n'apparaît au premier regard. La négation du métissage durant le régime britannique est loin d'être automatique et loge souvent à l'enseigne de l'ambivalence; elle est évolutive, rarement explicite et souvent à peine perceptible²³. La carte offre toutefois, comme nous le verrons, une conception beaucoup moins nuancée de l'anti-métissage. En fait, par sa capacité prospective, la carte du Québec sous le Régime britannique aura tendance à prédire l'effacement de l'Autochtone et la séparation ethnique du territoire, avant même que ces deux phénomènes ne se concrétisent réellement dans l'espace.

La nature et l'intensité du discours anti-métis dépendent largement des intérêts en jeu. Au début du Régime anglais, ces intérêts étaient divers et parfois même opposés. D'une part, les autorités coloniales agissent comme si l'assujettissement de l'Autochtone des pays d'en haut était le corrolaire de la chute de la Nouvelle-France. En demandant le retour des Britanniques faits prisonniers durant la Guerre de Sept-Ans et, surtout, en abolissant la politique des présents, les autorités faisaient ainsi un accroc aux sentiments des populations autochtones et rejetaient du coup la relation d'interdépendance au cœur du commerce franco-indien et du métissage (White, 1991, p. 256-261). Il n'est pas sûr qu'une telle stratégie servait les intérêts des marchands anglais. Reprenant à leurs comptes les activités de traite dans la région des Grands-Lacs, abandonnées avec la Conquête par la plupart des négociants français, les marchands anglais reconnurent l'avantage de tirer profit de l'expérience des Canadiens et de l'influence considérable de ceux-ci sur les nations autochtones (Brown, 1980, p. 35; Innis, 1999, p. 168-171). On comprend que ces marchands n'adhérèrent pas aussi profondément au discours anti-métis colonial. Cela dit, avec l'éclatement, en 1763 et 1764, des révoltes autochtones dans les pays d'en haut, les autorités durent réviser leur attitude conquérante, une révision qui fut fortuite à l'émergence d'un nouveau *middle ground* (White, 1991, p. 315-365).

²³ Il y a toutefois une chose qui soit consistante du début jusqu'à la fin: l'absence d'une catégorie légale définissant les droits et les responsabilités des Métis.

Le discours anti-métis est aussi évolutif dans le temps. Dans la première moitié du XIX^e siècle il prit un ton particulièrement péjoratif en condamnant la «dégénérescence» des Canadiens (Delâge, 1991, p. 26; Smith, 1974, p. 74). Les autorités coloniales décrivirent ces derniers comme des Français ayant troqué leurs vertus européennes en échange de quelques charmes autochtones. Cette vision peu flatteuse du métissage canadien cherchait à légitimer une conviction depuis longtemps inscrite dans l'esprit colonial anglais, à savoir que les Canadiens étaient voués à s'assimiler (Christie, 1848, p. 60 & 73). Une telle conviction est d'ailleurs fondamentale sous la plume de lord Durham, lequel, dans le fameux rapport qui porte son nom, dépeint le Canadien comme un Français inférieur et propose son assimilation complète (Bouchard, 2000, p. 95 ; Brunet, 1958, p. 195). L'Acte d'Union de 1840 fait d'ailleurs suite aux propositions de Durham. En gros, le métissage est une affaire essentiellement canadienne dans la perspective coloniale.

La réponse de la bourgeoisie canadienne à ce discours péjoratif fut élaborée sur un canevas anti-métis d'une tout autre nature. Au lieu de renier le caractère dépréciatif donné au métissage franco-indien par Durham et ses acolytes, les élites canadiennes proposèrent un discours de la *survivance* répudiant l'existence même de ce métissage. Ce discours chercha à rappeler la mémoire et la culture héritées de la France — à entourer d'une aura de pureté la *race canadienne* — vues comme les seules armes véritables contre l'assimilation (Bouchard, 2000, p. 107-110; Dumont, 1993; Lamonde, 2001, p. 53-62). En d'autres termes, le Canadien se défend bien d'être dégénéré, quitte pour cela à réécrire, comme le firent François-Xavier Garneau et Lionel Groulx²⁴, l'histoire de la nation canadienne en la présentant, généalogie à l'appui, comme la descendante directe (enfin presque) de la noblesse française. Dans l'esprit de la bourgeoisie canadienne, s'il y a bien un métissage franco-indien, celui-ci se limite à cette contrée qui a vu naître Louis Riel, le Nord-Ouest.

Quoi qu'il en soit, pendant que les autorités coloniales et la bourgeoisie canadienne s'opposent sur le terrain de l'idéologie et de la rhétorique, dans les marges coloniales québécoises, la réalité métisse continue à unir par le mariage des univers ethniques distincts et à

²⁴ Il ne fait aucun doute que l'opposition du chanoine envers l'héritage métisse du Canadien est avant tout une contestation de la vision négative d'un tel métissage par le Canada anglais. Dans une note de bas de page Groulx affirme: «Il n'y aurait pas lieu de mettre la moindre ardeur à dissiper cette légende [le métissage] si elle ne servait d'appui à des théories d'ethnologues sur l'infériorité des races métissées et n'avait permis à quelques historiens d'esquisser des fantaisies assez peu complaisantes sur le caractère du peuple canadien-français» (1930, p. 25).

enfanter une progéniture illégitime. L'«illégitimité» de cette descendance tient à deux facteurs: de un, ces enfants sont souvent nés de mariages d'abord célébrés à la mode du pays et catholiquement consacrés en seconde instance seulement; de deux, ils rappellent cette «dégénérescence» dont le Canadien est accusé et doit se défendre. En conséquence, on soupçonne que plusieurs de ces naissances furent officiellement camouflées (Hébert, 1976, p.xii; Trudel, 1960, p. 262). Grâce à une lecture «déconstructive» des registres jésuites de Tadoussac, Léo-Paul Hébert (1984) relève plusieurs de ces altérations officielles²⁵ et montre qu'une part non négligeable de la population du Saguenay et du Lac-Saint-Jean d'avant colonisation (1842) fut d'origine sang-mêlée. Une commission spéciale sur les affaires autochtones du gouvernement fédéral note d'ailleurs, en 1856, la présence de quelques familles «of half breeds» à la réserve de Mashteuiatsh (alors nommée Pointe-Bleue) au Lac-Saint-Jean; d'après cette source, les Métis auraient d'ailleurs plus de succès en agriculture que leurs congénères indiens (Anonymous, 1858). Il est fort probable que d'autres régions périphériques québécoises, telles l'Abitibi, le nord de l'Outaouais, la Mauricie et le Témiscouata, aient été les théâtres de semblables altérations.

Il est même vraisemblable que des populations métisses aient développé, dans ces régions, une certaine distinction identitaire. Si l'on jette un coup d'œil attentif au journal de Neil McLaren (Bouchard, 2000), chef du poste de Chicoutimi entre 1800 et 1804, il semble bien que les conditions socio-spatiales nécessaires à l'ethnogenèse métisse du Nord-Ouest aient été aussi présentes dans les *King's Posts*²⁶. Il y a bien quelques hommes libres influents qui, comme François Verreaux, «gardien des Terres-Rompues» (situées à quelques kilomètres au nord-ouest de Chicoutimi), se sont isolés avec leur famille métisse de la proximité immédiate des bandes autochtones et des postes de traite. Les Verreaux n'ont pas les mêmes comportements dans l'espace que les «sauvages» dont fait mention McLaren. Leurs contacts avec les traiteurs sont plus réguliers, sans toutefois trahir une quelconque attache envers le poste de traite comme c'est le cas des engagés canadiens. On ne peut certes pas comparer l'ampleur du phénomène métis du Saguenay, ou celui d'autres régions du territoire québécois, avec celui s'étant développé à la même époque dans le Nord-Ouest. Les réalités économiques, politiques et démographiques des

²⁵ Comme l'indique Léo-Paul Hébert dans sa présentation du troisième registre de Tadoussac: «Parfois la rédaction française se poursuit en latin par souci de discrétion: baptêmes d'enfants nés d'une union illicite...» (1976, p. xii).

²⁶ À proprement dit, le journal de Neil McLaren ne dit rien sur les Métis, laissant croire que son auteur ne fait aucune distinction particulière à leur endroit. On doit l'identification de l'origine métisse de ces individus au travail de présentateur du journal, l'historien saguenéen Russel Bouchard. Les registres de Tadoussac représentent de toute évidence la source première de l'historien.

faits métis du Nord-Ouest et du Québec n'ont aucune commune mesure. Cela ne veut toutefois pas dire qu'il faille négliger l'existence possible de l'identité métisse québécoise.

2.3.2 Les puretés et les clartés: la fonction de la carte et ses conséquences.

La politique coloniale des Britanniques a un effet tangible sur la cartographie du territoire québécois, à commencer par son mandat lui-même. Plus que jamais, depuis la prise de possession du fleuve Saint-Laurent par la France, la carte a pour fonction première l'organisation administrative du territoire (Boudreau, Courville & Séguin, 1997, p. 3-40)²⁷. La nomination, en 1764, de Samuel Holland au poste d'arpenteur général est une indication des desseins britanniques à l'égard de l'administration des territoires nouvellement acquis (Boudreau, 1991, p. 39). Le cartographe britannique s'attarde à rationaliser l'espace par l'application de divisions administratives clairement définies. La carte agit ici comme un outil de planification, un cadre graphique sur lequel les stratégies colonisatrices seront élaborées. Dans un espace aussi bien délimité et cloisonné, il reste bien peu de place à l'intrication visuelle et à la représentation des espaces d'entre-deux. L'anti-métissage est roi au pays des cartographes et des arpenteurs.

2.3.2.1 Le cloisonnement ethnique et la mosaïque coloniale: la cartographie d'un espace anti-métis.

La carte du Régime britannique endosse sans complexe la «théorie de la ligne à tracer», ou si l'on préfère, la conception mosaïque de la territorialité. L'image mosaïque n'est plus, comme auparavant, l'expression souvent inconsciente des préconceptions ethniques et spatiales des autorités coloniales. Selon Mark Warhus, spécialiste en histoire de la cartographie, cette image serait plutôt garante des intentions coloniales, c'est-à-dire l'établissement de nouvelles logiques socio-culturelles et spatiales et la prise en charge du Canadien conquis et de l'Indien «pacifié» (1997, p. 159).

²⁷ Il y a bien eu, durant le Régime français, des cartes comme celle de Gédéon de Catalogne qui avaient pour objectif de représenter en détail l'occupation seigneuriale de la vallée du Saint-Laurent et celle de ses tributaires les plus importants. Mais sur toute la production cartographique néo-française, ces cartes font figure d'enfants pauvres. Comme le mentionnent Courville et Labrecque, «ce n'est donc qu'après la Conquête et plus exactement après la

On observe d'abord, à l'échelle des possessions britanniques, l'importance du lien entre les délimitations cartographiques et les politiques coloniales. La carte de Thomas Kitchin (1764, Figure 2.8) — graveur, éditeur, hydrographe du roi et prolifique cartographe —, laquelle se veut une représentation du territoire québécois dans son contexte régional immédiat, est particulièrement éloquente. Elle s'accorde avec le premier temps de la ségrégation socio-spatiale du colonisateur britannique. Les limites de la *Province of Quebec*, élaborées dans le cadre de la Proclamation royale de l'année précédente, sont pour une des premières fois mises sous forme cartographique²⁸. La Proclamation redessina la géographie politique américaine et attribua à chacun un espace propre: le Sauvage dans le Pays indien — vaste territoire comprenant la région des Grands-Lacs, des Illinois, de l'Ohio et même une mince partie du Nord québécois (excluant les eaux se déversant dans la baie d'Hudson appartenant à la CBH); l'Anglais dans les treize colonies atlantiques; et enfin, le Canadien dans *the Province of Quebec*. Ces limites entraînent l'isolement visuel du Canadien et, conjointement, son expulsion cartographique des pays d'en haut et des régions plus nordiques du territoire québécois d'aujourd'hui, telles que le Nord-Ouest du Lac Saint-Jean. L'absence cartographique des Grands-Lacs et du Pays indien, sur la carte de Kitchin, renforce d'ailleurs cet effet d'isolement du Canadien²⁹. En outre, la nature rectiligne et artificielle d'une bonne part des limites de la province ajoute une dimension «planifiée» et prospective à la séparation géographique de l'Indien et du Canadien, laquelle correspond à une distinction sociale dans l'esprit anglais: l'Indien est un allié obligé — surtout après la révolte de Pontiac — alors que le Canadien est un vaincu.

La carte de Samuel Holland³⁰ (1829, Figure 2.9) opère à une échelle plus grande que la carte de Kitchin. Ce faisant, c'est de manière beaucoup plus précise et appliquée qu'elle présente les limites administratives à la base de l'organisation coloniale et ethnique du Bas-Canada. Il ne s'agit plus de gérer les différentes parties de l'empire britannique en Amérique, mais de planifier l'utilisation même du sol. À ce changement d'échelle correspond le deuxième temps de la ségrégation ethnique et géographique, laquelle commence avec l'arrivée des Loyalistes (1792),

nomination d'un Arpenteur général des Terres en 1764 que la véritable cartographie des seigneuries s'amorcera» (1988, p. 12).

²⁸ Ces limites reviennent souvent dans la cartographie britannique, même après qu'elles furent officiellement modifiées par l'Acte de Québec de 1774, comme en fait foi la carte de Jonathan Carver en 1776.

²⁹ Il est à noter que l'absence des Grands-Lacs n'est pas une constante dans la cartographie de l'époque. Kitchin lui-même produisit d'autres cartes montrant côte-à-côte *the Province of Quebec* et le pays indien, dont celle de 1769.

³⁰ Cette carte fut publiée à titre posthume dès 1802 (Courville & Labrecque, 1988, p. 13).

première vague sérieuse d'arrivants britanniques: la seigneurie au Canadien, le canton au nouvel arrivant britannique et, un peu plus tard (1850-1853), la réserve à l'Indien (van Schendel, 1994, p. 108). Cette ségrégation est particulièrement évidente sur la carte de Holland. D'une part, la représentation du système de canton fait ressortir les limites des vieilles seigneuries et crée un effet d'encerclement de l'ancien territoire canadien³¹. Les deux systèmes de régime foncier apparaissent distincts, bien qu'ils soient tous deux des abstractions géométriques. D'autre part, la toponymie se charge d'ethniser l'espace du canton et de la seigneurie. Alors que cette dernière conserve son caractère canadien et ses anciennes dénominations françaises, le premier est incontestablement de nature anglaise. Les noms attribués aux cantons proviennent essentiellement des îles britanniques, et cela même si la plupart des cantons n'étaient toujours pas habités et mis en valeur par les immigrants britanniques. Le choix de ces noms n'est bien sûr pas innocent. Ce faisant, on cherchait possiblement à attirer les colons de langue anglaise en leur présentant une terre d'accueil au paysage culturel familier. Cette carte fut ré-éditée huit fois entre 1802 et 1843 (Courville & Labrecque, 1988, p. 13), ce qui suggère une certaine popularité et une assez large distribution.

La carte de Joseph Bouchette fils (1857, Figure 2.10), l'ainé de celui qui succéda à Samuel Holland au poste d'arpenteur général en 1803 (Boudreau, 1991, p. 40), perpétue en gros le travail de la carte précédente. Il accentue même l'effet de la division administrative du territoire en épurant sa carte de détails géographiques «superflus». On y observe en effet qu'un minimum de caractéristiques physiques et humaines. Le cartographe crée ainsi un contraste visuel faisant ressortir davantage la logique discriminante et classificatoire de la représentation cartographique. Claude Boudreau (1993), spécialiste québécois en cartes anciennes, considère une telle épuration informationnelle comme une pratique courante à cette époque.

La carte de Bouchette met aussi en évidence les plus récents fronts pionniers qui s'ouvrent un peu partout sur la rive nord du fleuve. Bien que le canton règne en maître dans ces nouvelles zones, la nature canadienne de la colonisation est parfois bien marquée par une toponymie française: les cantons *Simard*, *Tremblay*, *Laterrière*, *Tache*, *Caron* etc. au Saguenay; les cantons *Joliette*, *de Salaberry* ou *Morin* en Outaouais et dans les Laurentides. On note aussi la présence de plusieurs cantons «anglais» (*Rawdon*, *Chertsey*, *Brandon*...) qui sont pourtant

³¹ Et pour cause, car le système de canton avait pour but d'occuper les régions situées aux confins des vieilles

occupés majoritairement par des Canadiens. Deux conséquences découlent de cette ouverture «cantonnée» des fronts pionniers francophones sur le vieux Bouclier canadien. D'abord, il devient clair que le Canadien n'est plus prisonnier de la vallée du Saint-Laurent comme le suggéraient à tort les cartes précédentes. Ensuite, la francisation du canton laisse supposer que les frontières ethniques ne sont plus aussi rigides qu'au départ, ce qui s'explique en partie par la faiblesse de l'immigration britannique au Bas-Canada.

Toutefois, il ne faudrait pas penser que Bouchette soit totalement sourd aux idéologies en cours. En fait, une lecture plus poussée de la toponymie permet de constater que le modèle mosaïque est toujours aussi dominant. Bouchette impose sur sa carte une hiérarchie toponymique qui ravive les vieilles distinctions ethniques et spatiales. Ainsi, les seigneuries, canadiennes par leur origine, sont créditées d'une visibilité plus considérable que les cantons britanniques, quand bien même ceux-ci porteraient-ils des noms canadiens. La distinction entre les deux types d'organisations spatiales se retrouve même dans le titre: «...*the Townships district from the Seigneuries*».

2.3.2.2 L'occupation coloniale des marges: les «réductions» cartographiques de l'Autochtone et de l'hybridité.

L'occupation effective des marges coloniales par les colons et les compagnies forestières fut quelque peu anticipée par les cartes sous le régime britannique, ce dont témoigne la disparition visuelle de l'Indien. D'abord, la visibilité matérielle de l'Autochtone est à peu près nulle sur les trois cartes. Il est surprenant de ne voir aucune mention des nations autochtones sur la carte de Thomas Kitchin (Figure 2.8), car il est encore de coutume de faire ainsi à la fin du XVIII^e siècle³². Pareillement, on s'attendrait à voir poindre sur la carte de Bouchette (Figure 2.10) les premières réserves indiennes issues de la loi de 1851-1853, *Acte pour mettre à part certaines étendues de terre pour l'usage de certaines tribus de Sauvages dans le Bas-Canada* (Fortin & Frenette, 1989, p. 31). Au bout du compte, seul Samuel Holland semble laisser à l'Autochtone une petite place, toute relative par ailleurs. Les quelques villages autochtones qu'il mentionne sur la carte (les réserves contemporaines de Kanesatake, de Caughnawaga et d'Odanak) se perdent

seigneuries françaises, régions toujours inhabitées (dans une perspective coloniale bien sûr) à l'époque.

dans la densité graphique du document (Figure 2.9). Bien sûr, la présence de portages dans la région du Témiscouata laisse présager l'importance toujours aussi accrue du fait autochtone sur cette carte (Figure 2.11). Le plus important de ces portages, celui-là même d'où dérive le nom de la région (*Timiscouata Portage*), est particulièrement bien représenté, bénéficiant d'un trait aussi large que celui accordé aux plus importantes routes coloniales dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent. L'influence autochtone du portage est toutefois tempérée par deux réalités. D'abord, remis à l'échelle de la carte entière, ce portage reste plutôt marginal. Ensuite, la mention d'un *ferry* à l'extrémité est du portage (au lac Témiscouata) semble rappeler qu'au bout du sombre «tunnel» primitif brille une lumière civilisatrice.

L'effacement autochtone s'effectue aussi sur le terrain symbolique. La diminution des toponymes d'origine amérindienne et leur remplacement par des noms de lieux plus fidèles à la prise de contrôle du territoire par les autorités cartographiques est un processus graduel mais constant. Ainsi les toponymes indiens, relativement nombreux sur la carte de Kitchin, disparaissent-ils presque totalement sur les cartes de Holland et de Bouchette, remplacés tantôt par la toponymie anglo-saxonne du premier (laquelle se surimpose aussi passablement à la toponymie française) et tantôt par les noms de lieux majoritairement français du dernier.

Comme de raison, avec la chute de la visibilité autochtone, suit l'effacement de toute l'hybridité cartographique observée sur les cartes de la Nouvelle-France. Avec le recul constant des toponymes autochtones, l'image géographique se fait davantage homogène. S'ajoute à cela une diminution évidente et constante des zones suggérant l'apport informationnel autochtone. Si la carte de Kitchin offre encore à voir bon nombre de ces zones, au nord comme au sud du Saint-Laurent (y compris à l'intérieur de la *Province*), celles-ci se limitent, sur la carte de Holland, à une mince barre située entre Québec et le Saguenay, pour enfin disparaître complètement sur la carte de Bouchette. Ce dernier préfère cacher avec des «blancs» ces zones qui étaient auparavant propices à la géométrie autochtone. La cartouche de Samuel Holland semble jouer un rôle semblable, masquant ainsi le Nord de la Mauricie et l'Ouest du Lac-Saint-Jean.

Évidemment, ces zones où l'hybridité cartographique se concentrait, sont aussi celles où avait lieu l'essentiel des interactions interculturelles sur le territoire québécois jusqu'à la moitié

³² À preuve, Kitchin fait lui-même mention des «anciens Hurons» sur sa carte de 1769.

du XIX^e siècle, c'est-à-dire ces régions que l'on a auparavant qualifiées de marges coloniales. Il est donc utile de rappeler que la marginalisation de l'Indien (sa mise en «réserve») et de la géographie métisse fut une réalité cartographique et mentale avant même de devenir un fait géographique observable.

* * *

En définitive, la carte du Québec britannique et pré-confédératif se révèle donc le discours colonial le plus fidèle à la primauté des idées anti-métisses. Alors que les marges coloniales s'articulent toujours autour de l'interaction culturelle et d'une certaine ouverture à l'Autre et que la place publique engendre la conception mentale d'un Canadien métissé (ou «dégénéré»), la carte persiste à présenter la «pureté» des séparations ethniques et géographiques. Contrairement à ces contemporains, l'arpenteur-cartographe n'a jamais cessé de suivre la logique «de la ligne à tracer».

2.4 Conclusion.

La carte a joué un rôle non négligeable dans le rattrapage mental et l'intellection d'une réalité incontournable dans le contexte de la traite des fourrures, la géographie métisse. C'est une réalité, à notre connaissance, sur laquelle peu de spécialistes se sont penchés jusqu'ici. Bien que la conception coloniale du métissage reste partielle — la France comme l'Angleterre hésitent à reconnaître le «sauvage» en elles — la carte expose une influence autochtone qui s'affiche comme une porte ouverte sur l'univers matériel, politique et symbolique de l'Autre. Il y a deux raisons principales à l'apport de la carte dans l'intellection du métissage et de la géographie métisse. Premièrement, comme nous l'avons laissé entendre dans le chapitre introductif, la carte repose sur l'image. Elle permet, comme toute image, de communiquer directement et dans toute son intégralité l'information ou le message qu'elle contient (Bertin, 1961). L'image cartographique est une suite de codes (graphiques et textuels) qui permet de voir et de rendre intelligible des interactions territoriales (physiques et/ou humaines) qui ne sont pas visibles autrement (Wood, 1992, p. 5, 7, & 108). Cela représente un net avantage dans l'appréhension d'une réalité nouvelle comme celle de l'Amérique. Deuxièmement, la carte est investie, par rapport

aux sources écrites, d'une crédibilité supplémentaire qu'elle doit à la «neutralité»³³ de sa représentation (Harley, 1989a, p. 7). À titre d'exemple, la description que les jésuites font de l'influence de l'Indien sur le Français se fait sous le signe de la réprobation et trahit une prise de position idéologique. Pour sa part, l'image hybride présente cette influence de manière impartiale, comme un fait pur et simple, comme une réalité implaquable (Black, 1997, p. 12). Dans l'ensemble, la carte aura favorisé ce que Denys Delâge appelle «la connaissance de l'Autre» et la remise en question des paradigmes européens (1995, p. 55).

Cela dit, la remise en question de ces paradigmes, ceux à la source de l'idéologie des peuples primitifs par exemple, ne fut pas un processus soutenu et cohérent. En conséquence, la représentation cartographique et coloniale de la géographie métisse fut constituée d'autant d'avancées et de reculs. D'une part, la présence du fait français sur la carte du Nord-Ouest a amplifié la visibilité cartographique de la géographie métisse. En ajoutant à l'intrication symbolique du territoire et en occupant l'espace laissé vacant entre le monde autochtone et l'incursion euro-canadienne, le fait français établit un lien entre cette géographie d'entre-deux de facture récente et cette géographie métisse plus ancienne qui découle des alliances franco-indiennes au temps de la Nouvelle-France. Ce lien est d'autant plus frappant qu'au moment même où cet épisode métis originel participe au développement de l'ethnogenèse proto-métisse du Nord-Ouest, il subit les assauts répétés d'un anti-métissage colonial de plus en plus oppressant à mesure que se concrétisent le retrait des activités de la fourrure et la progression des fronts pionniers sur le territoire québécois. Il est tout de même ironique que la source première du métissage au Canada soit aussi la plus sujette à l'assèchement.

³³ Évidemment, la «neutralité» de la carte n'est qu'apparence. En fait, la carte est un système de «connaissances situées» (*situated knowledge*) et n'est donc pas perméable au contexte socio-culturel et idéologique dans lequel prend place sa production (Harley, 1988, p. 278-279). On peut donc considérer la carte comme un texte au même titre que les commentaires jésuites (Harley, 1989a, p. 3; Harley, 1989b, p. 84).

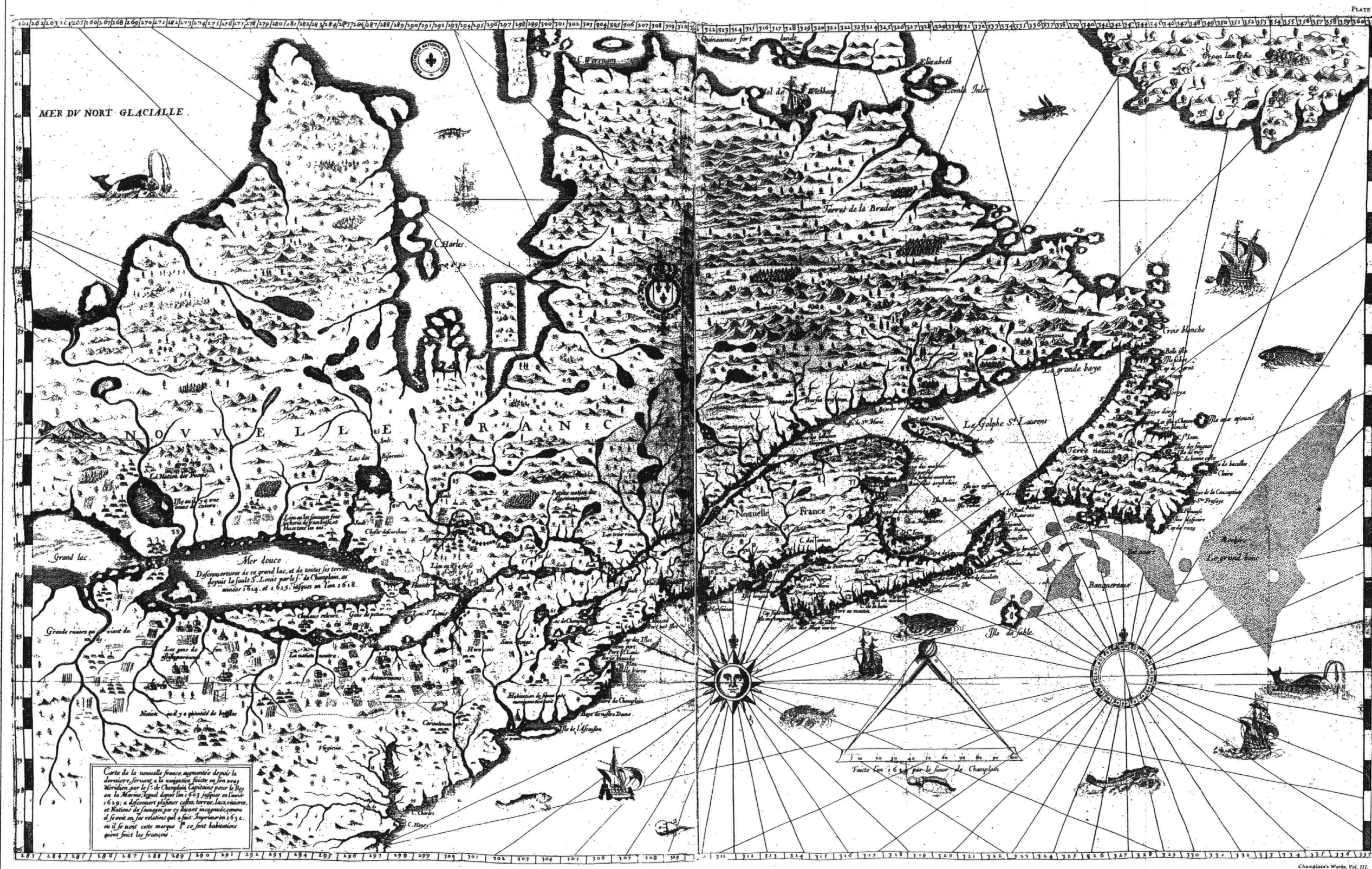


Figure 2.1

Sr de Champlain, *Carte de la Nouvelle-France augmentée depuis la dernière, servant à la navigation*, 1632.

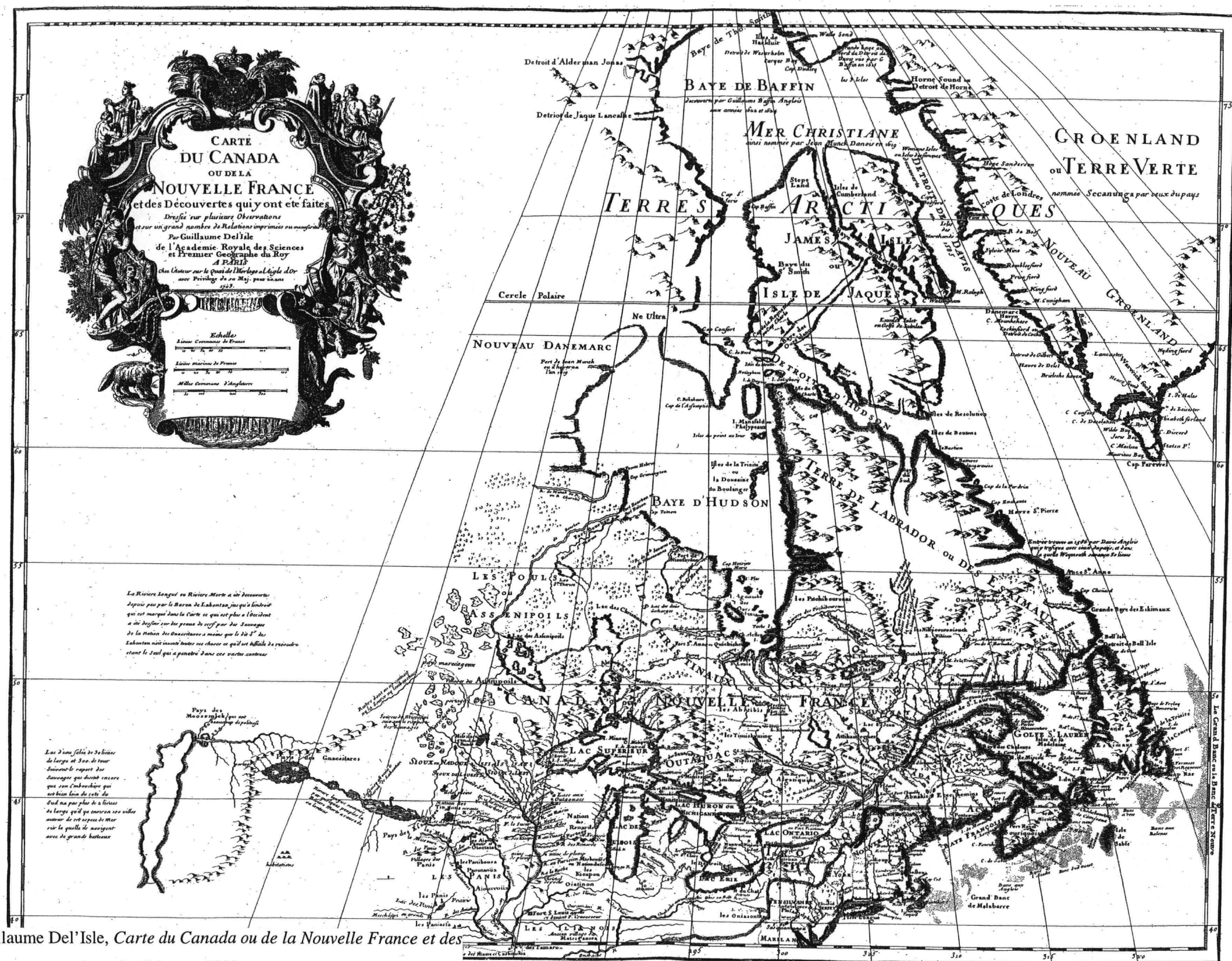


Figure 2.2

Guillaume Del'Isle, *Carte du Canada ou de la Nouvelle France et des Découvertes qui ont été faites...*, 1703.

CARTE PHYSIQUE
des Terreins
Les plus élevés de la Partie Occiden.
du CANADA

On l'on voit les Nouvelles Découvertes
des Officiers François a l'Ouest du Lac
Supérieur. Avec les Rivieres et les Lacs
dont M. Jeremie a parlé dans la rela-
-tion de la Baye d'Hudson.

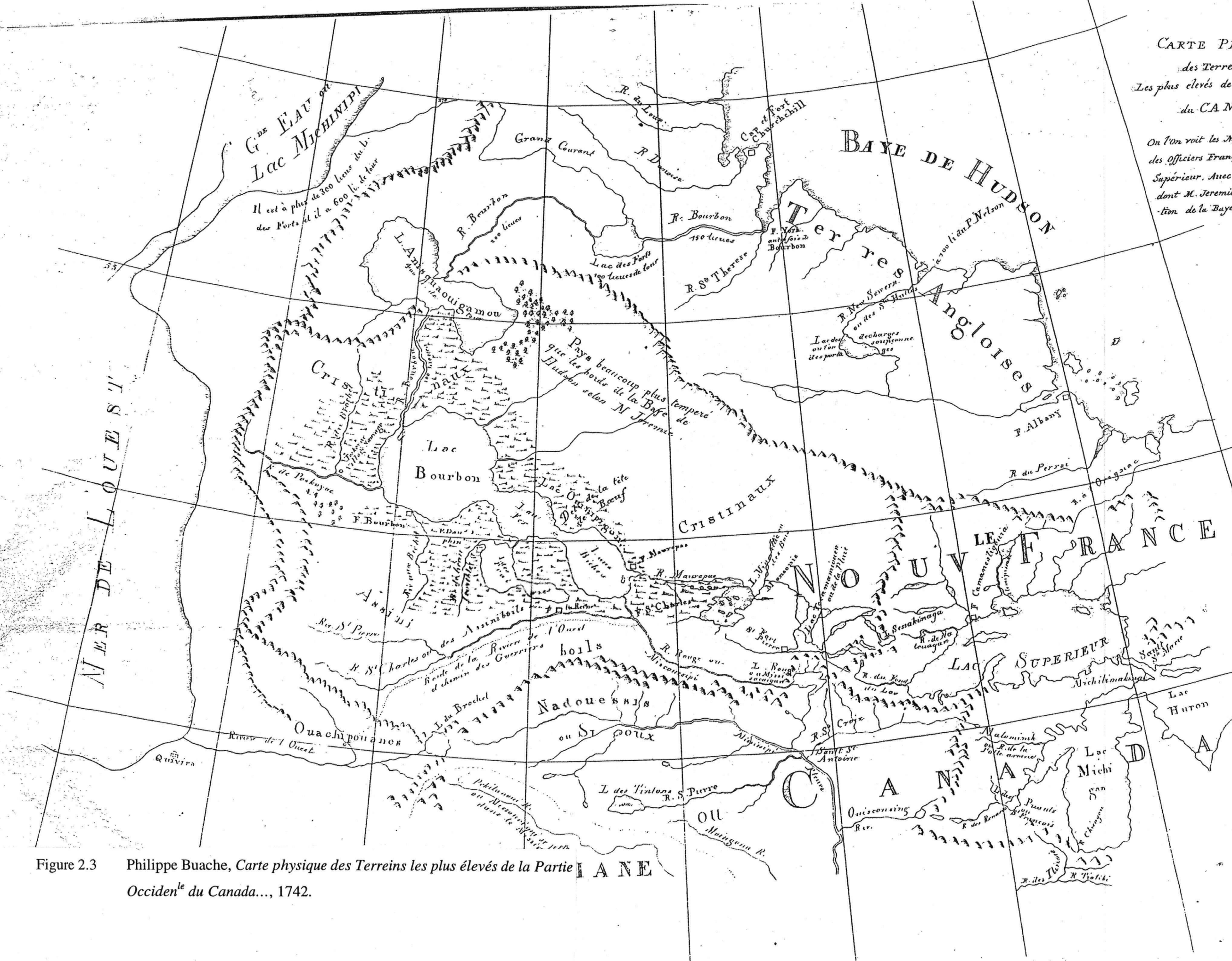


Figure 2.3 Philippe Buache, *Carte physique des Terreins les plus élevés de la Partie Occident^{le} du Canada...*, 1742.

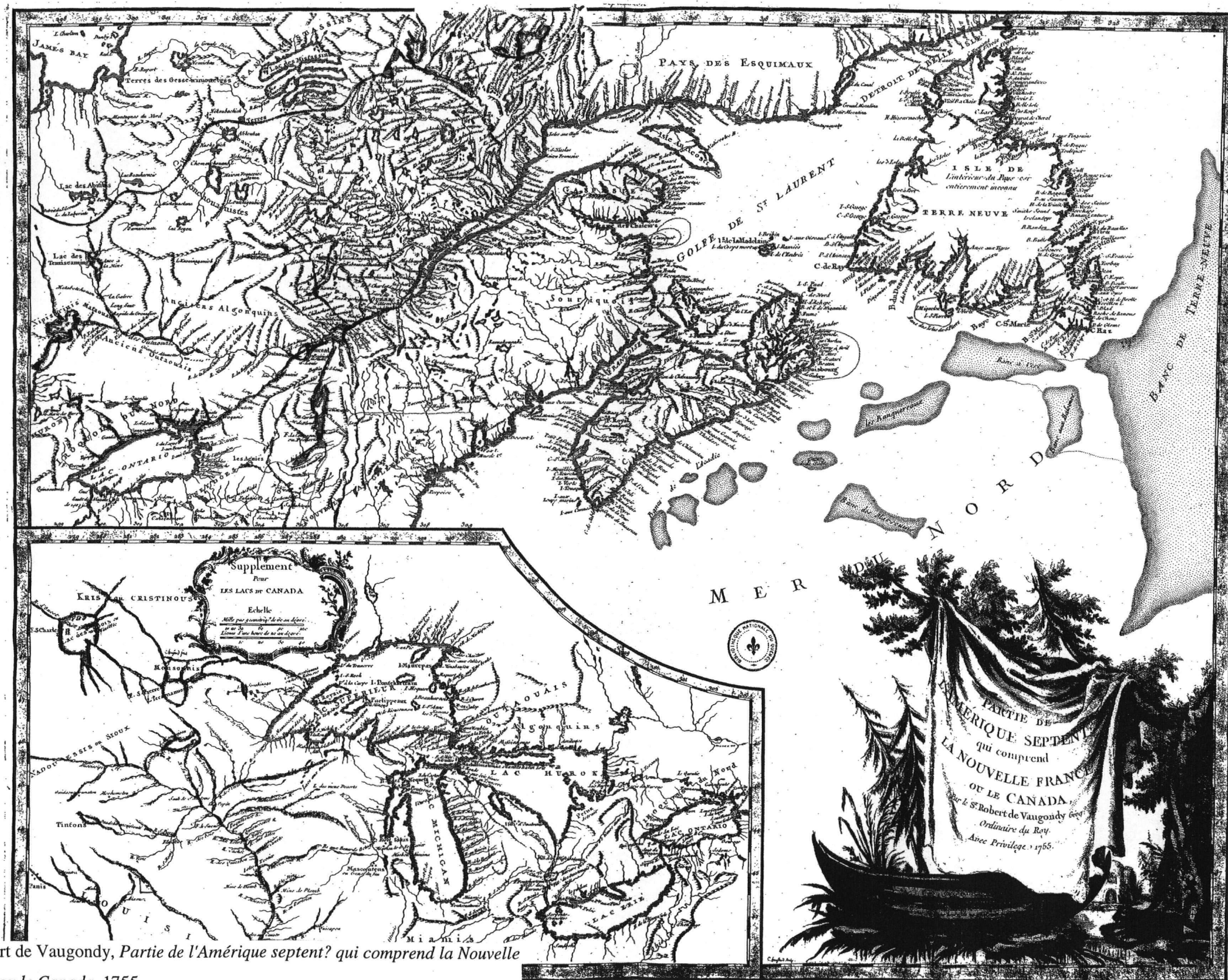


Figure 2.4 S^r Robert de Vaugondy, *Partie de l'Amérique septentrionale qui comprend la Nouvelle France ou le Canada*, 1755.

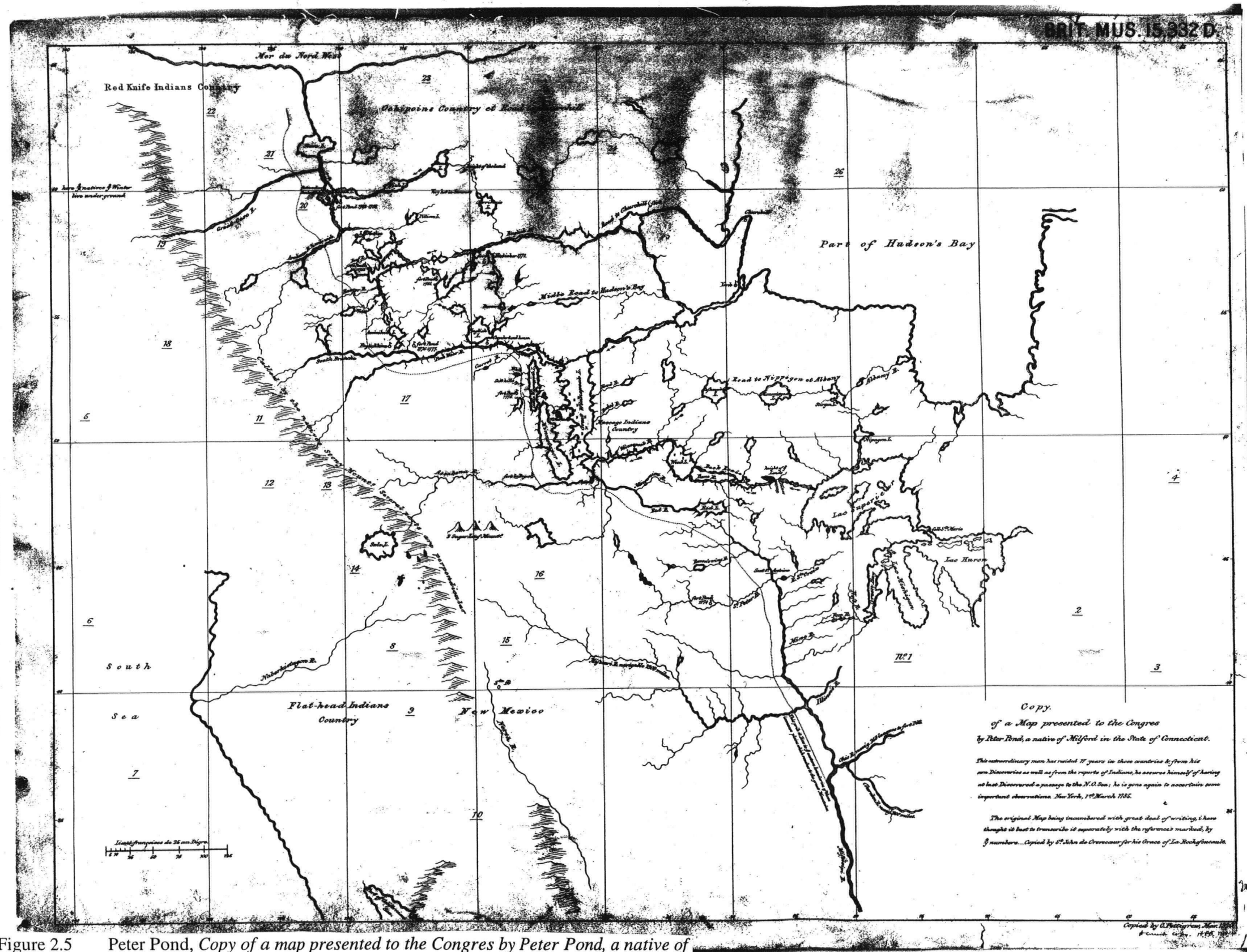


Figure 2.5 Peter Pond, Copy of a map presented to the Congress by Peter Pond, a native of Milford in the State of Connecticut..., 1785.

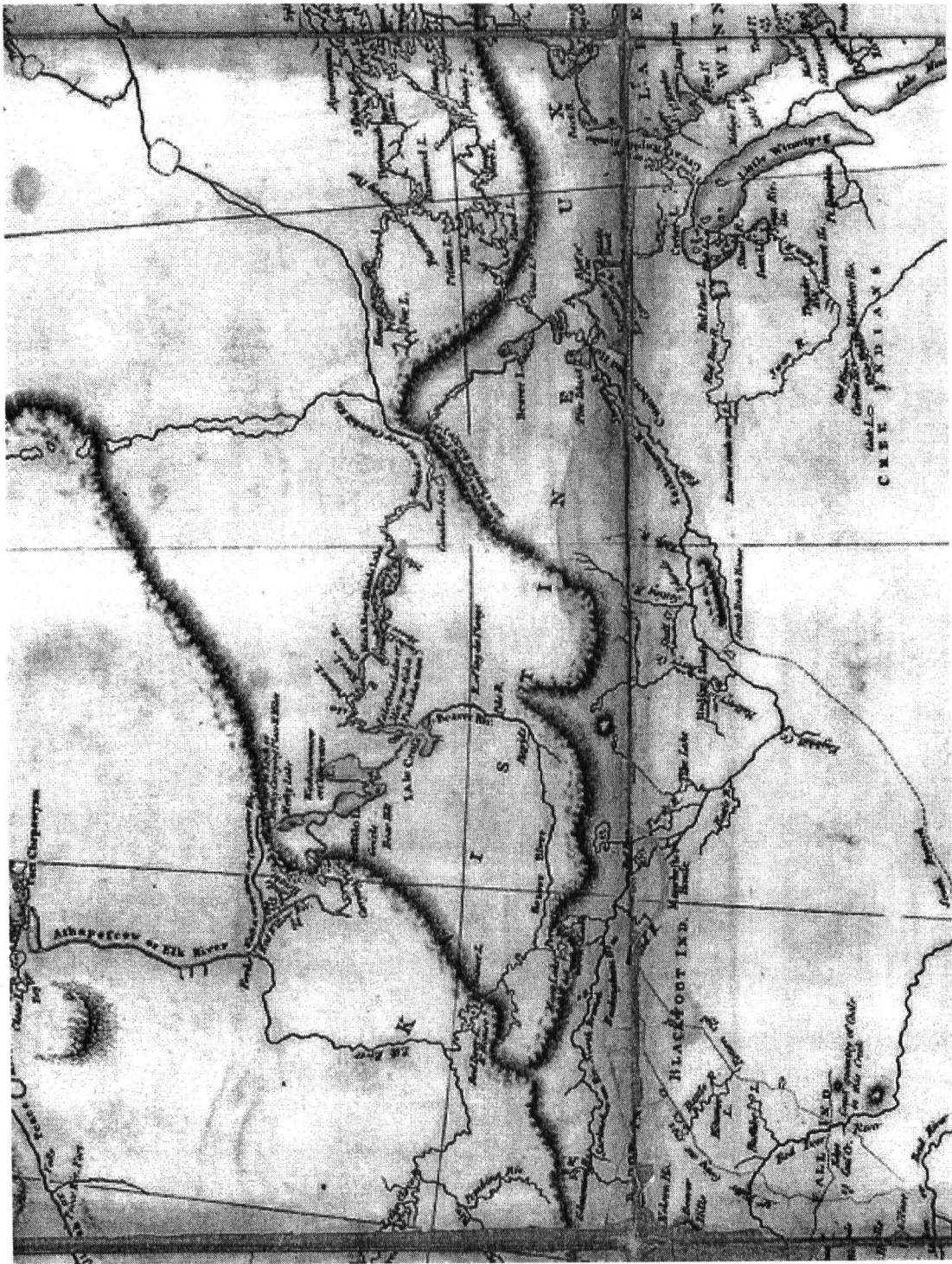


Figure 2.6 Portion de Aaron Arrowsmith Map Exhibiting all the New Discoveries in the Interior Parts of North America...., 1802.

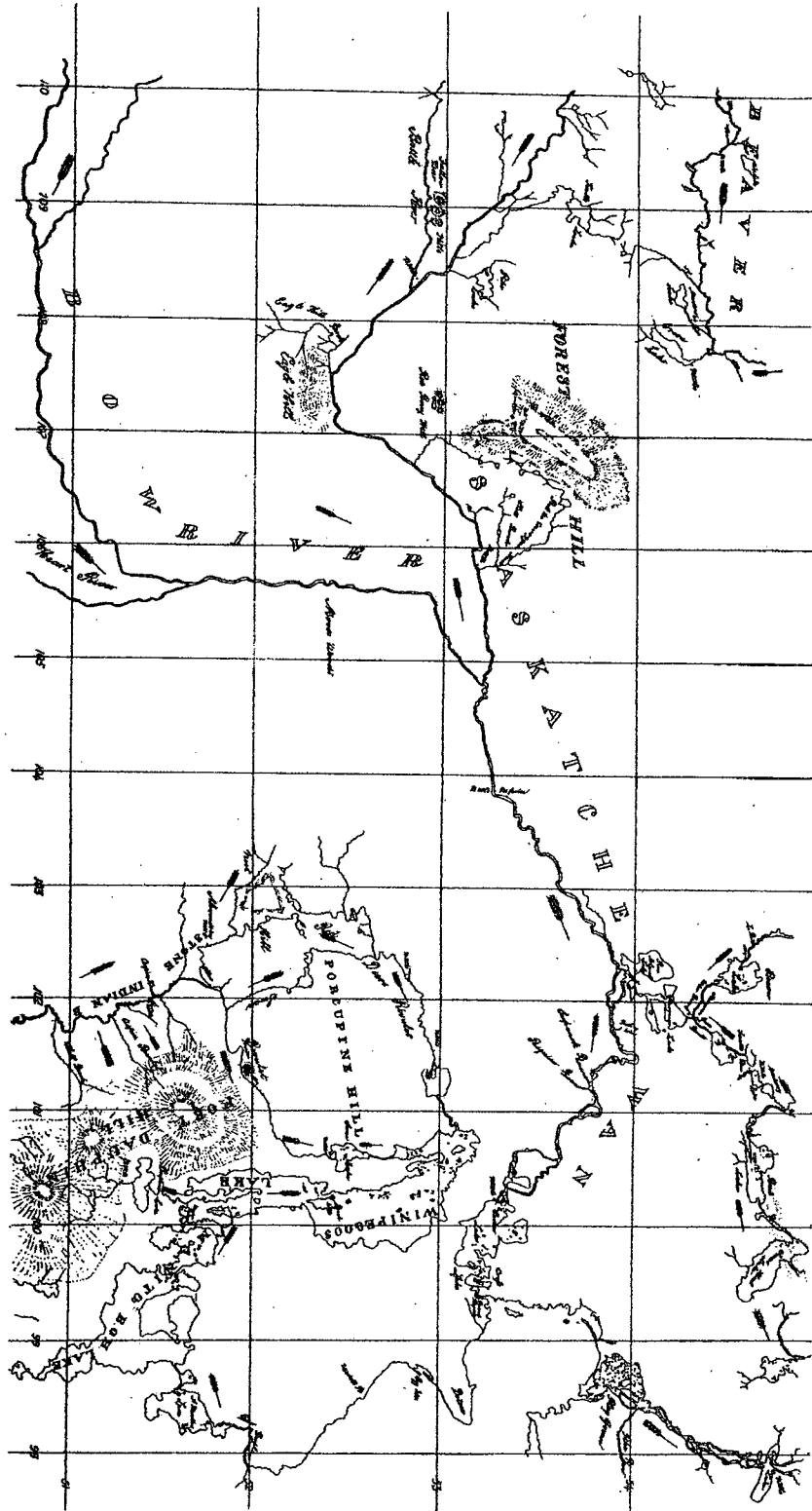


Figure 2.7 Portion de David Thompson, *Map of the North-West Territory of the Province of Canada....*, 1813-1814.



Figure 2.8 Thomas Kitchin, *A New map of the Province of Québec in North America...*, 1764.

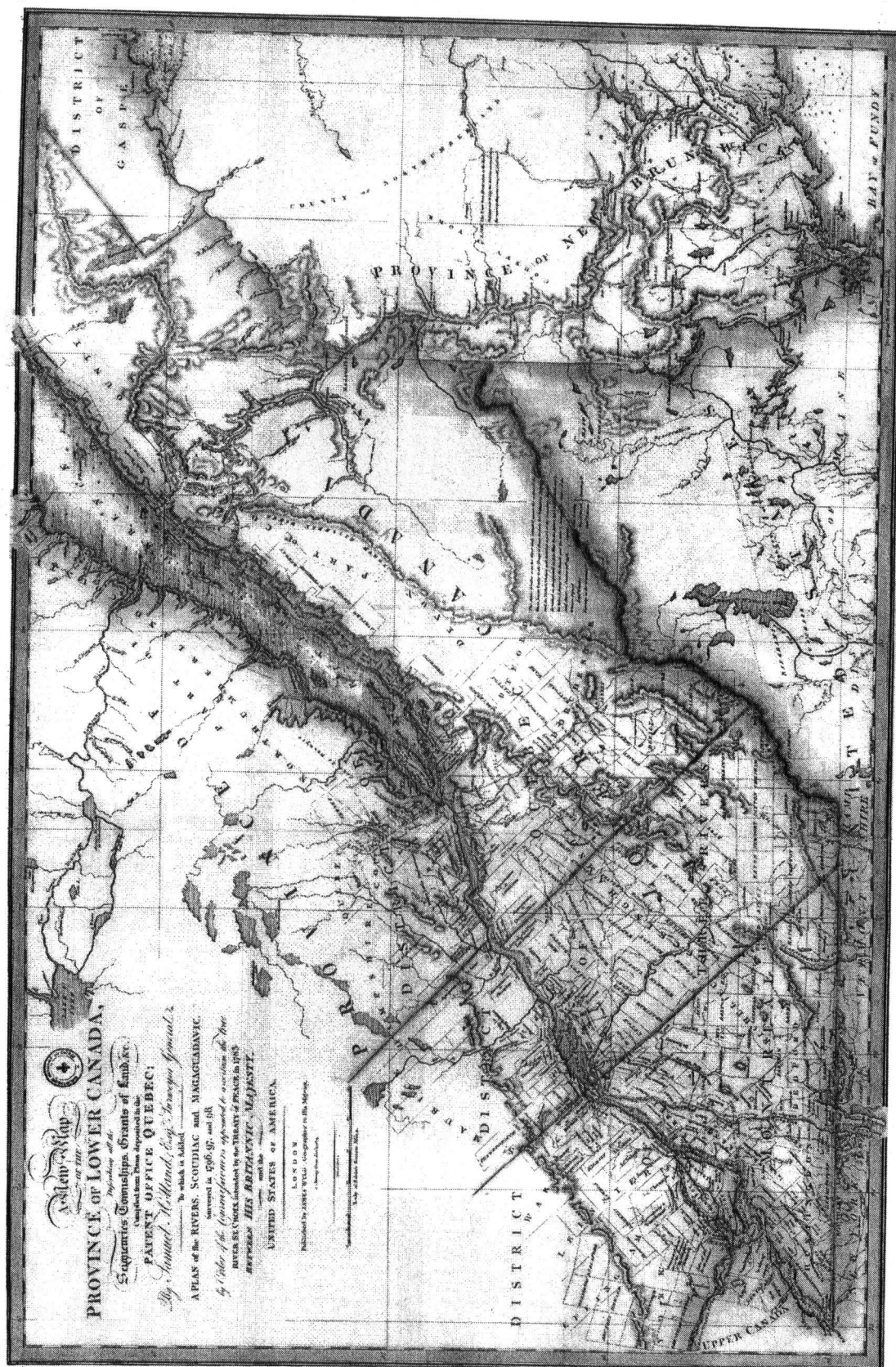


Figure 2.9 Samuel Holland, *A new map of the Province of Lower Canada describing all the Seigneuries, Townships..., 1829.*

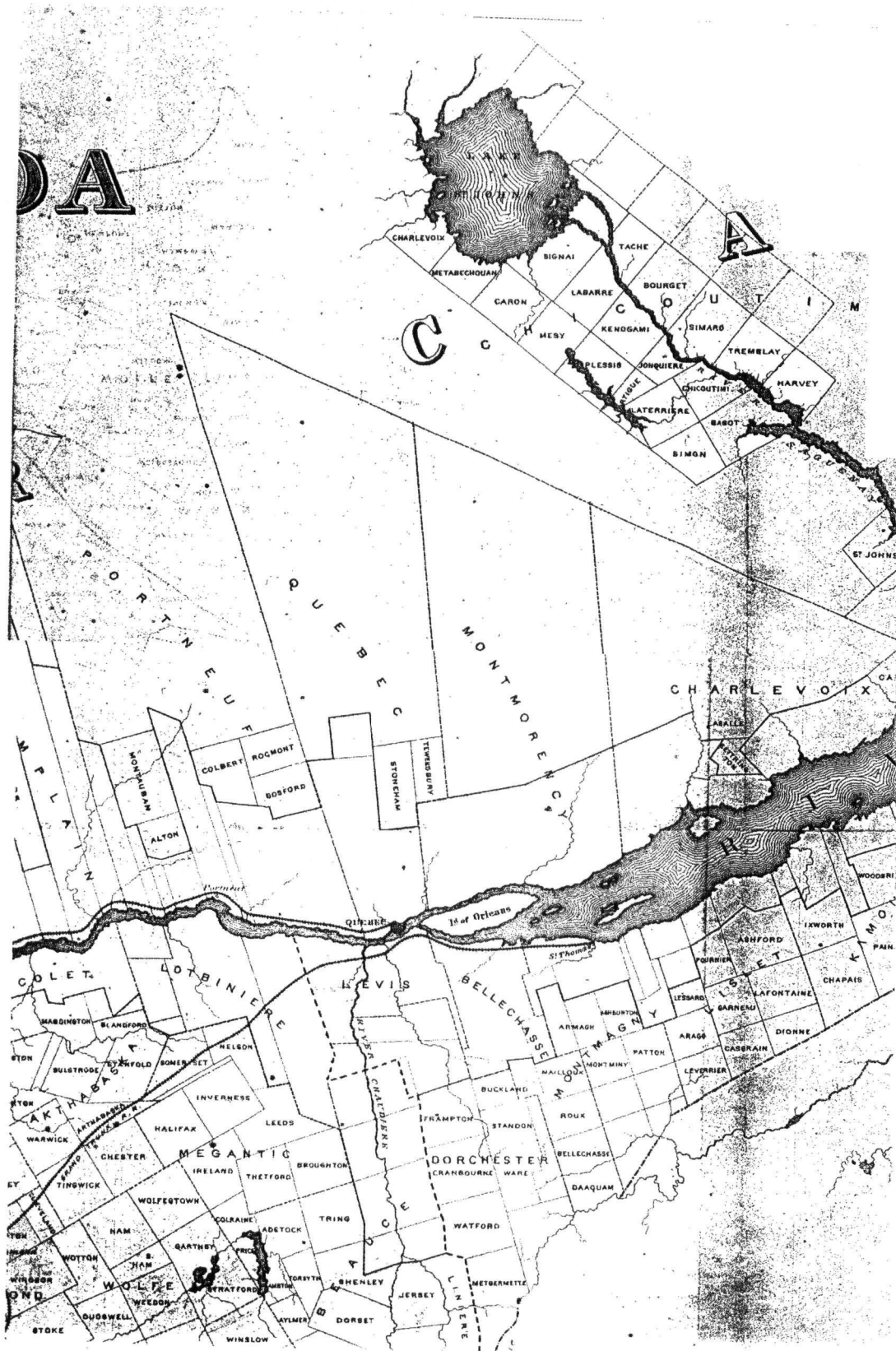


Figure 2.10 Portion de Joseph Bouchette, *Map of Lower Canada shewing the proposed land agencies and the townships district from the seigniories*, 1857.

Chapter 3: Cartography and the *Vécu* in the West — 1819-1895.¹

[...] nous savions qu'un certain nombre de Métis hivernait dans la région des rivières Tortue et Souris de sorte que nous ne pouvions point espérer une bonne chasse dans ces environs-là. Donc, nous avons décidé de prendre une direction médiane allant vers le sud-sudest pour changer plus tard vers le sud-sudouest. Cette dernière route nous mènerait par le lac des Branches, les Buttes des Trous, le lac du Diable, les Petites Fourches de la Sheyenne, le lac du Bois Blanc et la Maison du Chien.

— Père George Antoine Belcourt²

Father George Antoine Belcourt describes more than a Métis geography here. His words portray a socio-cultural appropriation of space that placed the Métis³ at centre stage and was little influenced by such geographical considerations as the British-American boundary. Moreover, in describing the buffalo hunt and listing toponyms the Roman Catholic priest depicted the material and symbolic attributes of Métis territoriality. As components of Métis orality, these toponyms also outline the importance of oral tradition in defining the Métis sense of identity and territoriality.

One of this chapter's objectives is to explore Métis oral richness and to show how it accounts for the unique Métis experience of space. The second part of the chapter is devoted to Métis narratives — stories, songs, and toponyms — and reveals them to be important subjects for understanding the Métis sense of territory and identity. But before treating Métis oral perspectives, I will first consider how Métis territorial makers find their place in the colonial cartography of the Canadian West.

The juxtaposition of those two very different objects of investigation — colonial maps and Métis oral tradition — should yield contrasting and complementary views of Métis

¹ A portion of this chapter has been published in RIVARD, Étienne (2002). "Territorialité métisse dans le Nord-Ouest canadien au XIX^e siècle: Exploration cartographique et toponymique", *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest*, 14 (1-2); 7-32.

² Copy of a letter written in 1845 found, in Dossier "Charrette, Guillaume", Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG9A6.

³ By using the term "Métis," instead of "Prairie Métis," I am aware that I may foster the idea that "Métis" exclusively applies to those who live in today's Prairie provinces. This is not my intention. My use of "Métis" in this chapter includes the Métis born in *Rivière-Rouge* and the Métis groups who emerged outside *Rivière-Rouge* and were closely tied to the fur trade economy, such as those of *Lac La Biche* or *Lac Sainte-Anne* for example. The latter

territoriality. It should also display two major phases in Métis territoriality: 1) its development, expansion, and dominance from the early 19th century to the *Rivière-Rouge* uprising in 1870; and 2), its gradual erosion with the rush of new settlers after that date. Overall, as Antoine Belcourt's comment suggests, these two analyses establish the Métis reality as a dominant feature of the geography of the Northwest for most of the 19th century.

3.1 Cartographical inscription of Métis territoriality: from recognition to erasure.

Colonial maps of this period may be categorised by their function. I note four distinct functions, which, of course, are not totally exclusive. I made my map selection in order to represent all of these categories. The first function is economic. Not surprisingly, the maps of the HBC are predominant as they principally focus on the fur trade routes and organisation of the different districts within which the company operated (Ruggles, 1991). In that respect, the principal function of HBC maps did not change very much from the early mapping of this part of the world to about the 1840s when cadastral surveyings became more important (*idem*, p. 96). Peter Fidler's *A Map of Red River District* (1819) is an example. The second function is scientific. The Canadian and British colonial governments launched a series of scientific expeditions in the mid-19th century to evaluate the possibility of colonising the Northwest. I present one example of this type of map, S. J. Dawson's *Plan Shewing the Region Explored by S.J Dawson and His Party Between Fort William, Lake Superior and the Great Saskatchewan River* (1859). Land management is another characteristic function of this period. Maps produced for this purpose were intended to serve as tools for supporting the land tenure system and for organising the division and allotment of the land to settlers. These maps represent a huge portion of the cartographic production of the Department of the Interior created in 1871. They were produced in a variety of scales, representing areas as diverse as parishes (Beaudry's *Plan d'une partie de la Rivière Rouge comprenant les paroisses de St.Boniface, St.Vital, St.Norbert et Pointe-Coupé d'après les opérations de 1871*), provinces (Russell's map of Manitoba, 1871), and the whole Northwest. Finally, some maps of this period were promotional in nature; they were used to present a specific perspective of the Northwest to eastern Canadians. These maps generally advantageously portray the political situation and the advance of colonisation by emphasising

Métis are often referred to as "proto-Métis" (see chapter 2). It is understood that Red River Métis had been proto-Métis as well.

colonial control over the land, railroads, and other lines of communication (colonial roads and telegraph). They were part of a propagandist discourse that aimed to recruit new settlers and to prevent them from settling in nearby American settlements (Courville, 2002, p. 451 & 463-466). These maps were produced or distributed by diverse agencies, public — the Office of the Minister of Agriculture in the case of Holland's *Map of the Seat of Riel's Insurrection* (1885) — or private like the "Canada Bank Note co.", printer of *Map of part of North-West Territory shewing the Locality of the HALF-BREED Rebellion. The Canadian Pacific Railway, the Roads, Trails, and Telegraph Lines* (1895). Whatever their function, maps were essential to colonial authorities in the economic, political, and social management of the Northwest. Moreover, and except for the HBC's maps — which were generally produced to assist the governors' decision-making — most of these maps were broadly distributed. Their message reached a large audience.

The maps under investigation here reinforce the observation made in the previous chapter that the inscription of Métis territorial markers is an ongoing process. Unlike the maps of the previous chapter, it is easier to distinguish between Métis and *Canadien* territoriality on the 19th century maps; Métis territorial markers on these maps are generally clearer. More interesting is the fact that Métis visibility increases on maps the function of which had nothing to do with the representation of Métis reality. These maps were conceived to serve colonial purposes, such as the appropriation of "empty" and fertile space for colonisation (Friesen, 1987, p. 109; Sprague, 1980b, p. 74).

The Northwest is a vast area and it took many years for colonial authorities to get a fairly precise picture of it. The Métis, along with the Indians, contributed in various ways to the colonial acquisition of knowledge about this region. First, like their *voyageurs* relatives, the Métis were important components of the commercial and scientific explorations launched in the "unexplored" Northwest over the years. Irene Spry mentions several of these expeditions in which Métis were employed as paddlers, guides, and interpreters: the Rae, Palliser, and Hind expeditions, the Boundary Survey of 1872-1876 (1985, p. 106-107). The geologist Henry Youle Hind made many comments during his expedition of 1858 about the Métis ability to provide geographical information (1860. v.1, p. 181). The scientist added: "I had an opportunity of meeting, at this isolated settlement [Portage la Prairie], with John Spence, a Cree half-breed of great experience in Rupert's Land. He drew a small chart for me, showing the position of what he called "coal" on the Assiniboine" (*idem*, p. 143). This observation is particularly interesting for it

stresses Métis mapping contributions to the colonial representation of the land, a fact that has not attracted the attention of the specialists on Aboriginal maps.⁴ In communicating first hand information, translating Indian knowledge, and providing means by which mapmakers could travel across the prairie — the carts and the trails (Hind, vol. 1, 1860, p. 147 et 154) — the Métis sustained and stimulated the colonial mapping of the *Nord-Ouest*.

Those who wanted to understand this land — voyagers, explorers, fur traders, or mapmakers — inevitably confronted and recorded the Métis presence. From the early 19th century to about 1870, the Métis gradually affirmed their prominence in forging the geography of the *Nord-Ouest* and imposed themselves as an inescapable reality. This is the reason why the inscription of Métis territorial markers figures so prominently on colonial maps.

But the situation changed in the last decades of the 19th century. It is broadly accepted that the Métis way of life was drastically modified following their defeat at Batoche in May, 1885. The post-1885 era was marked by the restructuring of Métis society after the material, political, and symbolic changes brought by the Canadian colonisation of the plains. The depletion of the buffalo and withdrawal of the fur trade affected the Métis traditional economy (Purich, 1988, p. 106). The north-south trade route, furrowed by Métis cart wheels, became obsolete with the implementation of the Red River steam-boats;⁵ the arrival of the railroad had a similar effect on Métis east-west trade (Payment, 1983, p. 134).

The political situation of the Métis was not any better. With the rush of new settlers from Eastern Canada and Europe, in a few years the Métis were demographically marginalised within

⁴ Over the last two decades, there has been an extensive literature on Aboriginal maps within the history of cartography. Volume two (book three) of the collection of *The History of Cartography*, initiated in 1987 by J.B. Harley and D. Woodward, is entirely devoted to Aboriginal maps produced around the world. Another important contribution to the field is Malcom Lewis' *Cartographic Encounters* (1998), an edited book that focuses on Native mapmaking traditions of the Americas. To my knowledge, however, never has any scholar treated in detail the mapmaking traditions of mixed-blood populations. Indeed, Malcolm Lewis (1980, p. 17) mentions the Métis Joseph La France's contribution to the 1744 Arthur Dobbs' map published in *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay...*, but he never tries to demonstrate in what way La France's contribution was distinct from a Native one. There is perhaps no distinction. The work of Glen Fredlund *et al.* on maps of the Yellowstone and Milk Rivers area produced between 1877 and 1880 by Crazy Mule also comes to mind. Although the authors label the mapmaker as "Cheyenne scout," many portions of their paper suggest the mixed-blood reality of the mapmaker and other scouts. The maps themselves appear like hybrid documents. Crazy Mule combined Native use of name-glyphs and autobiographic techniques with European cartographic "accuracy" (rivers with their meanders) and conventions (northward orientation for example).

⁵ Adding to this was the reinforcement of existing buffalo robe trade tariffs and customs regulations at the *Rivière-Rouge* borders with the US after 1870 (Ens, 1996, p. 149).

the whole Northwest. Finally, the construction of the railroad and the influx of immigrants brought with them “train stations” and new settlements bearing names that mirrored the newcomers’ realities. Many of the old names that once had covered the prairie disappeared from sight, lying underneath rails and crops.

But the portrait is more complex than this. The difficulties the Métis faced after 1885 were neither absolutely unfortunate, nor altogether new. First, in spite of a loss of influence and a process of marginalisation following the 1885 uprising, the Métis, as Diane Payment argues in her study of Batoche (1983, p. 136), were not left without any future, as earlier authors have suggested (Giraud, 1945, III, p. 1211; Stanley, 1936). Although the Métis were partly dislocated after the battle at Batoche, Payment suggests that they adapted to the new socio-economic reality in the West, and that some of them — Xavier Letendre dit Batoche, Salomon Venne, George Fisher and a few others — took advantage of these changes to prosper (1983, p. 132; 1986, p. 174-175). Second, the post-1885 effects were not unfamiliar to the Métis. At best they were the culmination of an ongoing process that started in the 1870s with the creation of Manitoba. As Nicole St-Onge points out, “By 1880 the farming Métis were no longer an elite in Manitoba. The high rate of immigration of non-Métis to Manitoba caused them to lose most of their political clout and they rapidly became a powerless minority within the province and within the French-Catholic group” (St-Onge, 1985b, p. 160).

Many of these Métis would then leave Manitoba to settle beyond the limits of colonisation. Two sections of the Manitoba Act dealt with the question of land: ss. 31 et 32. S. 31 stated that 1.4 million acres of land would be put aside for the children of heads of families to extinguish “Indian Title.” To meet its responsibilities to these children, allotments,⁶ surveyed in quarter section and mostly situated behind existing parishes (Flanagan, 1991b, p. 3), were to be allocated by lottery. In 1875, the Federal government started issuing scrips to the heads of families, redeemable for 160 acres of Dominion Lands or \$160. S. 32 concerned the confirmation of the land tenures allocated before 1870 and applied to both Métis and white settlers. In any case, surveys needed to be conducted and patents issued to secure Métis land

⁶ In the first place, Dominion Land authorities interpreted s. 31 in a very “liberal” way, including not only the children, but the adults as well. Since the Dominion census of 1871 revealed that there were about 10,000 Métis in *Rivière-Rouge*, the 1.4 million acres was to be divided into allotments of 140 acres. In the course of the process, however, Dominion Lands came back to the initial wording of the Manitoba Act and only “the children of the half-

possession. However, it turned out that only a few Métis had succeeded (or showed interest) in settling their piece of land, for more of them migrated westward.

Just why and when this migration started is a matter of contention among contemporary scholars. The historian Douglas Sprague, who was hired by the Manitoba Métis Federation, argues that the Federal authorities were responsible for the Métis land dispossession (1980a; 1980b; 1988; 1991). Beside the racist pressures the Métis faced after the 1870 uprising, the process put in place to deal with their land allocation was delayed in many ways and put the Métis in an untenable situation. It took more than a decade for most of the patents to be issued (Sprague, 1980b, p. 80). In the meantime, the federal Department of Justice had voted amendments to the initial s. 32 (occupancy before 1870) of the Manitoba Act to increase the requirements for land-in-cultivation (*idem*, p. 77). If such requirements did not affect full-time farmers, they could not be met by most of the Métis, who spent part of the year hunting buffalo, which, year after year, grazed further away from *Rivière-Rouge*. In such conditions, discouraged and threatened by the loss of their land, many Métis sold their allotment or scrip for cash. A speculative land market emerged in which the Métis were the losing party (Sprague, 1991; Tough, 1996, p. 116), a situation the Federal government was unlikely to ignore in spite of its inaction in preventing it in the first place (Ens, 1983, p. 10; Sprague, 1991, p. 147).⁷ Thus, it is clear to Sprague (1988) that the Federal government had made every effort, either actively or passively (by maintaining a state of “lawlessness”), to dispossess the Métis and bring them under its control (Sprague, 1980a, p. 421). Nicole St-Onge supports this argument in her thesis on the Métis of *la Pointe-à-Grouette*, in which she concludes that the amendments to s. 32 and speculation were the main reasons for the Métis dispersal (1985b, p. 163).

For the American political scientist, Thomas Flanagan, “Sprague’s thesis shares the problems of all attempts to infer motives from results. It quickly descends into the labyrinth of conspiracy thinking, where things are never what they seem” (1991a, p. 6). Flanagan — who was hired as historical consultant by the Department of Justice to discuss the Manitoba Métis Federation land claim case — affirms that the Métis had never been deprived by Ottawa and

breed heads of families” were eligible for land grants; the allotments were enlarged to 190 acres accordingly (Flanagan, 1991b, p. 3-4).

⁷ According to Gerhard Ens, the provincial government acknowledged speculation in Métis lands in the early stage of Manitoba and voted the “Half-breed Land Protection Act” in 1873 to prevent it (Ens, 1983). No similar legislative action was put in place by the Dominion.

speculators, and prevented from getting land (*idem*). Flanagan supports his argument in two ways. First, he draws on the historian Gerhard Ens⁸ to present evidence of the Métis ability to adapt to new economic situations. According to Ens, and to Flanagan, the Métis were anything but the poor victims of the “evils” of western capitalism (Ens, 1996, p. 5). They had integrated perfectly well its logic and functioning to develop, from the 1840s, new markets and profitable activities (Ens, 1988; Ens, 1996; Flanagan, 1991a, p. 17; Flanagan, 1998). In fact, Ens (1988; 1996) suggests that the migration started before the creation of Manitoba and was the result of the development of the buffalo robes trade in which many Métis were involved, and consequently, the necessity, from the 1860s, to winter outside *Rivière-Rouge* as the buffalo progressively withdrew westward (Flanagan, 1991b, p. 9). Second, Flanagan tries to quantify the debate, and to show that the Métis were quick to get rid of their land (1991a, p. 65 & 121-127). For him, most of the Métis understood very well the speculative nature of the market, got a fair price for their land (Flanagan, 1991a, p. 122; Flanagan & Ens, 1994), and reinvested it in their “traditional” activities such as freighting and hunting (Flanagan, 1991a, p. 15).

Douglas Sprague (1991) answers these critiques with supporting data. First, he opposes Ens’ views with regard to Métis migration from *Rivière-Rouge* before 1870. While Sprague admits that old parishes became crowded in the 1850s and 1860s, he suggests that many Métis moved near to newer parishes (and not outside the settlement) and criticises the fact that Ens makes generalisations from a study based on the comparison between St. Andrew’s and *Saint-François-de-Xavier*, old Métis parishes (*idem*, p. 139). Second, Sprague compares the Dominion census of 1871 and the notes of the commissioners who took Métis affidavits in 1875 to show that most of the Métis had not sold their allotment or scrip in the first years (*idem*, p. 141), but had rather held it (at least until 1875), “waiting for the terms of the ‘Manitoba treaty’ to come into effect” (*idem*, p. 151).

Although it is not within the scope of this thesis to take a position in this debate, my analysis of colonial maps reaches a conclusion closer to Sprague’s. Maps of this period tend to show the colonial “intention”⁹ to take over the land, especially after the creation of Manitoba. For the first time Euro-Canadians were engaging themselves in colonisation with the intention of occupying the whole Northwest. In comparison, the Selkirk colony was a much more modest

⁸ Ens has also regularly appeared as a government expert in Métis issues.

enterprise, spatially limited by the fur trade. For colonial authorities, the Northwest was to become a land for agriculture. Using the land otherwise — in a “primitive” way — was to waste its potential (Sprague, 1991, p. 151). In fact, any Métis who fit this Euro-Canadian agricultural scheme had little problem to secure a piece of farm land for himself and his family (*idem*). One can review the amendments to the Manitoba Act regarding the cultivated land requirements less as a way to disqualify Métis applications than as a means “to separate the wheat from the chaff” among the mixed-blood population. As noted above, while these requirements were generally met by full-time farmers, they were an impediment to those Métis who were also involved in the buffalo trade. Accordingly, and as I will show, the colonial maps exhibit the gradual extinction of Métis territorial markers and their replacement by colonial ones. What is more interesting is that not only do the maps depict the growth of colonisation at the expense of a “primitive” way of life, they sometimes predict it. Given their prospective quality, maps may be ahead of the spatial reality they intend to represent and, therefore, they may convey colonial intentions or spatial ideologies (Clayton, 2000; Harley, 1988). Thus, they can also be considered as good indicators of the federal “responsibility” in the territorial dispossession and dispersal of the Métis, another way to say that the maps convey, to a certain extent, colonial *anti-métissage* discourses.

3.1.1 Material territorial marks: taking over the land.

The material dimension was the best way for colonial cartographers to mark the difference between the land-wasting primitive way of life and the more prosperous and effective colonial use of land. Colonial maps of the West clearly demonstrate this. On the other hand, these maps also allow much room for the representation of material elements of Métis territoriality, in spite of the fact that they had always been made to emphasise primarily the Euro-Canadian perspective of the land. The increasing demographic importance of the Métis, and the specific socio-economic niche they had found for themselves within the Northwest economy, especially before 1870, had much to do with this reality (Ens, 2001, p. 162; Foster, 1985). Two types of Métis material markers prevail on colonial maps: transportation networks and land tenures.

⁹ “Intention” is understood here less as a planned course of action than as a result of spatial ideologies.

3.1.1.1 Transportation systems: Métis' tentacles in the Nord-Ouest.

In the Northwest, as in other parts of early Canada, rivers and lakes comprised the primary transportation system (Tough, 1996, p. 44-62). Considering the contribution of the Métis in the fur trade geography and in "the development of Northern water transportation," Diane Payment says, the region "could be considered a distinctive Métis sphere of influence (2001, p. 159). As I showed in chapter 2, portages and rivers are good, although indirect, indicators of the Métis mastery of the water system. Despite the fact that Métis shared these spaces with their *Canadien* and Indian relatives, the portage pinpoints map *métissage* in action, and identify emerging Proto-Métis groups. Again, it is no surprise to note the prominence of French place names in northern water systems: "L. des Isles," "Portage Cr.," "Point a la Mittasse," "Bonnet Portage," "Rivier L'Oiseau," and "La Barriere" are relevant examples on the 1858 S.J. Dawson's map (Figure 3.1).

The cart trail network, however, was of undoubted Métis origin. Although the network borrowed to a great extent from the pre-existing trajectories of Native people (Létourneau, 1978, p. 15; Ray, 1998; Spry, 1983), it was generally associated with three basic elements of Métis economic life: the buffalo hunt, pemmican production, and trade. Put another way, the cart trails were essential to the Métis material existence.

Most of the maps of the Northwest produced in the 19th century represent cart trails. The representation is particularly explicit on Dawson's map, which presents the cart trail infrastructure in all its complexity and extension.¹⁰ This infrastructure appears as a dominant material element of the region. The map exhibits a network that spreads its reach along the most important rivers such as the Red (Saint-Paul's Trail), Pembina, and Assiniboine (Carlton's Trail), and also on the plains, as marked and labelled by the term "Hunters Tracks," to the north-west of "Turtle Mountain" or near the Pembina Hills (southern Manitoba). The fact that, beside the rivers, there is no alternative means of transportation in the Northwest accentuates the material and cartographic importance of the cart trails. It is likely that such emphasis of the Métis material importance was not Dawson's intention. The mapmaker and scientist had a responsibility to document the Northwest's suitability for colonisation. The identification of transportation routes

was only one element of his physical description along with the recognition of land improper for cultivation such as the swampy areas near Lake Winnipeg. Whatever Dawson's intentions, the visual effect remains. The cart trails prove the Métis presence.

3.1.1.2 Land tenure: *le paysage de la Rivière-Rouge*.

The first official system of land tenure was made of long, narrow strips with a water frontage, the river lot. This system was proposed by HBC authorities who asked their servant and mapmaker, Peter Fidler, to survey it in 1813 while he was chief factor at the Brandon post (Warkentin & Ruggles, 1970, p.183-184). The 1819 Fidler map (Figure 3.2) reveals the first river lots to be surveyed in *Rivière-Rouge*, located on the western bank of the Red River (on "Frog Plain") and on the two sides of *la rivière la Seine*.

In spite of their colonial origin, it is safe to say that the river lots are an important type of Métis territorial mark. The Métis adopted the river lot system and implemented it outside Red River, notably in northern Saskatchewan in the late 1870s-early 1880s. When, following the creation of Manitoba, surveyors again measured and established river lots along the *Rivière-Rouge* (*idem*, p. 233),¹¹ it was not to satisfy the needs of newcomers, but simply to secure the land occupied by the Métis and white settlers before Manitoba. As the Métis were demographically dominant at the creation of Manitoba,¹² one can argue that s. 32 of the Manitoba Act and the resurveying of river lots first aimed to accommodate the Métis population. Wherever the Métis were found cultivating lands, river lots were generally surveyed (*idem*, p. 234). The necessity of resurveying these lots also highlights the relatively weak influence of the prior colonial legal and spatial structure on Métis land occupancy. Douglas Sprague notes that before the creation of Manitoba the division of lots was based on both formal and customary boundaries. If the former boundaries were fixed by surveyors — as Peter Fidler and George Taylor had done for the older parishes — the Métis people determined the latter.¹³ The Métis

¹⁰ This is no surprise, for the trails were essential for expeditions launched into the prairie (Hind, vol. 1, 1860, p. 147 et 154).

¹¹ The HBC first resurveyed the lots in the 1830s (Ens, 1996, p. 32).

¹² According to the census of 1870, near four-fifths of the Red River population was Métis (Sealey & Lussier, 1975, p. 95).

¹³ Some archaeologists make a similar point. David Burley *et al.* show that Métis agricultural settlement sites — that of *Petite-Ville*, near Batoche for example — featured a lack of boundary definition and symmetry that does not suit

used the land they needed — they sometimes needed less than a whole lot — and such use was proof of ownership (1991, p. 143). Staying in *Rivière-Rouge* in 1857, Hind observed that many Métis occupied lots for which they held no official titles (1860, vol. 1, p. 190-191). From a colonial perspective, these Métis were squatters.

The importance of surveying the river lots in the early 1870s is made obvious by A.L. Russell's map (Figure 3.3) — recognised as the first official map of the province of Manitoba (Warkentin & Ruggles, 1970, p. 248). This is not surprising, given the fact that this map was made in order to prepare the land for the arrival of the new settlers by putting in place the Canadian surveying system. Although Russell did not map the river lots (the scale of his representation was too small), he clearly established the areas where river lots were to be surveyed. These areas are on the banks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, on the southern shore of the Manitoba Lake (site of the Roman Catholic and Métis colony of Saint-Laurent), and along the "White Mud River" and "Rat R.," near Portage la Prairie. Over the decade that followed the creation of Manitoba, the progress in surveying resulted in an increasing number of large-scale maps, which allowed more detailed information about land and its division. In the early 1870s, J.A.U. Baudry [*Beaudry*], a *Canadien* surveyor employed under the direction of J.S. Dennis,¹⁴ produced a large-scale map entitled *Plan d'une partie de la Rivière Rouge comprenant les paroisses de St. Boniface, St. Vital, St. Norbert et Pointe-Coupé d'après les opérations de 1871* (Figure 3.4). The river lots are represented as they had recently been re-surveyed and their owner's names are indicated. Beyond the few lots owned by the churches or the HBC, most of them were assigned to the Métis, visual confirmation of their demographic and material importance in this part of the settlement (south of Fort Garry).

3.1.1.3 Socio-economic assimilation and the railroad: to "put on track" the Métis material marginality.

As mentioned above, 1870 marked a shift in the mapping of the region. As the colonial involvement in the management of land increased with the advancement of colonisation, maps

the principle of property division central to the Euro-Canadian organisation of space. Accordingly, the author suggest that this rather loose spatial organisation may be linked to Métis social structure (1992, p. 49, 120 & 159).

became an efficient if gradual means of erasing the Métis reality. The erasure, however, was the result of a complex, not always conscious, array of cartographic manipulations. It was much more than just ignoring the Métis reality as the Russell map of 1871 shows. The Ontarian surveyor pays more attention to selecting the Métis material elements to be represented than to trying to put them entirely aside as if they had never existed or had disappeared. In fact, while Métis material markers are easily found in *Rivière-Rouge*, they are almost completely invisible on the prairie. Examples of the representation of the Métis include the river lots, the cart trails, and the mention, in the “statistical” inset situated in the upper-right corner, of the 1.4 million acres of land reserved for “Resident Half breeds.” In the meantime, Russell’s map does little, if anything, to represent the Métis prairie materiality. Indeed, the prairie is less the mapmaker’s focus than is the Province of Manitoba. However, there is nothing in the representation of Manitoba to justify the fact that the province is not quite centred on the map, but is rather displaced towards the left. This has an obvious two-fold effect. First, it reduces space left for the prairie and Métis territorial markers and, second, it allows a better representation of the area dominated by Euro-Canadians. How intentional this was is hard to determine. But the visual effects are obvious. The Métis material reality in the prairie is less represented than its importance would suggest. An incomplete representation of cart trails, pale and visually insignificant compared to the rest of the map, is all that is left from detailed cartographic representations such as those on Dawson’s map.

Basically, Russell represents only one aspect of the Métis, the one that could assist the government to integrate them peacefully and successfully into Euro-Canadian society. He certainly pays little or no attention to the “wandering”¹⁵ life of buffalo hunters, which was generally seen as a limitation to this integration by Euro-Canadians (Hind, 1860, vol. 1, p.181-182). This cartographic representation is at odds with the spatial reality of many Métis. Not only was their life on the prairie not yet extinct, but with the bison moving steadily westward, buffalo hunters and traders were compelled to travel further south and west, to spend even more time in the prairie and, consequently, to devote even less time to farming their lots in *Rivière-Rouge* (*idem*, p. 180; Ens, 1996; Grant, 2000, p. 109). Russell’s map does not give an accurate picture of the material reality of Métis life. But the accuracy of this map should be measured less by its

¹⁴ Dennis was responsible for the making and implementation of the quarter section survey system in Manitoba. He was appointed Surveyor General in 1871.

accordance to a contemporary reality than by its capacity to mirror the land as colonists intended it to become. This map proved to be a fair conception of a future reality and well illustrates the prospective potential of maps. The mention of a “probable railroad route” in the upper-right of the map is another element of this prospective vision.

Beaudry’s large-scale map of the old French parish river lots may be analysed in the same way. His focus is on the settled portion of Métis reality. There is no representation of the prairie. Rather, he surrounds *Rivière-Rouge* by some considerable blanks. Even the cart trails appear to connect only different parts of the settlement; they do not seem to be connecting *Rivière-Rouge* to the “outside” world. Moreover, his precise inscriptions of Métis names on each single lot give the impression of Métis compliance with a settled life. The impression may be justified for some, but not for the majority of the Métis as their subsequent dispersion attests. More importantly, this inscription of Métis names suggests that government did properly address the Métis land issue. Surveyors, as the map shows, ran the river lot boundaries in accordance with the terms of s. 32 of the Manitoba Act. Actually, they surveyed river lots even where they considered that Métis improvements of the land were insufficient. One can find a considerable number of large-scale maps of river lots in the NAC that represent new French parishes (*Sainte-Anne*, *Saint-Laurent*, *Sainte-Agathe*, *Baie Saint-Paul*, and *Lorette*), precisely where a greater proportion of Métis were overlooked (Sprague, 1991, p. 141-142).¹⁶ In this light, it could be argued that maps initiated the colonial mental conception that the Métis were offered a fair opportunity to secure a piece of land. Put another way, maps would confirm the colonial belief that Métis failed to secure land in Manitoba because they had no will to cultivate and/or because they left the province, not because they were dispossessed.

Another cartographic manipulation involves information density and visual attractiveness. Even when a considerable number of Métis territorial markers find their way onto a map, they can be hidden by a more striking emphasis on the colonial appropriation of land. This is particularly obvious on the 1895 *Map of Part of North-West Territory Shewing the Locality of the Half-Breed Rebellion...* (Figure 3.5). Although Métis cart trails appear on this map, what first attracts the reader is the CPR, which sits on the lower section of the map and

¹⁵ I use this 19th century pejorative term to emphasise the Eurocentric perspective behind the mapping of Métis reality.

¹⁶ For example: McPhillips & Whitcher (1880), and McPhillips & Douppé’s (1875).

crosses it from left to right. The railroad stroke is darker and more pronounced, a reflection of its relative importance. The map insets and the *cartouche* add to the CPR visibility in two ways. First, their positioning on the representation creates a visual corridor in the centre of which lies the railroad. Second, one of the insets is a *Reduced Map Shewing Route to Winnipeg and North-West via Canadian Pacific Railway* that connects the region to its “civilised” and more developed eastern province; the other inset is a table of distances that also shows the connection between Eastern Canada and the Northwest territory. As the Québec geographer Serge Courville points out, such maps were instrumental in promoting colonisation and were largely addressed to potential settlers (2002, p. 466). Their function was less to “erase” the Métis than to highlight (should I say “overemphasise”) the steady and rapid progress of colonisation. The end result is the same. The Métis had become, cartographically speaking, a secondary element of the Northwest, although this was not yet the case.

3.1.2 Political territorial marks: delineating the Métis sense of common identity?

Of all its dimensions, the political component of Métis identity has caused the most ink to flow over the years. The narrative thread of Métis history has been built on events that marked the evolution of a Métis sense of common political identity: the battle of *la Grenouillère* (Seven Oaks) in June 1816, Guillaume Sayer’s trial in 1849, the creation of Manitoba, and the uprisings of 1870 and 1885 are among the most repeated examples (Friesen, 1987, p. 75-79, 100; Sawchuk, 1978, p. 24). In spite of its importance, however, the Métis political dimension is hardly perceptible on colonial maps. In the first place, mapmakers had little concern for the political dimension of the land as a whole. The centrality of the geography of the fur trade encouraged them to focus on the commercial characteristics of the region (Ruggles, 1991). But by the turn of the 1850s, Ontarians showed more interest in the fertile plains of the Northwest and started thinking about colonising and reproducing their way of life on such promising lands. While the colonial political dimension became more apparent on maps of this time, the Métis sense of identity was not directly inscribed on maps.

Nonetheless, some maps reveal indirect evidence of Métis (geo)political characteristics. Implicit recognition of Métis distinctiveness is revealed by subtle elements and by the context within which maps were produced. The representation of the province of Manitoba, which is central to the Ontarian surveyor Russell’s map (Figure 3.3) of 1871 is one example. The creation

of the province in 1870 marks the apogee of Métis political influence in the West, apparently making it impossible for “outsiders” to rule or take over the land without the Métis’ explicit consent. The Manitoba Act is best conceived as a negotiated agreement or as an alliance, and necessarily implies the interdependence and mutual influence of the two parties. Even if the Métis conceded the Dominion’s right to send its surveyors to prepare the field for the arrival of the new settlers, their political mobilisation awarded them many advantages, among which was the reservation of land for them. In the Dominion’s plan, Manitoba was meant to be, at least in its beginnings, a territory with little autonomy that was to be principally administered from Ottawa. In forcing the creation of a province with its own legislative assembly, the Métis sought to ensure the continuity of their culture.

The 1885 Northwest uprising offers more indirect evidence of the Métis political influence. W.H. Holland’s map of the Saskatchewan and Assiniboia territories, 1885, is a good example (Figure 3.6). Although the map does not clearly represent battle sites, its title says it all: *Map of the Seat of Riel’s Insurrection*. Considering that “insurrection” defines an organized opposition to authority, the title of this map indirectly confirms that the Métis were considered as a specific people with a certain military organisation. As the precise locations of the battles are hard to identify, the Métis “military” and geographic importance seems to embrace the whole region. Yet this is contrary to the general emphasis of the map, which is to assert the material mastery of civilisation as represented by the *Canadian Pacific Railroad* (CPR) and the telegraph line. The Métis are not intended to be dominant. The same comments can be made of the 1895 *Map of Part of North-West Territory Shewing the Locality of the Half-Breed Rebellion...* (Figure 3.5). Again, the importance of Métis political influence in the Northwest is revealed less by the visibility of the Métis on the map than by the title itself.

3.1.2.1 Surveys and battlefields: measures of a political and military seizure.

The Métis may have been politically influential, but this is not what the mapmakers aimed to show. It is unlikely that Russell meant to portrait Manitoba as the ground of an alliance between primitive and civilised peoples. This was against colonial racial conceptions. If Métis existence is perceptible on his map — the river lots — it remains subordinate to the colonial reality. The river lots appear to be remnants of a much larger survey system dominated by the

township or quarter section, and the geometric, rational, and organised spirit of modern western society (Spry, 1983, p. 215). The Manitoba that is sketched on this map is not intended to be the site of the Métis Nation, but is rather the colonial sight of an empty land available to be “transformed into townsites and farmsteads—policed, surveyed, fenced, settled, and threaded with railroads and roads” (Spry, 1999, p. ix).

Such an exercise of re-examination can also be applied to the representation of the battlefields of the 1885 uprising (Figure 3.6). It might well be that any mention of the uprising is a demonstration of Métis influence in the Northwest; however, it has to be recognized that battlefields are shown to emphasise the loss of such influence. The use of the word “rebellion” is calculated. From a colonial point of view, the term expresses the “illegal” nature of the Métis uprising, legitimises its suppression, and validates the Euro-Canadian political (military) supremacy over the Northwest.

3.1.3 Symbolic territorial marks: soul and sense of territory.

Symbols are central to a social system as they generate the attributes that define a society’s sense of identity, as well as those on which the formation and development of its territory depend. They also generate communication between individuals. The most obvious form symbols can take is language; as a particular way of thinking, language is really a “*trésor commun*” (Siblot, 1999, p. 15), a symbolic expression of a sense of identity.

3.1.3.1 Naming the land: making a “home.”

Toponyms are the predominant cartographic symbol. Not only do names have a meaning on their own, but they are also made of a system of signs, a spoken and/or written language. Naming and language provide a group of people with the means to distinguish itself in space (Akin, 1999, p. 34). Naming and its result, the toponymic nomenclature (the sum of a society’s toponyms in a given time), are then an expression of a group’s sense of place (Nash, 1999, p.

472) and, as Hervé Guillorel would say, the process by which space is transformed into territory (1999, p. 64).

Métis toponymy largely borrows, by way of translation, from original Indian place names. Given, however, the cultural and familial ties that bound Métis and their Native forebears, I consider these translated place names to be authentically Métis.¹⁷ Moreover, it must be said that these toponymic transfers indicate yet again the basic Métis socio-cultural duality. Similarly, Métis nomenclature considerably overlaps non-Aboriginal toponymies, notably those of the *voyageurs canadiens*.

French toponyms are most likely to originate with the Métis, especially on the prairie where French-speaking Métis were numerous (Dawson, 1859, p. 24; Hind, 1860, vol. 1, p. 179 & 181).¹⁸ One finds some of them on Fidler's map (Figure 3.2). The best known are "R. Qu'appelle" and "Portage des Prairie." Fidler also notes "Fort la Reinne" (near Portage-la-Prairie) — a French Regime toponym —, "Mountain La Bofse," and "Soore river" (Souris River).¹⁹ There are also some French toponyms on Russell's map (Figure 3.3) — "Seine," "Isles des Bois," "aux Prunes," and "aux Marais" Rivers; "la Petite Montagne" — and Dawson's (Figure 3.1), as revealed by the "Butte au Carcajou" (at the forks of Assiniboine and Qu'appelle Rivers) and numerous tributaries of the Red River: "R. Salle" (Lasalle River); "R. aux Gratiias" (Morris River); "R. aux Isles des Bois" (Boyne River); "R. aux Prunes" (Plum River); "R. du Marais"; "Riviere la Seine"; and "Riviere aux Roseaux". Unusual on the latter map is the use of the French generic "Riviere" in substitution for its English equivalent, "River," which otherwise abounds on the map. Dawson had probably transcribed the toponyms, the specific and generic terms altogether, as they were given to him by his Métis informants.

¹⁷ On the one hand, such a translation can be seen as the Métis recognition of their Aboriginal origins. On the other hand, it could also be argued that it was a way for the Métis to distinguish themselves, a way of appropriating First Nations territory.

¹⁸ This is not to say that English-speaking Métis had not named the land on which they lived. However, if they did so, their toponyms were more than likely to be integrated into the colonial geography, which was anglophone as well. Therefore, English-language Métis toponymy is not well documented.

¹⁹ The use here of English spelling is striking. Mapmakers would generally do so to transcribe Native place names. Actually, "Souris" might not be the French for "Mouse," but rather an unexpected Native name. According to Carol Léonard (2002, *ad verbatim*), the toponym could be a corruption of "Missouri." It appears that the Missouri and

That said, French toponyms are relatively outnumbered on colonial maps. Nothing prevents explorers, traders, outsiders or cartographers from translating into English the names they encounter. However, many of the original French and Métis place names have persisted until today. Dawson's map exhibits the best examples: the "Caling River" (Qu'appelle) and "Mouse River" (Souris). Both Russell and Fidler mention the "Stinking River," the contemporary name of which is the Lasalle River or was, as the Métis used to call it, *la rivière Sale*. Fidler also maps the "Reed River," which flows into the Red River a few miles north of the US border and is known today as Roseau River.

Maps also include many translated toponyms that have not survived in the West, but for which Métis equivalents are known to have existed. These toponyms leave no doubt as to their Métis origin. Dawson mentions a place called "Where the bones lie" (site of Regina, Saskatchewan), which was named "*Tas d'Os*" by the Métis (Morice, 1912, vol. ii, p. 328; Rondeau, 1923, p. 113). One can also observe, on Dawson's map, the "Jaw bone R." This name is a corruption of the Métis term "*la Mâchoire d'Orignal*," or Moose Jaw as both a city and a river are named today. The "Scratching River," Métis' *rivière aux Gratias* (Morris River, Manitoba), or "Moose Hill" — "*la montagne d'Orignal*" — are other examples (Charette, 1976, p. 15, 79 & 101).

3.1.3.2 The Queen sits on a pile of bones: a symbolic infiltration.

Few in Canada are aware that Louis Riel was hanged in a place the Métis traditionally knew as *Tas d'Os* (Rondeau, 1923, p. 113) — the "Where the bones lie" on Dawson's map. The site was one where the Métis gathered to make pemmican, and the name was derived from the accumulation of buffalo bones (Baker, 1934, p. 5-6). In the 1880s, some Métis, especially those from *la Montagne de Bois* and *La Talle de Saule*, moved there to gather these bones (and those spread all over the prairie), which were sent to the United States to be powdered and processed into fertiliser (Rondeau, 1923, p. 112). This coincided with the arrival of the CPR. A train station was built on site and named *Regina* (Latin for "Queen") after Victoria "the Good." Regina, as the symbolic and geographic throne of the British Crown in the Northwest, is the best illustration of

Souris Rivers are very much alike in terms of their turbidity. They are also, geographically, fairly close to each other.

how names can be used to superimpose a dominant group's territoriality, and how they can become political issues for they imply control over the land and express the spatiality of power relations (Guillotel, 1999, p. 65; Kahlouche, 1999; Myers, 1996; Nuessel, 1992, p. 3).

As the settling of the land had mostly proceeded from the expansion of the railroads and roads (Stanley, 1961, p. 185-186), the renaming of the prairie followed these same axes. The CPR was certainly the most important source of renaming. Along this railroad emerged train stations, most of which were given Euro-Canadian names. Another look of the 1895 *Map of Part of North-West Territory Shewing the Locality of the Half-Breed Rebellion...* (Figure 3.5) confirms this. If old toponyms such as Portage la Prairie, Qu'appelle, Grande-Coulée or Moose Jaw persisted and identified train stations or new settlements, most names were introductions to the *Nord-Ouest*. Bagot, Austin, Douglas, Sidney, Fleming, Herbert, and Bowell are just a few examples of the colonial toponymic appropriation of Métis land. As these toponyms are in the more salient portion of the map, their relative importance is often obvious at a glance, leaving other place names in the dark. Given the promotional nature of this map and its role in attempting to attract settlers, one may suspect a certain colonial intention in this European toponymic emphasis that recalls the cartographic tactics used by British mapmakers in early 19th-century Québec (see chapter 2).

It would be misleading, however, not to remember that the process of renaming had started years before the creation of Manitoba and the expansion of colonisation. As I pointed out above, Métis toponyms were largely translated into the mapmaker's language or replaced on early maps. The huge "Canada" that crosses the old prairie on Dawson's map is also relevant, as the region was not yet "Canadian" when the map was made.

* * *

Colonial maps expose Métis geography as a dominant element in the *Nord-Ouest*, and reveal themselves as rich sources of Métis territorial markers. However, Métis territoriality can be only partially revealed by maps. The Métis territorial markers represented on maps are those that do not confront the Euro-Canadian geographical project, the integration of the Northwest

into the Dominion. As both creator and bearer of knowledge, the cartographic discourse produced by colonial authorities is based on views, representations, and languages (cartographic/scientific) largely foreign to Métis reality. Shaped by the discursive and rational logic of the map, Métis reality is first classified and situated, spatially and socially, as any other human (Indian, Euro-Canadian...) or physical (hills, rivers, fertile plains) feature to be mapped. Imprisoned in its specific localisation and category, Métis reality had become another element of colonial management.

3.2 Oral inscription of Métis territoriality: sketch of a primary writing.

Because of the cultural bias of colonial maps, Métis territoriality needs to be seen within another set of representations and perspectives. Métis oral tradition is one. I will now consider what this tradition can teach us about Métis territoriality. In so doing, I will use three major types of oral information: stories, songs, and toponyms.

Exploring Métis oral narratives is not new, although it is still a marginal component of Métis studies (Dorion & Préfontaine, 2001, p. 20). Many authors have offered their interpretations of such material, notably of the songs (Carrière, 199-; Cass-Beggs, 1967; Clemens, 1985; Complin, 1939). From this literature a multitude of insights emerge about what Métis life had been, particularly with regards to its organisation, its materiality (tools, transportation means, food, clothing or housing), and its cultural distinctiveness. However, as I noted in the introduction, territoriality has never been a major concern in Métis studies, and narrative analyses are no exception. Understanding the importance of the experience of space in the forging of identity as revealed by these narratives is a study that remains to be done — and is what I propose to do here. A central question emerges: how do Métis oral expressions mirror and/or shape their *vécu* or experience of space?

To suppose that oral tradition can provide indicators of a people's experience of space is to admit that narratives are discourses, and following from that, that they take part in the constitution and/or acceptance of a system of knowledge. Narratives present information that was first culturally selected, defined, and hierarchised by the representations (about space, and history), practices, codes and rules originating from and recognised by a people. Selecting and

hierarchising “reality” is a way to put some order in the world, to make it meaningful. As the world is constantly changing, so are narratives: “If we think of oral tradition as a social activity rather than as some reified product, we come to view it as part of the equipment for living rather than a set of meanings embedded within texts and waiting to be discovered” (Cruikshank, 1998, p. 41).

As I want to emphasise Métis territoriality, geographical knowledge (be it social and/or physical) is at the centre of my analysis. My understanding of geographical knowledge generally corresponds to what is labelled *traditional ecological knowledge* (TEK). TEK is defined as a specific set of geographical information based on practices and cognition shared from one generation to another through orality, and upon which is built the relationship between a society and its environment (Berkes, 1993, p. 1-3; Collignon, 1996; Ruddle, 1993). TEK or geographical knowledge specifically tells us about land occupancy, which “refers to the group’s collective sense of its own territory in relation to that of others. In a sense, it is defined by a summation of historic use of the area, and an expression of the breadth of the community traditional ecological knowledge” (Hrenchuk, 1993, p. 75). As this last quote shows, TEK benefits a society by conveying as much information about geography as about identity, collective memory, or historical-genealogical origins.

TEK offers more than spatially represented information; it is a representation of space in its own right. In fact, the definition of TEK is broadly similar to that of the map! It requires only a small step from this observation to conclude that oral narratives can be read as cartographic representations. This is an issue that has been recently debated by scholars working on the history of cartography, and has resulted in the revision and broadening — beyond its European basis — of their definition of what constitutes a map. Accordingly, an increasing number of studies focussing on “alternative” map productions, mainly those of indigenous people, have emerged over the last two decades and have tended to emphasise the distinctiveness of Native cartographic conventions (Lewis, 1998; Rundstrom, 1990). From this literature, one can identify three outcomes that are relevant to our understanding of Métis “cartography.” First, Native people drew “conventional” sketch maps that European mapmakers reproduced by integrating

them into colonial maps.²⁰ Similarly, it is known that the Métis occasionally produced sketch maps for Euro-Canadian mapmakers, as Hind's comments quoted earlier in this chapter indicate (1860. v.1, p. 143). Second, Native maps were mostly "simple" graphic fragments of a primary, rich, exhaustive, and orally communicated body of geographical information (Warhus, 1997). Little of this oral information but a few Native place names was transcribed on colonial maps. Finally, some scholars have suggested that non-graphic representations of space, such as oral narratives, are types of maps (Brody, 1988; Chatwin, 1987; Pearce, 1998, p. 159; Woodward & Lewis, 1998, p. 6). The intention of such a proposal was to avoid the Eurocentric bias of considering "primitive" people, who had not developed writing to which conventional maps belong, to be incapable of mapping. Some scholars oppose this proposition, as does Denis Wood in affirming that "songlines are not maps" (1993). For him, all peoples are not "map-immersed" (1992, p. 34). He considers that maps are artefacts (so material, not oral) that can communicate over time and be consulted as needed. Wood offers a bounded definition of map, and rather neglects the communicative and temporal nature of oral tradition or TEK. He ignores the fact that memory and orality form, by their interaction, "mental artefacts." On the other hand, there is something suspect and culturally biased in supposing that mapping is a universal cultural activity just because it is part of a European tradition (Woodward & Lewis, 1998). It is as if a people have to be absolutely map-immersed — materially and/or mentally — to be considered equal to Europeans.

For this reason, I am hesitant to label Métis oral narratives as "maps." To avoid an ethnic bias, I think it is worth considering maps for what they are fundamentally: a specific — if not exclusive — type of representation of space. On these grounds, comparison between maps and oral narratives is possible, even if one defines them separately. Narratives can be conceived as territorial representations that are made of conventions different from those understood by colonial mapmakers (Belyea, 1992), and that mirror the Métis' unique cognitive experience of space, or geographical knowledge.

²⁰ These Native maps or sketches were generally drawn on ephemeral and fragile materials — birch bark, animal skins, snow, or sand — and were preserved because of their inscription on European cartographic documents.

3.2.1 Métis songs and stories: the words that bound.

Neither “stories” nor “songs” are single categories. I will use two types of stories: 1) collective stories, based on Métis collective memory and transmitted through the generations, some of which remain part of the oral tradition of contemporary Prairie Métis;²¹ and 2), accounts relating to an individual’s experience of space during the 19th century. By no means are these two types of stories closed categories. Individual accounts may make many references to collective stories (Charette, 1976, p. 21). Songs can also be classified in two distinct categories. There are “original” songs that relate specific Métis experiences, and other songs that come from the old French repertoire shared with the *voyageurs*.

In order to analyse Métis narratives, I propose three types of investigation. First, I will observe how Métis experience of space is expressed through their oral tradition. Second, I will consider how Métis narratives shape the Métis experience of space. If narratives are to be understood as systems of knowledge, one must bear in mind that “just as traditional knowledge and its transmission shape society and culture, culture and society shape knowledge; these are reciprocal phenomena” (Ruddle, 1993, p. 18). And third, I will show how in-betweenness, the central element of Métis reality, forms overlapping spaces that challenge social and geographical “frontiers” delineating the Métis experience of space. This will reveal how ambiguous categories such as “we” and “other” are, and how rich and diverse the Métis *vécu* is.

Before proceeding with the analyses it is important to recall that narratives are contextual productions that tell as much about the present as about the past. My examination relies on a relatively limited number of sources, which focus on individual’s accounts, such as these of Peter Erasmus, Louis Goulet, Antoine Vermette, and Norbert Welsh. Although these individuals provide good insights into the collective nature of the Métis sense of identity and territory, one has to avoid generalisations; these Métis speak on their own behalf, not for the Métis as a whole. Moreover, while these accounts reveal a variety of experiences, they do not cover all dimensions of Métis life in the same way. First, the way in which these individuals identify as Métis differs from one to another. While Goulet, Vermette and Welsh clearly self-identify as Métis, Erasmus’s sense of identity is only indirectly suggested. Second, their ethno-linguistic origins were

²¹ See, for instance, *The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture* held by the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research at <<http://www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php/57>>.

different: Goulet and Vermette were Catholic French; Erasmus, whose Danish father worked for the HBC, was Protestant and had English as his mother tongue; and Welsh, although he adopted the religion of his French Métis mother and in-laws, kept strong links with his English background. Finally, none of these Métis were full-time farmers or fur trade employees; they were mostly involved in the free trade and buffalo hunt.²² Consequently, Métis individual accounts offer a particular version of the past influenced by life contingencies and the context within which they were performed and “cannot, therefore, be taken word for word as a source of precise, factual information” (Spry, 1999, p. xiv).

But I am not suggesting that these accounts are fictional and exclusively personal. All of these Métis elders (Erasmus was 87 years old when he performed his narrative) were considered good storytellers. Hugh Dempsey, in the foreword of the most recent re-edition of *Buffalo Days and Nights*, says of Peter Erasmus that he

follows a Native practice in telling his story. When an Indian recounts an historical event, whether or not he was part of it, he describes it as though he was there, complete with conversations among the principal participants. [...] The reader should not think that this is fictionalizing the account—not at all. It is following the ways of his mother’s people (1999, p. x).

In other words, storytellers often describe events of a collective nature as if they had personally experienced them, “individualising” what was common. Their stories perhaps present “corrupted” versions of the past, but they often rely on real events that had collective meanings.

3.2.1.1 Relating Métis experience of space: three areas of investigation.

While the broad components of Métis territoriality were similar everywhere in the Northwest, the Métis sense of identity and territory varied greatly in time and space. The Métis in the 19th century were not only those who hunted the buffalo and lived at *Rivière-Rouge* as

²²As far as I know, there is no account from those Métis working as farmers or as tripmen and York boat operators for the HBC, other than contemporary ones — the *Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives*, the *Lac La Biche Mission Historical Society* or Jean Morisset’s *Ted Trindell: Métis Witness to the North* (1986). I do not know the reasons for this. One may suggest, however, that the “free life of the prairie” was a more interesting reality to depict for both the storytellers and the interviewers in the early 20th century when all these accounts were recorded.

early studies had shown (Slobodin, 1966).²³ The Métis were also at home in the parkland-woodland environment, along fur trade routes, and near the posts (Tough, 1996, p. 5). It is in such environments that groups of proto-Métis had emerged and eventually formed most of the Métis population of the *Rivière-Rouge* (Foster, 1985). The Métis sense of identity and territory was derived, for example, from areas as distinct from each other as Hudson Bay and *rivière de la Paix*.

The explanation of such diversity has inaugurated an important debate (Dorion & Préfontaine, 2001, p. 29). On the one hand, Frits Pannekoek (1976), a University of Calgary specialist in Métis studies, has suggested that ethno-linguistic and religious differences created an intrinsic cleavage between the *Métis* and the *Half-breeds* at *Rivière-Rouge*. His argument is that very few English-speaking Métis supported Louis Riel during the 1870 uprising. On the other hand, Irene Spry thinks that Pannekoek's argument is shaky at best for it does not take into account the numerous family ties existing between French and English mixed-blood populations at the time. She also suggests the inadequacy of building a study exclusively on clerical records, as did Pannekoek, and calls for the use of other sources, notably Métis oral tradition. Spry leads by example in quoting Louis Goulet's account in which she finds evidence of the unity and friendship throughout the colony of *Rivière-Rouge* (1985, p. 95-97). Moreover, Spry argues that all French Métis did not follow Riel. In fact, a commercial and agricultural elite of French and Catholic Métis had no grievance about the succession of Rupert's Land from the HBC to the Dominion of Canada (Ens, 1996, p. 129-130). Spry considers social class to be a more suitable explanation for *Rivière-Rouge* diversity in that it created an economically-based spatial segregation. Gerhard Ens (1988; 1996) and Nicole St-Onge (1985b) give further weight to Spry's argument when discussing variations in Métis responses to legal and economic pressures in the *Rivière-Rouge* area in the 1870s. St-Onge goes further in diminishing the importance of ethno-linguistic and religious cleavages. For her,

[English and French-speaking Métis] seemed to have had very flexible alliances when it came to their denominational affiliation. Several Catholic mixed-bloods were buried in St. Peters Anglican Cemetery. Most of the Scottish Métis could name at least one French Métis ancestor (who would presumably have been Catholic) who had joined the Scottish Protestant mixed-bloods community by way of marriage. This would indicate that the two groups [...] were not as distinct as historians have suggested (1985a, p. 3-4).

²³ Quoted by Peterson and Brown (1985, p. 6).

The two interpretations may both be reflected in the geography of the fur trade. The HBC and the NWC had developed distinct strategies and gave birth to distinct mixed-blood populations organised along both ethno-linguistic and social class lines. Initially, the companies acquired their employees from two different cultural basins. While the HBC recruited most of its labourers and clerks in Orkney, the Montréal-based company, the NWC, filled its canoes with *Canadiens* from the St. Lawrence Valley. This is the source of a fundamental ethno-linguistic divide. There are, however, other differences. Each company had distinctive views of its emerging mixed-blood population, views that were greatly influenced by the social position of the father within the company. Many of the HBC mixed-bloods, especially men, would be sent to the British Isles, to Montréal and later to the *Rivière-Rouge* settlement, to receive a “proper education” — to get “civilised” —, and be taught literacy and a sense of agriculture (Brown, 1980; Coutts, 1988, p. 70). Because of their Euro-Canadian education, these mixed-bloods were more suited to occupy higher position within the HBC, such as clerks, than most of their counterparts within the NWC. The latter, like their fathers before them, would be often confined to the lower ranks of the working force, as labourers, tripmen, and canoemen. These trends were confirmed in 1821 when, with the merger of the two companies and the restructuring that followed, the majority of those laid off were of *canadien* origin (Friesen, 1987, p. 96; Giraud, 1945, p. 1003).

Diversity also found its way beyond the fur trade companies. *Les Hommes libres* — as *engagés* (*Canadiens*, Iroquois or Métis) were generally called when they had completed their contract with the fur trade companies and stayed in *le Nord-Ouest* to trap and trade for their own benefit — were involved in a variety of economic activities ranging from those that were closely related to the fur trade economy to others independent of it. All of these activities had their own spatial logic. Some of the *Gens libres* who had kept a link with the fur trade were reintegrated part time within the HBC labour system as hunters, boat operators, tripmen, *etc.* (Ens, 1996, p. 29 & 43; Friesen, 1987, p. 92). Another group was composed of independent buffalo hunters who would produce the pemmican, essential food for HBC employees working west of *Rivière-Rouge*. A last group was involved in freighting and traded goods, pemmican, and other by-products of the buffalo to the HBC or to Indians. Indeed, some Métis engaged in all of these activities.

Freighting also operated outside the fur trade’s tentacles. It was at the source of an emerging Métis commercial elite that “reigned” over the prairie to the point of challenging the

HBC's trade monopoly in Rupert's land (Ens, 1988 & 1996; St-Onge, 1985b, p. 155). The episode of the Guillaume Sayer's trial, in 1859, is the best-known example of it.²⁴ Finally, agriculture in *Rivière-Rouge* was an alternative way for the Métis to sustain themselves. For the most part, agriculture was a subsistence activity on a few acres of land where vegetables, crops and hay — to feed a few cattle, horses and sheep — were grown while Métis were away on the buffalo hunts (Dawson, 1859, p. 24). For the francophone areas, on the east side of the Red River and along the Assiniboine, "the Métis farming element was made of hunters who, between 1850 and 1870, because of thinning bison herds and the emergence of a market for agricultural goods, were slowly turning away from the chase to take up full-time farming" (St-Onge, 1985b, p. 156).

Although it is understood that such a diversity of origin made complexity the likely characteristic of the Métis *vécu*, I have identified three spatial categories, the limits of which are, of course, fluid and evolving: 1) experience of the settlements; 2) experience of the "prairie"; and 3) experience of the "margins" and of the "outside world." Unlike the fur trade geography, which divided territory by water basins (Friesen, 1987, p. 6), the categories I propose are based less on physical attributes than on the Métis perception of space.

Experience of the settled life: Rivière-Rouge and other Métis settlements.

In the course of the 19th century, the Métis created many settlements across the Northwest. They were generally located either in the parkland, near the fur trade posts and the woodland area,²⁵ or near the numerous wooded hills scattered over the grassland.²⁶ *Rivière-Rouge* was the dominant Métis settlement.

References to the material importance of *Rivière-Rouge* largely refer to the agricultural activity of the settlement. Matheson mentions the harvest in the fall, for example (Morin, February 25, 2003b). Goulet offer other examples: 1) that *la rivière aux Marais* (west of today's

²⁴ The Métis Guillaume Sayer was convicted of illegal trade by the council of Assiniboia, the principal authority in *Rivière-Rouge*. Waiting outside for the decision was a party of armed Métis. Aware of the gathering and fearing the crowd's reaction to the judgment, the Council decided to free Sayer. The Métis interpreted it as if Sayer was not guilty and some voices raised from the crowd and claimed: "*Le commerce est libre! Vive la liberté!*" (Howard, 1952, p. 59). From that date, the HBC no longer tried to enforce its commercial supremacy over the Métis.

²⁵ Lac Sainte-Anne, Lac La Biche, Île-à-la-Crosse, Saint-Albert, *Petite-Ville*, Batoche, etc.

²⁶ The *montagnes de bois*, de *Cyprès*, de *l'Orignal*, etc.

Dufrost) was where the Métis used to “faire du foin” (Charette, 1976, p. 24); and 2), how the *tourtes* (type of pigeon), known as pests among farmers, make the settlement a rather bad land for agriculture (*idem*, p. 51). In addition to these comments about agriculture, there are other indications of the material reality of *Rivière-Rouge*; one example is the durability of the Métis log houses — the Charette house built at the entrance of the village of Saint-Norbert in 1800 was still standing when Goulet told his story (*idem*, p. 59).

Similar comments about Métis material life in settlements had been made by Norbert Welsh who, along with Father Hugonard, was the first to farm in Fort Qu’appelle in 1878 (Weekes, 1994, p. 119). In 1884, after a few years trading, he was back to *Prairie-Ronde* — about 60 miles south from Batoche — where he started ranching. Describing his operations, he quickly sketches Métis land tenure: “It was now the beginning of September [1884]. I had brought my plow and harness, so I broke three acres of land that could be used for potato and vegetable garden in the spring. *The plowing marked my claim. Nobody else would take it. That was the law of the country*” (*idem*, p. 144, my emphasis).

Métis community life is also a recurrent element among Métis oral accounts. Goulet gives an interesting portrait of Métis community life at *Rivière-Rouge*. He describes the moral importance of Father Ritchot within the community (*idem*, p. 90-93).²⁷ He also mentions the changes brought by the newcomers from Ontario in the 1850s by recalling his father who deplored the loss of “[l’]esprit d’union et de camaraderie qui avait toujours existé chez les gens d’origines raciales et de religions différentes” (*idem*, p. 77). Similarly, each occasion Peter Erasmus had to visit his relatives in *Rivière-Rouge* was an opportunity to meet with his family’s neighbour and friend of Scottish descent, Murdoch Spence, and learn the latest news about the community. Spence would tell Erasmus that the quietude of the old days of the community were compromised by the coming of a young French Métis “agitator” named Louis Riel (Erasmus, 1999, p. 140, 191).

²⁷ In fact, churches greatly regulated Métis life in settlements (Ens, 1996, p. 7); all central activities of community life — marriages, baptisms, funerals, and masses — were officiated by a priest. The churches also created particular patterns in the colony, dividing it into parishes with their specific religious adherence. Given the demographic dominance of French-speaking Métis, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) was the most important religious institution. It was established in 1818 by Father Jean-Norbert Provencher in response to Lord Selkirk’s and the Métis’ expressed demands.

Settlements were also expressions of Métis symbolism as illustrated by naming. It is striking how many activities or elements of Métis daily life do refer to *Rivière-Rouge*. Why would the Métis call so basic and crucial a means of transportation “*la charrette de la Rivière-Rouge*” (Charette, 1976, p. 99; Vermette, 1910) if the settlement had meant little for them?²⁸ The same question could apply to “*la jigüe de la Rivière-Rouge*,” which is mentioned in W.E. Ingersoll’s narrative, *The Man Who Danced Himself to Death* (Morin, February 25, 2003a). Naming is about making sense of things. The words used in the process cannot be insignificant.

Experience of the “virgin prairie,” le pays du buffalo.

It would be difficult to discuss Métis territoriality without considering the prairie.

[...] *ces années de mon enfance et de mon adolescence ont été si belles! je n’hésite pas à dire qu’elles ont été les plus enivrantes de toute notre histoire à nous Métis, avec l’accent, Métifs. Nous avions la prairie vierge où il y avait encore assez de buffalos pour nous suffire, et les Indiens pacifiés n’étaient plus là pour la disputer. Nous avions avec nous tous les anciens qui avaient vécu le temps de la prairie et de ses guerres* (Charette, 1976, p. 60).

This quote pictures the prairie as Métis, and relegates both Indians and whites to the background. Indian competition for this land and the fur trade posts established in the parkland and here and there in the grassland have little significance in Goulet’s perspective.

Métis experience of the prairie encompassed a vast region comprising both grassland and parkland. If many consider the parkland an ecological transition zone, with a distinct landscape where aspen is dominant and, consequently, not part of the prairie (Friesen, 1987, p. 3), the Métis narratives do not often distinguish the two zones.²⁹ The prairie is wherever the buffalo are. If the plains bison, “the Prince of the Prairies” to use Horward’s term (1952, p. 292), generally ranged within the grassland, the Métis chased them up to Edmonton, in the parkland (Charette, 1976, p.

²⁸ It is worth noting that Métis narratives often referred to the “*charrette*” without mentioning its place of origin.

²⁹ In addition to this is the fact that the “grassland zone” was not exclusively made of low-prairie vegetation (grasses, wild flowers, mosses, forbs...), but also contained some wooded areas. The rivers and hills were, as in the parkland, zones of flora transition dominated by poplars, willows or even oaks. These plant species were essential sources of fire wood — lack of which would have entailed the use of *les bouses de vache* (“bison pies”) —, and building products for Métis wintering camps and carts (Charette, p. 59, 98-99).

78). Moreover, other species of bison, although economically less significant for the Métis, such as the wood bison, occupied both parkland and woodland zones (*idem*, p. 36).

The prairie is often identified with the buffalo hunt. The buffalo was a structuring element of Métis geography.³⁰ It was a major factor in the ongoing acquisition and development of Métis geographical knowledge — based as it was on a variety of information regarding resources such as fire wood, game, fishing areas, camp sites or flora (*idem*, p. 23). Louis Goulet's detailed description of the different species of bison the Métis killed for food and trade is a good illustration of such knowledge (*idem*, p. 36-37).

Although seasonal, the buffalo hunt occupied the Métis for much of the year. There were no fewer than three buffalo seasons: "We hunted about three times a years in the summer, fall and winter, and each man in the party would get from ten to fifteen buffalo" (Vermette, 1910). Giving even more details, Goulet explains that

Nous avions coutume de partir de bon printemps pour la prairie, dès que l'herbe était assez longue pour être broutée, pour la pincer, comme on disait. Nous revenions vers le mois de juillet. Nous restions à la maison pendant une, deux ou trois semaines pour repartir et ne revenir cette fois que tard à l'automne, quand nous ne passions pas l'hiver en hivernement, sous la tente, dans une loge ou dans une maison d'occasion construite sur la plaine. Nous allions ordinairement à la montagne de Bois; quand le buffalo recula du côté des environs de la montagne Cyprès, nous l'y suivîmes. Enfin, plus tard, lorsque le buffalo se réfugia dans les terrains difficiles d'accès du Montana, du Wyoming, du Nebraska et de Colorado, ce fut le long du Missouri que nous allions à la rencontre des troupes qui restaient encore (Charette, 1976, p. 32).

Considering that certain Métis passed little time in *Rivière-Rouge* it is no surprise that Norbert Welsh delivered his own baby on the plains in the mid-1860s while trading at *Prairie-Ronde* (Weekes, 1994, p. 35). In fact, many Métis were born, married and died on the prairie, outside official settlements. One can find no fewer than 13 marriages, 47 births and 3 deaths recorded as "on plains" in the 1885 scrip records in the *National Archives of Canada*.³¹ Indeed, this number is relatively marginal compared to the mentions of official settlements such as *Rivière-Rouge*,

³⁰ The hunt itself had probably reached its peak in the 1840s; never would a Métis brigade be as big in the following years. The rapid depletion of the herds from the late 1860s to the 1880s was likely the major reason for that. However, the importance of the St. Paul buffalo-robe trade, in terms of both the number of carts involved and the value, had grown during that period (Ens, 1996, p. 80).

³¹ *North-West Territories Métis scrip applications* (scrip made in 1885 by Métis living in the Northwest Territories previous to July 15, 1870), R190-44-1 (old # RG15-D-II-8-b), finding aid 15-20.

Saint-Albert (Alberta), Portage-la-Prairie, Fort-à-la-Corne, Prince-Albert, *etc.*³² However, it would appear that a considerable number of marriages made in the first place “à la façon du pays” (Spry, 1985, p. 103) were afterward recorded in settlements where a church and a priest were to be found (Ministry of Education, Government of Saskatchewan). It was the same with baptisms (*idem*). There were probably many more marriages and births “on plains” than the evidence shows.

Buffalo hunting expeditions also entailed a specific spatial organisation of the camps. Although the Métis would often sleep out with only a blanket (Charette, 1976, p. 177; Vermette, 1910; Weekes, 1994), settling a camp for the night was anything but simple:

Certains chefs de caravane avaient l'habitude de former le rond à chaque arrêt afin d'habituer les gens à cette manœuvre et d'en acquérir la rapidité à force d'exercice. On appelait former le rond, placer les charrettes parallèlement à côté l'une de l'autre, roue à roue, puis lever les timons en l'air de façon à asseoir la charrette sur sa fonçure d'arrière et présenter ainsi une clôture circulaire. [...] Grâce à ce système le camp pouvait se mettre immédiatement en état de siège et préparer sa défense (Charette, 1976, p. 40).

This circular distribution of the carts would create a defensive position and help the Métis secure their family and goods from potential Indian attacks, another important element of the human geography within which the Métis lived.

The winter camps were more permanent³³ and were generally situated near a river and source of wood, exposing again the importance of the *vécu* in the building of Métis geographical knowledge:

*La grande majorité des maisons d'hivernement étaient construites de liard, qui était l'essence la plus commune des forêts du haut Missouri. C'était de beaucoup l'arbre le plus abondant et le plus facile à travailler, mais une fois qu'il avait été équarri, puis mis à sécher à l'ombre il valait le chêne comme durée. Alors, je ne serais pas étonné qu'il y eût encore de ces maisons que j'avais vu construire. Surtout parmi celles qui étaient d'épinette rouge ou de cyprès (*idem*, p. 59).*

³² Among the 1360 affidavits that contains these files there are 130 marriages and 245 births in *Rivière-Rouge* area.

³³ According to Gerhard Ens, these winter settlements would be used only for a few consecutive years (1996, p. 79). Many of these winter camps also became permanent settlements in the 1860s-1870s. (*idem*, p. 97; Stanley, 1961, p. 179).

Another central element of Métis material reality was *la charrette de la Rivière-Rouge* and the trail network that had been developed from it. The cart was indispensable to buffalo expeditions:³⁴

Les chasseurs emmenaient avec eux leurs femmes et leurs enfants, sur des charrettes recouvertes de bâches de peau ou de toile [...]. On appelait ces charrettes bâchées des carrâchetêhounes. C'était un spectacle grandiose et unique à la fois que de voir défiler des centaines de charrettes traînées par des bœufs, chargées de grappes humaines cheminant sur deux, trois files parallèles et plus, vers les troupeaux de buffalos (Charette, 1976, p. 35-36).

The cart was also essential to the trade (Sealey & Lussier, 1975, p. 22). Both Matheson and Goulet picture the importance and extent of the network of Métis cart trails across the whole prairie.

As yet, the railway had not reached the Settlement, so every year in the late Fall after the harvest was in, it was necessary to make the long trip to St. Paul, Minnesota, the nearest point to which freight was delivered, to claim merchandise ordered from England months before" (Morin, February 25, 2003b).

Vers le mois de septembre 1880, je suis retourné à la montagne de Bois avec Chrysostôme Poitras, de Saint-Vital. Il n'y avait pas encore le chemin de fer, alors nous avons pris la route de Fort Ellice et de Qu'appelle. Je suis resté à la montagne de Bois jusqu'en juillet 1881, alors que j'ai conclu un contrat pour aller chercher du fret à 100 milles, le long de la rivière Missouri, toujours pour les mêmes traiteurs américains (Charette, 1976, p. 113).

The numerous place names that accompany the last description, and all of Goulet's comments regarding carts and caravans, suggest the complexity and density of the Métis network of cart trails.

Métis knowledge and mastery of the prairie was expressed in other ways; for example, in facing prairie fires. Grappling with a prairie in flames, in an environment of dry and highly inflammable vegetation, is dangerous, and success or failure — survival or death — largely depend on collective experience and knowledge. Goulet gives us an impression of the resources needed to come to terms with prairie fire. He describes his own experience with a fire that was progressing into a muskeg (near *la rivière Castor*) surrounding a Métis buffalo expedition on its way to *le Bassin de la Judée* on the Missouri River:

³⁴ There were 1,210 carts in the 1840 expedition (Stanley, 1961, p. 13).

A l'occasion de ce feu, la fumée durait depuis quatre ou cinq jours. Nous n'avions pas une idée juste de l'endroit où il était, vu la difficulté d'aller le localiser à cause de l'atmosphère enfumée. Nous savions par l'odeur qu'il exhalait qu'il brûlait dans la tourbe, et comme ces endroits n'étaient pas nombreux, nous avions une idée approximative de sa distance. [...] Le feu qui longeait le muskeg constituait un très grand danger pour la caravane pour plus d'une raison. La traversée du muskeg n'était pas chose facile. Il y avait au moins trois jours de marche en largeur et encore plus en longueur. Le contourner imposait un détour que nous n'avions plus le temps de faire de sorte que, faute de choix, nous avons décidé de passer à travers. [...] La troisième journée nous vîmes venir les découvreurs à bride abattue, sans détour ni circuit. En les voyant venir ainsi nous avons compris que le feu s'était engagé dans le muskeg. Le conseil s'attendait à cela. Il avait pris ses précautions. Il avait fait un grand cercle en brûlant une longue bande circulaire de la plaine, pour protéger les voitures et pour le pacage. Le conseil avait sondé minutieusement le lit d'une chaîne d'étangs, qui formait le fond d'un immense repli allant communiquer avec la rivière La Vieille, distante de plusieurs jours de marche à l'est d'où nous étions. Enfin par des exercices de manœuvre, il avait assuré le bon fonctionnement des voitures toutes attelées vers les étangs qui avaient de l'eau, afin de les abriter contre les flammes (Charette, 1976, p. 79-82).

Goulet's description exhibits at least three aspects of Métis geographical knowledge. First, his description of the group's calm and control reveals the Métis experience with and knowledge about threatening environmental situations. Without seeing the fire, the hunting party was able to assess its extent, direction, and speed. Second, Métis TEK allowed them to react in a way to protect themselves from the flames and certain death. The Métis knew what to do in these circumstances and how to use the environment to maximise their safety. Third, the Métis also had a general knowledge of the region and of its physical particularities, which were of great help in determining their survival strategy. Without this intimate knowledge, Métis chances of handling such critical situations would have been substantially reduced.

The organised Métis response to prairie fires is, in fact, the tip of an iceberg. Below it lies a much broader collective organisation. If the *Rivière-Rouge* was the core of the institutional structure in the Northwest for both Euro-Canadians and Métis, the prairie was not a paradise for anarchists. It was the site of what was known as *le conseil des chasseurs* (Riel, 1889, p. 81). Much discussed in the literature, the organisation of the buffalo hunt had provided the Métis with a sense of common action and the choice of their leaders (Giraud, 1945, p. 805-807; Howard, 1952, p. 302-303; Stanley, 1961, p. 180-181; Trémaudan, 1935, p. 47).

The temporary and itinerant character of hunt organisation distinguishes it from the socio-political structure in the settlements. The institutions in *Rivière-Rouge* — the Council of Assiniboia, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, or the diverse religious orders — were permanent structures. Unlike the hunting council of the Métis, they did not operate for a specific

season, then to be dissolved and reconstituted as needed. This is not to say that the organisation of the hunt was simply a loose configuration. There was a hint of “permanence.” The formation of the hunting expedition and its organisation were generally decided at specific meeting points such as Pembina (Howard, 1952) or near Beaver Lake, Alberta (Erasmus, 1999, p. 200). First, the Métis would choose a leader. Then, they would elect twelve councillors and appoint guides and a “town” crier. In this organisational structure, any hunter was considered a *soldat*, for the expedition might have to face Indian attacks (Riel, 1889, p. 81). The rules stayed the same year after year. “There was a law that you couldn’t shoot cows after July 15, and if a man was found guilty of this he was fined by the chief of the party. They would also fine a man if he could not skin all he had killed” (Vermette[2], 1910)]. The communal sharing of the meat and labour was another rule of buffalo hunting expeditions (Erasmus, 1999, p. 183, 229; Weekes, 1994, p. 20). What was “temporary” in this organisation was the exercise of power itself. Although this type of political organisation would become a base for organising the new permanent settlements in the Batoche area in the 1870s-1880s (Payment, 1983, p. 95; Stanley, 1961, p. 180-181) and affect Métis society in *Rivière-Rouge* (Ens, 1988; Osler, 1961, p. 6), its authoritative and “coercive” function disappeared once the hunt was over. “*Les Métis*,” wrote Riel, “*n’avaient presque pas de gouvernement*” (1889, p. 81).

Métis narratives are also rich sources of memories that pinpoint the symbolic nature of the Métis experience of the prairie. They reveal an experience that is historically rooted in the prairie. Goulet’s description of the prairie fauna, while romanticised, is a good illustration:

Ça! le chant d’ensemble de la gent marécageuse n’était éclipsé que par l’incomparable ronde de la danse des poules de prairie. Quel dommage que je ne puisse écrire une musique sur ce régal sonore que la nature des vastes espaces offrait à l’ouïe des coureurs des plaines. Pour ma part, je n’ai jamais écouté ces chants, ces bruits, ces cris sans me figurer les générations passées qui s’étaient endormies à leur rythme (idem, p. 47).

The muskeg fire episode is another case that communicates the historical dimension of Métis experience of the prairie: “*Ce muskeg était recouvert d’un épais humus vieux d’au moins un siècle et qui de mémoire d’homme n’était jamais passé par le feu*” (idem, p. 81-82)

"Margins" and the "Outside world": le fond et la fin de l'Ouest, and le bout du monde.

My third and last spatial category covers spaces that, though less significant, composed nevertheless part of the Métis experience of space. I identify three sources in the making of this category. The first is "virtual" spaces, which were not based on a direct Métis experience, but rather were built on an "inherited" *vécu*. In this matter, a large part of the Métis song repertoire speaks for itself.

Many Métis songs were drawn from the French and *canadien* repertoire:

Les chansons qu'on y entendait [during les veillées métisses] étaient à peu près toutes tirées des vieux répertoires de voyageurs canadiens: "V'la l'bon vent, v'la l'joli vent", "lève to pied, jolie bergère", "les matelots s'en vont à leur vaisseau", "brigadier répondit Pindore", Trois jeunes soldats sur le Henri IV", "Du temps que j'allais voir les filles", "Souviens-toi belle canadienne, Souviens-toi de ton ami le voyageur", "Bercé par la vague plaintive, à Venise par un beau soir", "T'en souviens-tu Caroline", "J'ai de la tristesse, moi, dans ma maison", "La table est agréable", "Dans Paris y avait une brune" (Charette, 1976, p. 65).

As these titles suggest, these songs often refer to historical and geographical realities that have nothing to do with Métis experience. However, these external places and stories form a "meta-geography" that allows the Métis to connect themselves to the historical geography of their Euro-Canadian ancestors, to France and to *la vallée du Saint-Laurent*. Whereas their maternal Indian ancestors were rooted in the Northwest,³⁵ the existence of the *voyageurs* in this region is barely older than that of the Métis. The songs remind the Métis of the existence of an old land the origins of which are distinct from their daily experience.

Virtual as this geography was, the old French and *canadien* repertoire of songs mirror the Métis' own experience in the Northwest. They suggest that the Métis share with the *voyageurs* not only genealogical ties, but also a common cultural background and a way of approaching the space where they live. It is interesting to note that Goulet's mention of these songs is one of the rare occasions he outlines the links between the Métis and *Canadiens*. Most of these songs were

³⁵ I am aware that many Native peoples were "newcomers" for they had once migrated to the Northwest to take advantage of the fur trade economy. Surely when groups moved from the woodlands to the grasslands to take up buffalo hunting there were substantial changes in their spatial behaviour and territoriality (Ray, 1998). However, this major shift had likely entailed relatively less modification in their territoriality than it did for people of European descent, for they were to perform mostly the same basic activities that they had before: hunting, fishing, and trapping.

communicated to Métis within the fur trade and confirm the parallel between the *Canadiens* and Métis appropriations of the river network that composed the basic structure of the fur trade geography as described in chapter 2. Travelling in a canoe with Métis from *Saint-Albert* and *Lac Saint-Anne* Erasmus relates that “Someone started a French boat song and the others joined in — a rollicking melody that expressed my own feeling of the joy and freedom of the prairies. I was thrilled to be part of this happy good fellowship of the crews” (1999, p. 133).

The second source comprises spaces the Métis experienced directly, but at the margins of both the prairie and the settlements. Hence their marginality within the narratives. The woodland and the space of the fur trade is the first example. These environments generate few comments in the Métis narratives under analysis here. There are, of course, a fair number of references to the HBC and its fur trade posts within the narratives. Goulet makes a short mention of his trade with the HBC (Charette, 1976, p. 74). So do Welsh, who traded with Fort Garry Chief Factor, John McTavish, in June, 1865 (Weekes, 1994, p. 36), and Peter Erasmus who worked in the HBC post at *Lac La Biche* in the 1880s and who frequently mentioned the importance of Fort Edmonton as a yearly gathering place for HBC officials in the Northwest. Erasmus also describes the Métis experience of the rivers as paddlers and York operators: “These men [from St. Albert and Lac Ste. Anne] knew the river, every rapid, bend, and channel. Had they not traversed its bank in the tedious and back-breaking job of towing cumberstone loads upstream?” (1999, p. 133). Apart from these few mentions, the prairie and the settlements remain the central thread of Métis narratives.

St. Paul, Minnesota, a very important trading point for the Métis, was another marginal presence in the Métis experience of space. In spite of his numerous years as a freighter, Goulet never really mentions this city as he concentrated his freighting on the British side of the border and scouted for the US Army further west along the Missouri. Both Antoine Vermette (1910) and Welsh (Weekes, 1994, p. 28) mention St. Paul. But again, these references do not weigh much in the balance of their account compared to their descriptions of the buffalo hunt and trade. *Les montagnes de Roches Brillantes* are the last example. Peter Erasmus is the only one to make any mention of them, as he had been ordered to guide his employer, Dr. Hector of the Palliser expedition, through Howse Pass (Alberta). Erasmus opposed Hector’s plans for this expedition and refused to accompany the Doctor (1999, p. 109). In doing so, Erasmus showed himself to be uncomfortable in and ignorant of the land to be explored, and uncertain about the time and food

needed for the trip. The narrative reveals the Rocky Mountains as the western limit of the Métis experience of space.³⁶

The last source of information about the Métis experience of external space relates to the gradual imposition of a colonial geography over the old Métis land. In this matter, the English translation of *L'espace de Louis Goulet*, the title of which is *Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of a Prairie Métis*, best renders the shifting nature of Métis territoriality. So does the title of Norbert Welsh's account, *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. For Welsh, "the North-West was turning into a white man's country. The buffalo were scarce, about gone you might say. The Government was shutting the Indians up on Reserves, and everything was getting rather tame" (Weekes, 1994, p. 116). The nostalgia and the sense of loss communicated by Welsh taint much of the Métis narratives. Vermette for example: "We always hunted away to the southwest, where the United States are now; but in those days there was no boundary line" (1910). The two previous excerpts about the Métis cart trails and the railroad are other good examples of the vanishing of the old Métis territoriality. They oppose a past reality, when the Métis cart trails were the only means by which the prairie could be traveled, to a current one which displays the new supremacy of the railroad (Charette, 1976, p. 113; Morin, February 25, 2003b). Goulet also understood the symbolic importance of naming in re-appropriating a land: "*S'inspirant de la couleur argentée du bois qui la couvrait, les Anglais étaient en train de changer le nom de Coquille Pilée en celui de Whitewood, nom qu'il porte aujourd'hui*" (Charette, p.68-67). But it is perhaps Peter Erasmus who best summarises the changes:

"Peter," the doctor [Hector] observed, "you must prepare yourself and your associates to adjust to a new order in this country. The progress of civilization renders this inevitable." "Yes," added the captain [Palliser], "your work with our expedition is but a phase of things to come. All the great territory now sparsely populated by a few wandering tribes will someday be the home of thousands of prosperous people engaged in agricultural pursuits, stock raising, and other industries that always follow the settlement of vacant lands." (1999, p. 72).

³⁶ It is a matter of fact that the Métis had crossed the Rockies' "barrier" to settle areas of British Columbia. But this was mainly done by Métis involved within the fur trade economy, which is rarely discussed in Métis narratives.

3.2.1.2 Shaping Métis experience of space.

Stories and songs generate specific spatial behaviours and can be interpreted as normative guides. They present information selectively and function as discourses about territory.

Memory shapes spatial behavior.

Memory is a central component of stories and songs. The personal account of a Métis elder like Louis Goulet is primarily based on his memories. Like narratives, memory evolves. Memory is selective; it is made of “essential rememberings” and “forgettings.” The Québec historian, Jocelyn Létourneau, says of the latter that they should not be seen negatively as “*refoulements*,” but rather as “*les aboutissements d’un deuil*” (2000, p. 37); memory is also, if not primarily, about making sense of the present. In fact, memory thickens the experience of space by giving meaning to places, justifying collective and individual appropriation of space, and enhancing the sense of belonging to these places.

In the story of her uncle John, Matheson gives a good example of the link between memory and individual behaviour: “The first night on the trail, it was already dusk when they made camp not far from the big swamp that was the landmark for the first day’s trek” (Morin, February 25, 2003b). Matheson’s uncle and his friends did not stop there just because it looked like a suitable place to camp, but also because they knew this was a place where the Métis had stopped for years. This landmark, like any other, is a specific point in space that orients collective memories and marks the site where a specific behaviour is performed. Although life in the prairie has been associated with “freedom,” the Métis did not behave randomly on the prairie; they largely followed the prescriptions of elders, bearers of memory and of Métis geographical knowledge. Finding bison, berries or firewood are examples of activities facilitated by Métis landmarks and geographical knowledge.

The collective memory influences more than material existence. It is closely tied to the symbolic dimension of Métis territoriality. In his description of a buffalo expedition, Louis Goulet explains a segment of the trip in these terms:

Les vieux tenaient à passer par [la Coquille Pilée], parce qu'il y a soixante ou soixante-quinze ans c'était un lieu populaire d'hivernement. Une année, un groupe de cent à cent cinquante familles métisses de la Rivière-Rouge s'y étaient installées pour hiverner. A côté, se trouvait un gros camp d'Indiens cris qui fut attaqué durant l'hiver par une forte épidémie de grosse picote. Des chiens transportèrent des germes de la terrible maladie dans le camp d'hivernement métis, ce qui le décima totalement dans l'espace de quelques jours. Pas un seul Métis ne s'en réchappa. Il n'y resta même personne pour donner la sépulture aux victimes, qui devinrent la pâture des loups pour le reste de l'hiver, et des corneilles au printemps (Charette, 1976, p. 78-79).

No material reason led the Métis party to this place — no bison were to be found. The recollection of those who had died was the rationale for such a detour. Decades later, when an old man, Goulet would use both stories — about the epidemic and about the detour to *Coquille Pilée* — to give his own narrative some historical relevance and legitimacy.

The question of memory brings me back to my previous comment regarding the “silence” about the Métis involvement in the geography of the fur trade. It is as if this geography had been erased from the collective memory or considered irrelevant in defining ways of being Métis. This is at odds with the extensive academic literature about the fur trade economy and the emergence of the proto-Métis groups. In fact, if scholars study processes of ethnogenesis to better understand the Métis sense of identity, it is not clear from the narratives on which my analysis relies that 19th century Métis had similar concerns about their early identity formation.³⁷ These sources may explain the relative absence of this specific Métis experience of space. Except for the few years Peter Erasmus spent as a HBC employee, none of the Métis who recollected and shared their memories was directly involved in the fur trade. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that Peter Erasmus's father had also worked for the HBC. Would not Erasmus's memory have been affected by stories told by his father? What about the stories of the “most hazardous experiences of the north country” (1999, p. 63) that Erasmus was told by a Métis of the *Lac Sainte-Anne* settlement, father of his *fiancée* Florence, who worked most of his life as a tripman in the northern districts? Erasmus mentioned the fact, but seems to have forgotten the stories. But certainly Erasmus was aware of their existence.

One reason for such forgetting may be that it helped forge a common sense of what it was to be Métis. What best describes Métis ethnogenesis is diversity. Presumably, such diversity

³⁷ Actually, ethnogenesis studies do not rely on Métis oral tradition, but rather are documented from HBC or colonial archives. A reason for this may be the fact that there are not many accounts of the Northwest from Métis observers (Spry, 1999, p. XIV).

made it difficult for the Métis to define their common history, territory and language and to bound the limits of Métis national identity (Kimlicka, 1995). However, one may find better explanation in the context within which these narratives were performed. As I said above, these individual narratives were recorded in the early 20th century. In those days when the socio-spatial marginalisation of the Métis was the norm, one may consider that Métis elders were more interested in giving a distinct and positive portrait of the Métis as “*les gens libres de la prairie*,” than in focusing on their more subordinate role within the fur trade. Erasmus’s antipathy to the HBC may be seen as an indicator of this: “I hated the servile attitude of most of their servants, and the almost autocratic power which some of the officials used to assert their authority” (1999, p. 86). Similarly, it could be argued that the old days of the Métis on the plains offered a “romantic” and “exotic” view more attractive to non-Métis readers. In other words, Erasmus might have omitted the Métis fur trade experience just because he was never asked to elaborate on it during the interview.

Land and rhythm: identity poetics.

Contrary to Marius Barbeau’s observation about *les chansons canadiennes*, many Métis songs do not originate in the repertoire of medieval French troubadours,³⁸ but in Métis experience. Pierre Falcon, Cuthbert Grant’s brother in law and known as “*le barde de la Rivière-Rouge*,” composed many spontaneous songs depicting highlights and daily events of Métis life, which the ethnomusicologist Annette Chrétien (1996) names “story songs.” These songs do not only record historical events, but they also serve to pass on “knowledge of local people and events, Métis history and social life” (*idem*, p. 166).

In the evening of June 19, 1816, Pierre Falcon wrote *La Chanson de la Grenouillère*, a song describing an event of the same day that would be known as the “Battle of Seven Oaks” — the other name for the “Frog Plain” in *Rivière-Rouge*. During this battle, a party of Métis led by Cuthbert Grant of the NWC encountered the HBC’s newly appointed Governor Semple and a few of his men. When the two parties were within shooting distance, an accidental shot was fired by

³⁸ There are well known exceptions to that pointed out by Barbeau himself such as Guérin-Lajoie’s *Le Canadien errant*, or, more significantly for contemporary Canada, Calixa Lavallée’s “Ô Canada” sung *a mari usque ad mare* since the late 19th century.

the HBC party; this shot was followed by a barrage of fire that left one Métis and many HBC servants dead, including Semple. This battle had taken place within a broader struggle for the control of the fur territories, which peaked in 1814 when the then HBC Governor, Miles McDonell, issued a proclamation forbidding the export of pemmican from the Red River area. He sought to reinforce the company's official monopoly in Rupert's Land over its competitor, the NWC. As the Montréal-based company depended on pemmican to feed its *voyageurs* and canoe brigades, it did not accept its rival's pronouncements. The battle of Seven Oaks rapidly became a symbol of the animosity between the Métis and the "intruders" taking over their land.

La Chanson de la Grenouillère is more than an objective description of a fight that took place in a specific site at a given time. It is a call for Métis mobilisation against the "outsider" and a claim for Métis national sovereignty over the land.

*Chanson de la Grenouillère*³⁹

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1- <i>Voulez-vous écouter chanter
Une chanson de vérité?
Le dix-neuf de juin la bande des Bois-Brûlés
Sont arrivés comme de braves guerriers.</i> | 6- <i>Le Gouverneur qui était enragé
Il dit à ses soldats: "Tirez!"
Le premier coup, c'est l'Anglais qu'a tiré;
L'ambassadeur a manqué tuer.</i> |
| 2- <i>En arrivant à la Grenouillère
Nous avons pris trois prisonniers:
Trois prisonniers des Arkans
Qui sont ici pour piller notre pays.</i> | 7- <i>Le Gouverneur qui se croit empereur,
Il veut agir avec rigueur;
Le Gouverneur qui se croit empereur
À son malheur, agit trop de rigueur.</i> |
| 3- <i>Étant sur le point de débarquer
Deux de nos gens se sont mis à crier:
Deux de nos gens se sont mis à crier:
Voilà l'Anglais qui vient nous attaquer!</i> | 8- <i>Ayant vu passer tous ces Bois-Brûlés,
Il a parti pour les épouvanter,
Étant parti pour les épouvanter.
Il s'est trompé, il s'est fait tuer.</i> |
| 4- <i>Tout aussitôt nous avons deviné,
Nous avons été les rencontrer:
J'avons cerné la bande de grenadiers,
[Ils] sont immobiles, ils sont démontés.</i> | 9- <i>Il s'est trompé, il s'est fait tuer
Une quantité de ses grenadiers;
J'avons tué presque tout son armée,
Rien que quatre ou cinq ça l'ont pu se sauver</i> |
| 5- <i>J'avons agi comme des gens d'honneur,
J'avons envoyé un ambassadeur:
"Le Gouverneur, voulez-vous arrêter
Un petit moment, nous voulons vous parler?"</i> | 10- <i>Si vous aviez vu tous ces Anglais
Tous ces Bois-Brûlés après,
De butte en butte, les Anglais culbutaient,
Les Bois-Brûlés lâchaient des cris de joie!</i> |

³⁹ Quoted from Margaret Complin (1939, p. 49-50).

Falcon's song explicitly delineates the social and geographical boundaries of Métis territoriality. First, it draws definite ethnic boundaries between the Métis and the "outsiders" — the Selkirk settlers and HBC officials. Verses no. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 10 are particularly clear: the *Bois-Brûlés* are not to be confused with *les Anglais* or *les prisonniers des Arkanys*. Second, the song also outlines sharp geographical distinctions and depicts the *Rivière-Rouge* as the Métis "home" or "mother land." Third, the song claims exclusive Métis occupancy of the land. The fact that they were also employees of the fur trade and that the companies were also important actors in the making of *Rivière-Rouge* is ignored. Similarly, one learns nothing of the broader context within which this specific event was inscribed. *La chanson de la Grenouillère* emphasises the Métis question, while from the companies' viewpoint, this question had never been other than a secondary concern. Rather, the song first promotes *Rivière-Rouge* as the Métis' most important national space, where a sense of commonality and solidarity find their greatest expression (see especially verses 2 and 3).

Falcon was not the only Métis to write songs. Louis Riel also devoted some of his literary work to songs. While waiting for his execution, Riel composed *La chanson de Louis Riel*.⁴⁰ Not as popular as Falcon's song, nor as explicit in term of Métis appropriation of space, Riel's song is nevertheless another example of how narratives can feed common history, national identity and a sense of territory.

*La chanson de Louis Riel*⁴¹

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1- <i>C'est au champ de bataille,
J'ai fait écrire' douleurs.
On couche sur la paille
Ça fait frémir les cœur.</i></p> | <p>4- <i>Quand ell' r'cevra cette lettre
Tout c't' ecritur' en sang,
Ses yeux baign'ront de larmes,
Son cœur sera mourant.</i></p> |
| <p>2- <i>Or, je r'çois t'une lettre
De ma chère maman.
J'avais ni plum' ni encre
Pour pouvoir leur z'écrire</i></p> | <p>5- <i>S'y jett' à g'noux par terre
Appelant ses enfants:
Priez pour votre frère
Qu'il est au régiment.</i></p> |
| <p>3- <i>Or, je pris mon canif,
Je le trempis dans mon sang,
Pour écrire' t'un' vieu' lettre
A ma chère maman.</i></p> | <p>6- <i>Mourir, s'il faut mourir,
Chacun meurt à son tour;
J'aim' mieux mourir en brave
Faut tou(s) mourir un jour</i></p> |

⁴⁰ Barbara Cass-Beggs is not categorical in attributing the authorship of this song to Louis Riel. She argues, however, that the song is likely to come from Riel for he wrote many verses and poems, especially in prison (1967, p. 27).

⁴¹ The song lyrics are quoted from Barbara Cass-Begg (1967, p. 11).

Reference to the land and to its protection from outsiders' encroachments is metaphorically expressed in this song through the blood used by Riel to write to his mother. Riel is writing, the metaphor reads, with the same Métis blood that had been spilt to defend the Nord-Ouest from intruders, the same vital fluid that roots him and the Métis to their "Mother-land."⁴² The loss of blood and the tears that choke his mother's heart also represent the end of the Nord-Ouest as the Métis had known it. But at the same time, this blood makes history — as it flows both on paper and on dirt — and provides the foundations for a persistent Métis nationalism.

Métis national pride is also revealed by their collective battle for the land and for control over the buffalo, also a necessary resource for many Indian tribes. Hence the need for Métis to protect themselves from potential Indian attacks, particularly from the Sioux. This is depicted in the Métis story of the *Sixty Seven Bois-Brûlés*:⁴³

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1- Of a most incredible tale, let me say
That it remains a legend to this very day;
Of a buffalo hunt on the open plain
A small Métis band who won great fame.</p> <p>2- It happened so very very long ago
That only the prairie wind is left to know,
Of the time sixty seven Bois-Brûlés
Were challenged by two thousand Sioux one day.</p> <p>3- One hot summer in eighteen forty nine
Nine hundred carts left Pembina on time,
They made their way towards the west
For the mighty buffalo as their quest.</p> <p>4- Their home they left with happy hearts
The women and children seated on carts
The men recalled with anxious talk
The number of buffalo they each had stalked</p> <p>5- Across the dusty sun-baked land
The ox-cart trail was like desert sand.
Two long weeks had slowly passed
And still no buffalo on the prairie vast.</p> <p>6- So one night with unhappy hearts
A decision was made that they must part.
Some would go north, while others west
And southerly bound went the rest.</p> | <p>7- The southerly band was very small indeed
Three score and seven of the bravest Métis.
As they reached grassier plains their hearts did smile
And again hope grew with each passing mile.</p> <p>8- I believe no more than three days passed
When all too suddenly and quite fast,
The Métis scouts while ahead to scan
Spotted 2000 Sioux charging overland.</p> <p>9- Excitement first in their hearts took hold
Then a terrible fear made their hearts turn cold,
Quickly the men shouted out their demands
And rifles made ready to fire at command.</p> <p>10- With careful aim the Métis shot
To protect themselves and the lot,
The battle lasted all through the day
And by night they had turned the Sioux away.</p> <p>11- Just sixty seven alone that day
Became legendary Bois-Brûlés.</p> |
|---|--|

⁴² "Le Nord-Ouest est ma mère, Riel would repeat during his trial, *le Nord-Ouest est ma mère patrie, je suis sûr que ma mère ne me tuera pas*" (quoted from Morisset, 1997, p. 94).

⁴³ This story is quoted below from Bruce Sealey's *Stories of the Métis* (1975b, p. 90-93). The author associates this story to "the era of Louis Riel." I am not aware of any French version. Nor am I sure that this story has not been written recently; the words might be not authentic. However, the spirit they convey seems undoubtedly genuine. Remembrance of this event had been important for the Métis. Norbert Welsh refers to those years when the Sioux used to attack the Métis (Weekes, 1994, p. 161).

According to this story, the *Bois-Brûlés* are these courageous ancestors who once faced 2,000 Sioux warriors and defended themselves and their right to use the land. The story also emphasises the age of this event, to the point “that only the prairie wind is left to know”; a long-time ago then, when the *Bois-Brûlés* were already a distinct people, they left “home” with “nine hundred carts” travelling “the ox-cart trail.” The spirit of this story is that the Métis should be proud of their glorious past, of what they are, and of the land they are from. There could hardly be a better way to feed national feelings. From the Sioux perspective, of course, the Métis were appropriators — colonisers — of their land.

Place hierarchy.

So far, I have presented the Métis experience of space with little regard for the relative importance of each spatial category. There was no doubt, in colonial minds, that settlements were the core of Euro-Canadian colonisation in the Northwest. This was particularly true in the case of the most important settlement, the *Rivière-Rouge*. Colonial maps perfectly picture a Western “core/periphery” cleavage (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983). Beginning with *Rivière-Rouge*, settlements are the centres of attention on colonial maps. Their relative importance is suggested by the higher density of information related to them. In consequence, the prairie appears subordinated to settlements and is depicted as their potential hinterland, a fertile land to be exploited; the prairie is, like any peripheral region, “dependant upon one or more centres in at least one of the three domains of behaviour [...]: in political decision-making, in cultural standardization, and in economic life” (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983, p. 3-4). In some ways, this is true for the Métis as well. As agriculture in settlements was susceptible to crop failures and diseases, Métis supplemented their economy with prairie provisions (Ray, 1984, p. 269-270).

However, a Métis hierarchy of places does not emerge clearly from their oral tradition. Although some parts of these narratives suggest the centrality of settlements, other parts picture the lure of the “margins.”

One may find many excerpts that set settlements at centre stage. The *Rivière-Rouge* is described as “*la maison*” and “*le pays natal*” by Louis Goulet, when he refers to Saint-Norbert (Charette, 1976, p. 32, 45, 95 & 113) or when he discusses how, in 1870, Louis Riel and the

Métis prevented the Dominion from taking it over (*idem*, p. 89). Peter Erasmus, also a native of *Rivière-Rouge*, talks of the settlement as “home” (1999, p. 14).

The centrality of *Rivière-Rouge* is also comparative. The settlement is often constructed in parallel with the prairie, and in many cases, the latter appears subordinate to *Rivière-Rouge* — the vast hinterland that furnishes provision: “[...] *nous allongions la distance qui nous séparait du pays natal de la Rivière-Rouge, en nous rapprochant sensiblement de la région de chasse aux buffalos: la montagne de Bois ou la montagne de Cyprès*” (Charette, 1976, p. 44-45). Norah Matheson depicts the *Rivière-Rouge*/prairie binary in the same way:

In the year 1858, my uncle John was sixteen years old, and ready for adventure. Life in the Red River Settlement [...] was pleasant, with plenty of work, plenty of friends, and plenty of “home-made” amusement according to the seasons, but John was eager to see the world beyond the confines of the settlement (Morin, February 25, 2003b).

In Matheson’s mind, the prairie presents a life of adventure in contrast to the comfort of daily life at *Rivière-Rouge*; the prairie is a *terra incognita* to be explored.

But, paradoxically, many other parts of Métis narratives present the prairie as the focal point of Métis reality. Louis Goulet had spent little time in his native *Rivière-Rouge* and most of his narrative is about his experience of the “bare” prairie: in his childhood during the buffalo hunts;⁴⁴ in his adult life as a freighter or as a scout for the US Army. Moreover, his descriptions are fed by a deep and positive appreciation of life on the prairie, and reflect a specific attachment to that space. Peter Erasmus’s attraction for the prairie life compromised his chance to marry Florence, a Métis woman from *Lac Sainte-Anne*: “Suddenly I realized that the real reason for doubt or hesitation in declaring my intentions was not actually the difference in religious adherence but in my own dislike for a settled existence and my love for travel” (1999, p. 61). Another native of *Rivière-Rouge*, Norbert Welsh, who traded all over the plains for most of his life, mentions that “in all I must have had about twenty wintering houses on the Saskatchewan plains” (Weekes, 1994, p. 96). Métis settlements in the Northwest, no longer appear quite so central to Métis life. In these narratives, the prairie is depicted as a way of life that has a great deal to do with Métis identity and territorial behaviour.

⁴⁴ Goulet’s family had once spent over two years away from the *Rivière-Rouge* (Charette, 1976, p. 72).

Métis narratives do not reveal a fixed Métis hierarchy of places. The Métis spatial priority consistently oscillated between settlements and the prairie. For the Métis, the “core” and the “periphery” are interchangeable spatial categories. In Métis’ minds, they can switch quite rapidly:

C'est au cours des ces voyages mémorables [towards wintering places] que s'allumaient les amours qui aboutissaient à d'heureux mariages. C'était la belle occasion pour les filles et les veuves de se trouver un mari choisi sur la crème de toute la race! [...] La vie pastorale en commun au cours de la traversée des plaines depuis la Rivière-Rouge aux montagnes de Bois, de Cyprès, ou aux bords escarpés du Missouri continuait même après que la caravane eût atteint sa destination [Rivière-Rouge]. Un repos de quelques jours succédait à notre arrivée et nous en profitons pour retrouver des connaissances ou de la parenté. C'était le temps où les liens de parenté chez les Métis s'étiraient pour ainsi dire à l'infini. Il suffisait à des grands-pères d'avoir une fois échangé des chiens pour que leur petits-enfants se considèrent comme des parents. Ceux issus des cousins de deuxième et troisième degré redevenaient des oncles et des tantes... (Charette, 1976, p. 61).

Where, according to Goulet, is the centre of Métis socialisation, the focal point of their communal life? Is it in the prairie where months of pastoral life were shared, and where, he said, many of the marriages occurred? Is it in *Rivière-Rouge* where the extended family assumed all its significance? Actually, it is not in one or the other. Métis life in *Rivière-Rouge* is as much influenced by the prairie, as Métis life in the prairie is influenced by *Rivière-Rouge*. This shows that the Métis, like the First Nations, were multi-place oriented. Each place took all its meaning within a network of places.

3.2.1.3 Overlapping spaces of in-betweenness.

The ambivalence that characterises the Métis territorial hierarchy can also be observed in the way Métis define their otherness. Although one knows who is included within the Métis’ others — both Indians and Euro-Canadians — such a category remains flexible in time and space (Ens, 2001; Ray, 1995), and suggests that the Métis are neither white, nor Indian, but partly both. Geographic location fully participates in determining the nature of Métis otherness and in explaining its fluctuating condition. Does it mean that the Métis are more likely to be “Euro-Canadian” in settlements while more “Indian” in the prairie? It may well be, but this picture seems too simple, too incomplete. Ultimately, it is my argument that the Métis cultivate their Indian origins in settlements as much as they spread their Euro-Canadian nature over the prairie.

Their territoriality is made of overlapping spaces that give the impression that they are at “home” nowhere and everywhere at the same time.

Spatial mobility: reality of “wandering” people.

*Spatial mobility*⁴⁵ is what best describes Métis identity and territorial reality in the 19th century Canadian West. For most Métis, life in the settlements was not continuous. Many would leave their settlement for months, if not years, as Louis Goulet and Peter Erasmus did. Settlements were both points of departure and of arrival. They fell within a broader network of places (wintering, hunting, *etc.*) dispersed over the prairie and connected to each other by Métis mobility. In turn, some of the latter places would gradually become permanent settlements where hunting activities were complemented by some basic agriculture (Payment, 1983, p. 95).

Spatial mobility echoes, to a great extent, the fluctuating nature of the Métis hierarchy of places. It gives birth to a persistent and paradoxical feeling. Reading *L'espace de Louis Goulet* and *Buffalo Days and Nights*, one observes both the excitement of departing for the “free life” of the plains and the heartbreak of leaving *Rivière-Rouge* (Charette, 1976, p. 77; Erasmus, 1999, p. 141). The two narratives also express the pleasure of coming back to *Rivière-Rouge*. Such a mix of feelings makes it difficult to clearly identify which place is more meaningful for the Métis, the settlement or the prairie. Métis spatial mobility seems to considerably rely on a mental or symbolic disposition for “ubiquity,” as if the wish to occupy consistently two spaces at the same time was central to Métis reality. This is addressed by the old French songs. Clemens refers to this type of musical material as “songs of separation,” oral expressions of the Métis “itinerant life” (1985, p. 3). The “songs of separation” make some sense of the “wandering” nature of Métis life by expressing fragility or the absence of well defined geographical anchors, and the

⁴⁵ I use this expression for it helps avoid the eurocentric tone that expressions such as “nomad” or “semi-nomad” bear. As the anthropologist Adam Kuper says of primitive society ideology, one can see “nomadic people” as the “distorting mirror” of Western society, as the unconscious strategy of constructing otherness (1988, p. 5). Even labels such as “semi-nomadic” and “semi-sedentary” — often tagged on the Métis —, although attempts to establish connections between these two “irreconcilable” conditions of life, are incapable of overcoming the antagonistic philosophy that ties these conditions together in a Western anthropological tradition. What anthropologists and archaeologists propose in exchange is to broaden the definition of sedentariness to include all settlement systems “in which at least part of the population remains at the same location throughout the entire year” (Rice, 1975). Mobility becomes the variable (it can be nil) and sedentariness the constant; increasing of mobility is no longer thought as a

nostalgic memory of the land and the people left behind. In 1860, the German ethnographer Johann George Kohl described in similar ways the musical performance of the *Métis voyageurs* of the *pays d'en-haut* who “regarded themselves as exiles” (quoted in Ray, 1996, p. 50). On the other hand, these opposite states of mind (exitement-heartbreak) may simply emphasise the Métis ability to feel at home anywhere in their extended territory. Thus, Métis “ubiquity” would only be an illusion perceived by outsiders, including academics. In any case, both interpretations confirm the changeability of Métis spatial hierarchy and their multi-place tendency.

Identity mobility: to be your own other.

Mon père qui partageait notre déception eut l'ingénieuse pensée de nous apprendre que si nous ne repartions pas, nous serions obligés d'aller à l'école. La question fut réglée. Nous aimions mieux repartir tout de suite que d'être obligés d'adopter la vie des petits blancs et d'aller à l'école. Nous pensions à tout cela quand un bon matin de fin d'été, on alla se joindre à une caravane qui s'ébranlait deux jours après, pour les hivernements dans le fond de l'Ouest (Charette, 1976, p. 77-78).

Goulet exposes here a clear-cut distinction between Métis and “white.” According to Armando Jannetta, a literary specialist, *L'espace de Louis Goulet* often constructs Métis identity as binary and rhetorically emphasises Métis difference and otherness with regards to both Indians and *les Anglais* (1994, p. 62).

In Goulet's memoirs, Indians are frequently depicted as *des sauvages* or *des mauvais chiens* (Charette, 1976, p. 146). Goulet's comment suggests that the Métis considered themselves more civilised than their Aboriginal forebears. The “primitive” Indian can never been trusted, as Goulet suggests by his comparison of Métis and Indian horses:

De notre temps, l'on appelait les chevaux des Métis cayousses et ceux des Indiens, broncos. [...] La proportion des bonnes bêtes était plus forte chez les cayousses que chez les broncos. La grande différence entre les deux, en dehors de leur physique était que le cayousse ressemblait au chien:

social regression or as a lower level of cultural advancement (Crépeau, 1993; Eder, 1984 & 1986; Rafferty, 1985). With such a definition in mind, the Métis can be considered settled with a relatively high level of mobility.

vous saviez à peu près toujours ce que vous aviez dans vos mains, tandis que le bronco, c'était comme un sauvage, vous ne pouviez pas vous y fier avant de l'avoir connu (idem, p. 97; also quoted in Jannetta, 1994, p. 63).

If Peter Erasmus shows more respect for Indians and usually depicts them positively, he also labels them sometimes as “uncivilized savages” (1999, p. 127). These labels may be partly explained by the increasing conflict between the Métis and First Nations as they both competed for the same depleting resources, especially the buffalo herds (Ray, 1984, p. 270; Ray, 1998, 206, 227 & 231).

Les Anglais and *les Américains* compose a great part of otherness in Métis testimonies. In a land where the “newcomers” are becoming more and more influential and are progressively modifying the geography of the whole region, they are often conceived of as “*le diable [...] dans la cabane*” (Charette, 1976, p. 77). As Jannetta points out, Goulet opposes the Métis and the English other in terms of the antecedence of the former (1994, p. 61-62). All the comments made by Goulet, Vermette and others, about the US border and the railroad and that above I have labelled “nostalgic” can, then, be seen as the symbolic marks distinguishing in space and in time the Métis from newcomers. Moreover, the Euro-Canadian is generally depicted as one who can hardly survive on the prairie, ill-adapted as he is to operating in this vast wilderness. Hiding from the sight of some Canadian troops during the 1885 uprising, Goulet says that “*Si ce n'eût pas été des blancs, ça y était!*” (Charette, 1976, p. 174), meaning that if these men had been Indians or Métis, Goulet and his friends would have been detected.

However, a second glance at these narratives indicates some permeability in the Métis “othering” process. Métis narratives are not exclusively constructed on difference, but also on mediation and dialogue. In other words, the Métis also use the others’ discourses and categorisations to define themselves (Jannetta, 1994, p. 60). Métis narratives amalgamate diverse voices (*idem*, p. 65) and move between two cultures, in so doing making Métis identity exceedingly mobile. When the narrator distances himself from the Indian, by emphasising the latter’s “savageness,” he makes use of a colonial discourse, and approaches the Euro-Canadian way of thinking. When he shows sympathy for Indians or is critical of Euro-Canadian behaviours or ideologies, he moves in the opposite direction. When Goulet describes William Gladu as a

*“métis sauvage,”*⁴⁶ he admits in veiled terms Métis potential for occasional “savageness” and somewhat contradicts his negative assessment of the savage state. Goulet is trapped by his own in-between condition, and his narrative offers him no escape. Rather, this narrative exposes how its author builds his own sense of identity through a looping movement alternating between divergence and convergence, Indians and Euro-Canadians.

Peter Erasmus is caught in a similarly ambivalent logic. Like Goulet, his categorisation of Indians as savages is contradicted by his critique of the “so-called civilized living” brought to the Northwest by Euro-Canadians (1999, p. 201). His narrative opposes his enjoyable life with Woodland and Prairie Indians and the settled life brought by the inevitable advance of colonisation and by the great socio-economic changes in the region. He also has to make sense of the discordance between Indian and Euro-Canadian beliefs. Irene Spry outlines the “conflict between Indian mysticism and Protestant rationalism” experienced by Erasmus (1999, p. xxviii). The antagonism between scientific and Indian medicines presents another dilemma. If, at first, Erasmus expresses his doubts with regard to the latter (1999, p. 154), later he is “convinced that [his old friend and Methodist minister, Rev. Woolsey] could have been saved his present misery if he had not been prejudiced against Indian medecines” (*idem*, p. 171).

But ambivalence and in-betweenness have their advantages as well. They make the Métis successful intermediaries between Indians and Euro-Canadians, a role they are often pleased to play. Peter Erasmus, Louis Goulet, and Norbert Welsh all served, at least once in their life, as interpreters (Erasmus, 1999, p. 239-264; Charette, 1976, p. 146, 150; Weekes, 1994, p. 84, 107). They relate proudly to this experience and consider themselves, and the Métis as a whole, to be indispensable on the plains: “Many of the early famous travellers would have been hopelessly lost, starved, or frozen to death without the guidance and advice of the Indians and half-breeds” (Erasmus, 1999, p. 75). In other words, the Métis did not passively experience ambivalence and in-betweenness, they were aware that their intermediacy made them a distinct people.

It is no surprise that this intermediacy became, over the years, a way for the Métis to mark politically their distinctiveness in the Northwest. This Métis political awareness is best

⁴⁶ The term chosen for publication was “*métis indien*.” The “*métis sauvage*” expression was found in the transcripts of Charette’s original manuscript notes in the Provincial Archive of Manitoba (MG9A6, fo 112). If the former

rendered through the words of Charles Nolin. Attending the meeting that decided to send a party to Montana to retrieve the “exilé” Riel, Nolin said that: “*La question métisse [...] est comme une charrette. Pour la faire marcher il faut deux roues et, dans le moment, il nous en manque une. Si nous la voulons, il nous faut aller la chercher dans le Montana, le long du Missouri*” (Charette, p. 137). Nolin’s two wheels are made of different woods. On the one side of the cart is Gabriel Dumont, the “child of the plains,” an image of the Indian way of life; on the other side is the “educated” and literate Louis Riel, symbol of the Euro-Canadian element of Métis reality. For Nolin there exists only one way for the Métis to resist the Dominion, it is to mobilise a cart that contains the two essential components of their identity.

Moving from place to place: a journey in-between identities.

Considering the interactive nature of territory and identity, I would argue that the Métis spatial mobility and identity mobility are two sides of the same coin. This is what Jannetta also suggests when he refers to “Goulet’s nomadic ability to move between two cultures and to have sympathies for both...” (1994, p. 65), and argues, at the same time, that spatial mobility — which he considers a “(semi-) nomadic life-style” — is the basis of Métis identity formation and definition of the other (*idem*, p. 60).

But as far as the Métis are concerned, the situation of the other is fairly fluid, and this modifies the way Métis position themselves both ethnically and geographically. As I have suggested above, it is too simple to consider that the Métis get closer to the Indians when on the prairie and that they automatically adopt “civilised” manners, such as farming, when in *Rivière-Rouge*. Métis narratives are not drawn on these fractional lines. Goulet sometimes assimilates the Métis to their Indian conditions in the settlements as he does when reporting Ritchot’s words: “*Si on se faufilait pour ne rentrer qu’aux petites heures du matin, [le Père Ritchot] ne disait rien, mais à peine étions-nous endormis qu’il nous criait: ‘HO! HO! HO! là, les sauvages, c’est le temps d’aller au foin*” (Charette, 1976, p. 92, my emphasis). Similarly, although Goulet admits the influence of Indian reality for the Métis way of life in the prairie — when he associates, for

efficiently shakes the distinction between Métis and Indians, the latter remains more significant for it bears the

instance, Louis Riel's superstitions to the sixth sense the old Métis developed among Indians (*idem*, p. 185) —, his narrative should be mostly interpreted as an account of the Métis bringing "civilisation" among Indian tribes. In other words, the Métis had the ability to move between "civilised" and "primitive" conditions, in both the prairie and the settlements, and in so doing, to adapt their sense of identity and territory to specific social and geographical contexts.

This last comment reminds us that the Métis are neither "whites" nor Indians, but they are rather simultaneously both. I am aware that academic discourse — including mine — does not always make this point obvious. In fact, such analysis tends to emphasise the contradictions and ambivalence that articulate Métis life and provides a bi-polar image of Métis sense of identity and territory as either Euro-Canadian or Indian. These contradictions may well be academic constructions based on a Euro-Canadian experience of identity. In spite of the complex picture of Métis identity Louis Goulet provides, he never refers to this identity in terms of ambivalence and mobility. Goulet is not ambiguous when he says he is Métis.

3.2.2 Métis toponymic nomenclature: The land that knows a name.⁴⁷

At this point, it is necessary to come back to toponymy. So far, I have considered place names as symbolic components on colonial maps and in Métis narratives, and as expressions of power in space. My treatment may give the impression that place names are only elements of broader territorial discourses, cartographic or oral. What I am suggesting in this last section is that Métis toponymy is a territorial discourse in its own right (Nash, 1999, p. 473) — made as it is of an array of ideologies (spatial, historical), practices (naming, mobility, orality), conventions, codes and rules (linguistic ones for instance) that are generated and recognised by Métis society — that draws and conveys a specific mental and cultural representation of space (Guillotel, 1999, p. 64). The descriptive and pictorial nature of Métis toponymy, in which place names are the mental *presentations* of the physical (*la rivière aux Gratias*) and human (*la fourche des Gros-Ventres*, the South Branch of the Saskatchewan River) geography they name, means that it provides a wealth of geographical information. Taken as a whole, place names are indispensable

ideology of primitive people, which in this case, seems stranger to Goulet.

to the Métis and can be considered, as Susan Fair argues for Alaska Inuit place names (1997), as a cornerstone of their TEK. Toponymy is an indicator of the Métis way of perceiving, comprehending and forging their territoriality. This is its power.

The toponymic contribution to Métis geographical knowledge is two-fold: historical and spatial. In-betweenness is, again, central to the Métis naming processes.

3.2.2.1 An “oral history” of the *Nord-Ouest*: collective memory of place.

Place names are closely tied to Métis memory and orality. As the elderly Goulet says: *“Savez-vous? Chaque fois que j’y pense et j’y pense souvent, ça me fait ennuyer. Ces noms me rappellent tant de choses, tant de souvenirs! Devant mes yeux éteints, il me semble les revoir passer comme dans les défilés de mon enfance et de ma jeunesse”* (Charette, 1976, p. 60).

Toponymy takes an important place in Goulet’s narrative. The richness of the Red-River-born toponymic knowledge is outlined by a map that the publisher has produced and printed on the back cover of the book in both the French and English versions. I will come back to this map in chapter 5. Here I note the considerable number of names it contains, most of which have since disappeared or been translated or corrupted. Toponymy is also central to Peter Erasmus and Norbert Welsh’s accounts. There is hardly a recollection or a description that is not linked to a specific place name in all of the examples of Métis oral tradition that I have analysed in this chapter.

Métis emphasis on place names is not unique. It is a behaviour that belongs to most oral cultures. As Julie Cruikshank notes of Athapaskan toponyms, they “are more than names; they are metaphors bringing together varieties of information in one small word” (1990, p. 63). In other words, place names are mnemonic devices that follow and lead the narrator through a story (Fair, 1997, p. 473). The mnemonic role of Indigenous place names is reflected in the terse grammatical style in which these toponyms are composed. Toponyms are generally not precise geographical descriptions, but rather pictorial and summarised versions, that act as guides for

⁴⁷ Otherwise specified, the principal sources for this analysis of Métis place names are Erasmus (1999), Charette (1976), Coues (1897), Hind (1860), Létourneau (1980), Morice (1912), Rondeau (1923), Taché (1869), and Weekes (1994).

remembering and communicating (Pearse, 1999, p. 159-160). Globally, place names convey individual and collective memories, stories, and the mythic baggage of a people. To communicate these names from one generation to another is to preserve much of a people's oral history.

Some names are particularly eloquent in this regard for they are the result and mirror of specific events, whether real or mythical. These names, which one could label *anecdotal*, are numerous in Métis toponymic nomenclature. *Les Mauvais Bois* (Butler, 1873, p. 23) on the Assiniboine (surrounding *les Grands Rapides de l'Assiniboine*, today Brandon, Manitoba), is an illustration of how experience of space and specific events can be spatially incised. Henry Youle Hind refers to this place name in his narrative of the Red River expedition:

Leaving Prairie Portage on the morning of the 19th [June 1858], we took the trail leading to the Bad Woods, a name given to a wooded district about thirty miles long, by the buffalo hunters in 1852, who, in consequence of the floods of that year, could not pass to their crossing place at the Grand Rapids of the Assiniboine by the Plain or Prairie Road. There were found hundred carts in the band, and the hunters were compelled to cut a road through the forest of small aspens which forms the Bad Woods, to enable them to reach the high prairies. This labour occupied them several days, and will be long remembered in the settlements in consequence of the misery entailed by the delay on the children and women (1860, vol. 1, p. 283-284).

There are many other examples, some of which I have mentioned before: *la Mâchoire d'Original* (Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan),⁴⁸ *la Butte du Cheval Caille* (Pinto Butte, Saskatchewan), *la rivière du Calumet* (Pipestone), *lac La Vieille* (Old Wives), *le Coteau des Festins* (North of Saint-François-Xavier), or *la Pointe Coupée* near Saint-Eustache, Manitoba (Charette, 1976; Coues, 1897; Létourneau, 1978; Rondeau, 1923).

⁴⁸ The anecdotal nature of this toponym is a matter of contention. If it was once proposed that the name was derived from the story of a white man who had repaired the wheel of a *charrette de la Rivière-Rouge* with the jaw bone of a moose, such interpretation is now considered eurocentric. The most broadly accepted interpretation is that the name is Native and refers to the shape of the Moose Jaw River (Hamilton, 1978, p. 302). This interpretation is suspect, however, for it supposes the use of maps; it is unlikely that the river looked like a moose jaw from the ground. Although it is now known that Indians produced maps before Columbus, as noted in chapter 2, they were based on quite different cartographic conventions from the European ones. Indian maps' accuracy was measured less in terms of their topographic accordance with the represented area, than in terms of their respect of the topology and hierarchy of water systems; in a colonial perspective, Native maps were at best schematic representations. From such cartographic documents, one would not likely be able to decipher a moose jaw-like design. Paradoxically, this explanation is thus eurocentric as well. To come back to the initial interpretation, I would note that it is possible that the repair of the cart wheel was made by those Métis accustomed to building and repairing their carts — which contained no metal parts — entirely of wood.

When it is noted how close place names are to geography and culture and how collective memory is inscribed in them, then it becomes clear that Métis toponymy reveals the historical land use of the Métis (Cruikshank, 1990, p. 63) and the fact that Métis history is inscribed (or “written”) in the landscape (Linklater, 1994). This is much more than the inscription of a name on a map, which can be done without occupying the land; Euro-Canadians had named the land well before they occupied it. Rather, Métis naming is the result of a close time-related experience of the land. The recitation of names is then a means by which Métis can communicate such a *vécu*. To list toponyms and to give detailed geographical information are parts of the same process in Métis culture. The name “*la rivière aux Îles-de-Bois*” (Boyne River, Manitoba) not only reveal what can be found at this river, but also bears on what this river meant for Métis material life. Along this river, only a few miles west of *Rivière-Rouge*, was a forest of oak where the Métis used to gather most of the wood they needed to built or repair their carts. As the archaeologist Linklater (*idem*, p. 62) says of Nelson House Cree (northern Manitoba), the Métis-named landscape is the “text” in which is recorded their historical experience of land. The fact that, as I have noted, numerous Métis place names originate from previous Native geographies is an indirect way of suggesting the Aboriginal and immemorial nature of Métis land occupancy and of reinforcing the durability of the Métis in space (Akin, 1999, p. 10; Guillorel, 1999, p. 65) by tracing their history back to a time when they were not yet a distinct people.

3.2.2.2 An “oral geography” of the *Nord-Ouest*: topography of mobility.

To say that Métis place names tell about historical land use and geographical knowledge is to admit that they map an *oral geography* (Pearse, 1999, p. 159), they comment a territorial reality (Collignon, 1996, p. 116). The descriptive nature of these place names has a great deal to do with that for they provide characteristics of the place they name. It is a fact that dedicative toponyms (which comprise most Euro-Canadian place names) are incapable of doing as much. In involving an imported metaphysical, religious, and historical repertory, these toponyms are not site-specific and remain foreign to the places they name. Although Métis names can be mapped, they do not need such a document to express their geographical relevance. In fact, “detaching names from the context in which they are presented as though they can be objectively isolated and filed on a map gives too little sense of how they are actually used” (Cruikshank, 1990, p. 56).

Indeed, some Métis place names are dedicative, *La traverse à Gabriel* for instance, a place named after the Métis leader Gabriel Dumont. But the toponym is also descriptive in that it is a terse expression that literally means “the place where Gabriel Dumont operates his ferry service,” and so reflects both the reality to which it refers and the Métis experience of space.

Toponyms are often close to the geographical reality of the prairie. They can refer to topographical features: 1) the prairie itself, with names such as *la Prairie-Ronde* (Saskatchewan), and *la Prairie de la Tête de Bœuf* (Calf Mountain area, Manitoba); 2) the numerous hills scattered over the prairie and where the Métis had a number of camp sites — *la Montagne de l'Orignal* (Moose Mountain), *la Montagne de Cyprès*, *la Montagne de Bois*, *la Montagne Sale*, and *la Butte du Foin de Senteur*; and 3), the *coulées* and rivers that incise the prairie such as *la Grande Coulée de la Grosse Butte* which derived “its name from a large conical hill about two hundred feet high” (Hind, 1859, p 18). Some other place names describe available resources. *La Talle de Hart-Rouge* (Willow Bunch), is one example; the Métis used to fill their pipes with the bark of the red willow that grows in this region (Rondeau, 1923, p. 104). Finally, Métis place names also refer to the human geography, with toponyms such as *Batoche*, which refers to the place where Xavier Letendre dit Batoche had his ferry and store.

Place names also picture Métis experience of the northern margins (the boreal forest and the parkland), those lands often shared with the *Canadiens*, at the very heart of the fur trade geography: 1) in Manitoba, there were notably *les eaux-qui-remuent* (series of portages near the mouth of Winnipeg River), *la rivière de la Tête Ouverte* (Brokenhead River), *la rivière Bouleau*, *la rivière Blanche*, and the upper section of *la rivière au Rat* (Geographic Board of Canada, 1933, p. 30; Charette, 1976, p. 37); and 2), in Northern Saskatchewan and Alberta, with places such as *Lac La Biche*, *Île à la Crosse*, or *Portage La Loche*.

Central to the persistence of the geographical knowledge of oral cultures such as that of the Métis is the “practice of place.” As Béatrice Collignon (1996) argues in her *Les Inuit: ce qu'ils savent du territoire*, traditional knowledge can only persist by the action and relation of an ethnic group to its territory. Sedentarisation of the Inuit populations, as the French geographer argues, appeared to be fatal to their mobile experience of territory and traditional knowledge.

In the same vein, it can be said that Métis spatial mobility was both a practice of place, and a means by which geographical knowledge can be preserved and communicated to the next generations. As the Métis toponymy was knowledge, it is obvious that it played a role — along with the reasons for travelling (Collignon, 1996) — in structuring Métis mobility. Although described as “wandering” people by many observers in the 19th century, Métis mobility was not a loose spatial practice but one that was socially structured (Thistle, 1997, p. 200), and based on a precise and well established network of places recognized and named by them. In return, spatial mobility was sometimes affected by the encounter of exceptional situations, such a prairie fire, or by a collective decision — the elders’ will to reach *la Coquille Pilée* in order to recall those who once perished there. Deflected from its original course, a party of Métis could be exposed to unknown or long unvisited lands. Such encounters could generate new territorial experiences, and sometimes feed Métis toponymic baggage with more names. The previous quoted example of *les Mauvais Bois* is relevant; forced by a flood to cut their way through wood, the Métis immortalised the event and the place by a proper name. Overall, a specific place acquires its full meaning as part of a network, confirming what was said above about the Métis multi-place orientation and lack of a clear spatial hierarchy. Mobility was essential to the maintenance of such a network of place and to the persistence and development of Métis geographical knowledge.

3.2.2.3 An in-between geography of the *Nord-Ouest*: naming distinctiveness.

Métis place names are symbolic expressions of in-betweenness and identity mobility. If many place names derived from direct Métis experience, many originated from both Métis cultural backgrounds, Indian and Euro-Canadian. This variability in naming exposes the duality of Métis collective memories, stories, and mythic baggages. This explains why toponyms of Native origin, such as the *rivière Queue d’Oiseau*, *rivière Calumet* or *lac la Vieille*, lie alongside place names of Euro-Canadian extraction: 1) toponyms like *Portage-la-Prairie*, derived from the Lavérendrye’s exploration expeditions of the 1730s-1740s; 2) toponyms shared with the *voyageurs*, such as *la fourche des Gros-Ventres* (Taché, 1869, p. 34); and 3), hagionyms (names with religious meaning) brought in the Northwest by missionaries, such as Saint-Boniface, Saint-Norbert, Saint-Anne, Saint-Vital, and Saint-Albert. As I have said above, Métis did more than translate into French (or *Metchif*) Native place names; they also integrated the original stories

(real or mythic) associated with these names. *La Prairie du Cheval Blanc* (today Saint-François-Xavier on the Assiniboine River, Manitoba) is one example. The general belief is that the name comes from the Indians and relates the story of a mysterious and unapproachable horse (Rudnye'kyj, 1970, p. 179). Although agreeing with this, Elliot Coues also specifies, in a footnote of his edition of the narrative of Alexander Henry the Younger, that the story from which the name is derived has been often associated with Métis oral tradition (1897, vol. 1, p. 288). If *la Prairie du Cheval Blanc* is a name that borrows its meaning from the Indians, it draws in return its form from Euro-Canadian language, which adds another dimension to the in-betweenness of Métis naming.

In addition to this general picture, there are more specific indications of the in-between reality of Métis naming. One of them is the co-existence of more than one name for the same place. Again, *la Prairie du Cheval Blanc* is a good example, for this "Native" place name was used for a while in parallel with the hagionym *Saint-François-Xavier*. In this case, the former had eventually been substituted by the latter. But in some other cases, amalgamation is the norm. This is how *la Coulée des Loups* was "christianised" to become "*Sainte-Anne-du-Loup*" (Morice, 1912), a name that assimilates the "savage" and the patroness of the *voyageur*.

3.3 Concluding remarks.

The two investigations lead us to a similar conclusion. If the Métis territoriality had become a central element of the *Nord-Ouest* through most of the 19th century, the advance of colonisation, which significantly increased in the 1870s, brought structural changes that deeply affected it. Forced to abandon certain traditional activities and to develop others judged to be more civilised, the Métis image of themselves undoubtedly changed. But the most critical changes occurred in space, the appropriation of which was a colonial affair. The Métis were gradually dispersed and dispossessed of a clear land base. They saw their material superiority on the land melt like snow. What had once been a land of the cart, became one of farms and railroads. Maps leave little doubt about this after 1870. In fact, as I have shown, they often predicted such a reality. Métis narratives also address these changes in clear tones of nostalgia and loss.

However, some crucial differences have emerged through these two types of analysis. Métis oral tradition is revealed to be a much more fertile description than maps of the extent and deepness of Métis experience, perception, and representation of space. While maps do display Métis territorial markers, their portrait is partial, in all senses. On the 19th century maps the hybridity and ambivalence surrounding Métis territorial markers disappear. The Métis presence on maps becomes clearer, more precise, and homogenous. This creates the impression that the Métis reality can be fixed in space, regardless of its spatial and identity mobility. This had great advantages for colonial purposes. A “fixed Métis” is one awaiting to be taken in charge by colonial means. Such a Métis is better suited for civilisation. On the contrary, analyses of Métis oral tradition reveal identity and spatial mobility to be the main figure of Métis territoriality. Métis narratives convey a greater diversity of identities (Jannetta, 1994, p. 94) and of territorial discourses.

On the other hand, maps are the best indicators of the influence of Métis territoriality on colonial representations of space. If there is nothing surprising in the fact that Métis territoriality is central to the narratives I have analysed, one would not automatically suspect the same on maps, the purpose of which was not the representation of Métis reality. As incomplete as the cartographic representation of Métis territorial markers is, it nonetheless proves how inescapable Métis reality was in the geography of the region and how sophisticated the means of anti-métissage were to be.

Ultimately, these two investigations provide complementary views of the same phenomenon.

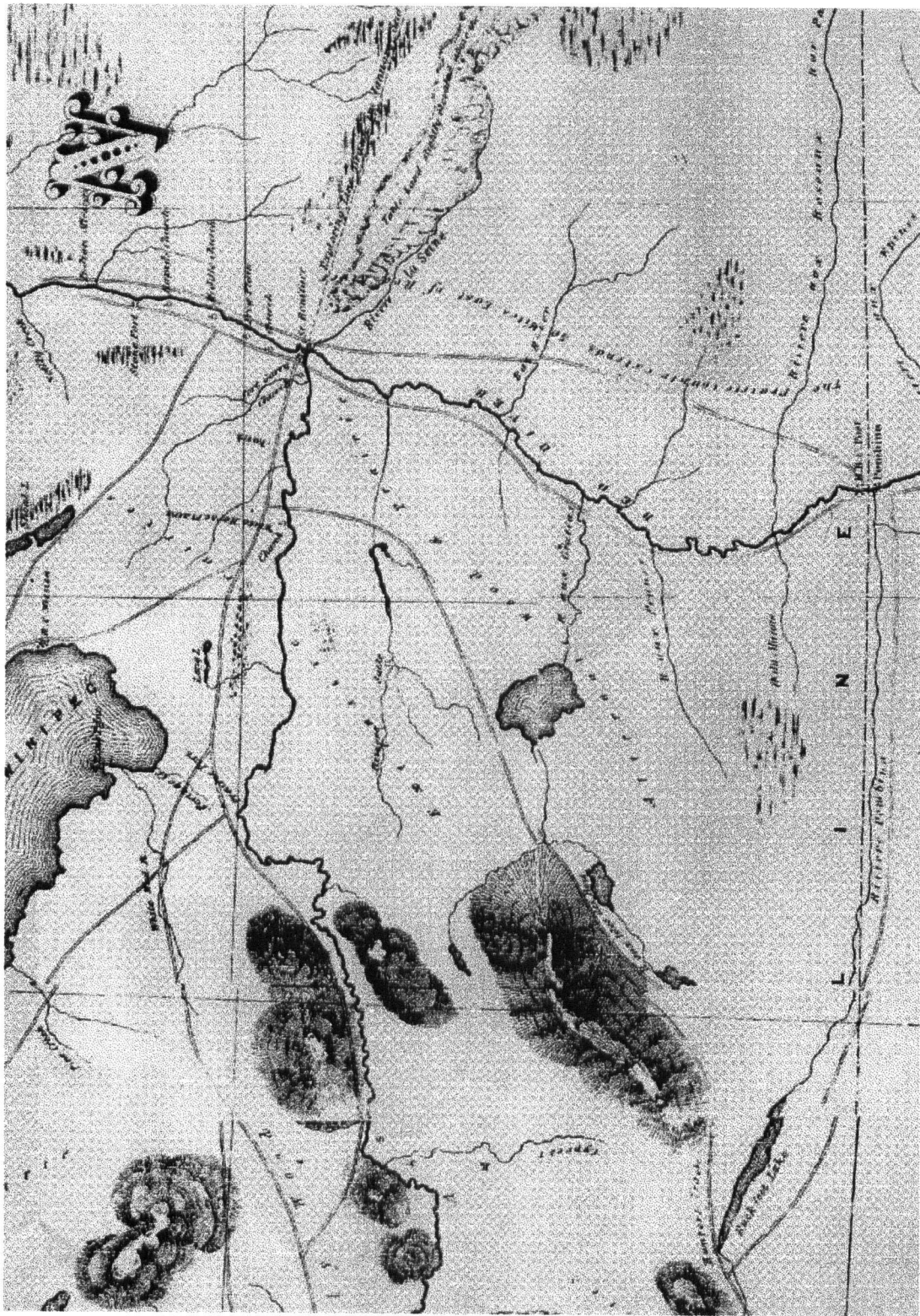


Figure 3.1 Detail from S.J. Dawson's *Plan Shewing the Region Explored by S.J. Dawson and His Party...*, 1859.

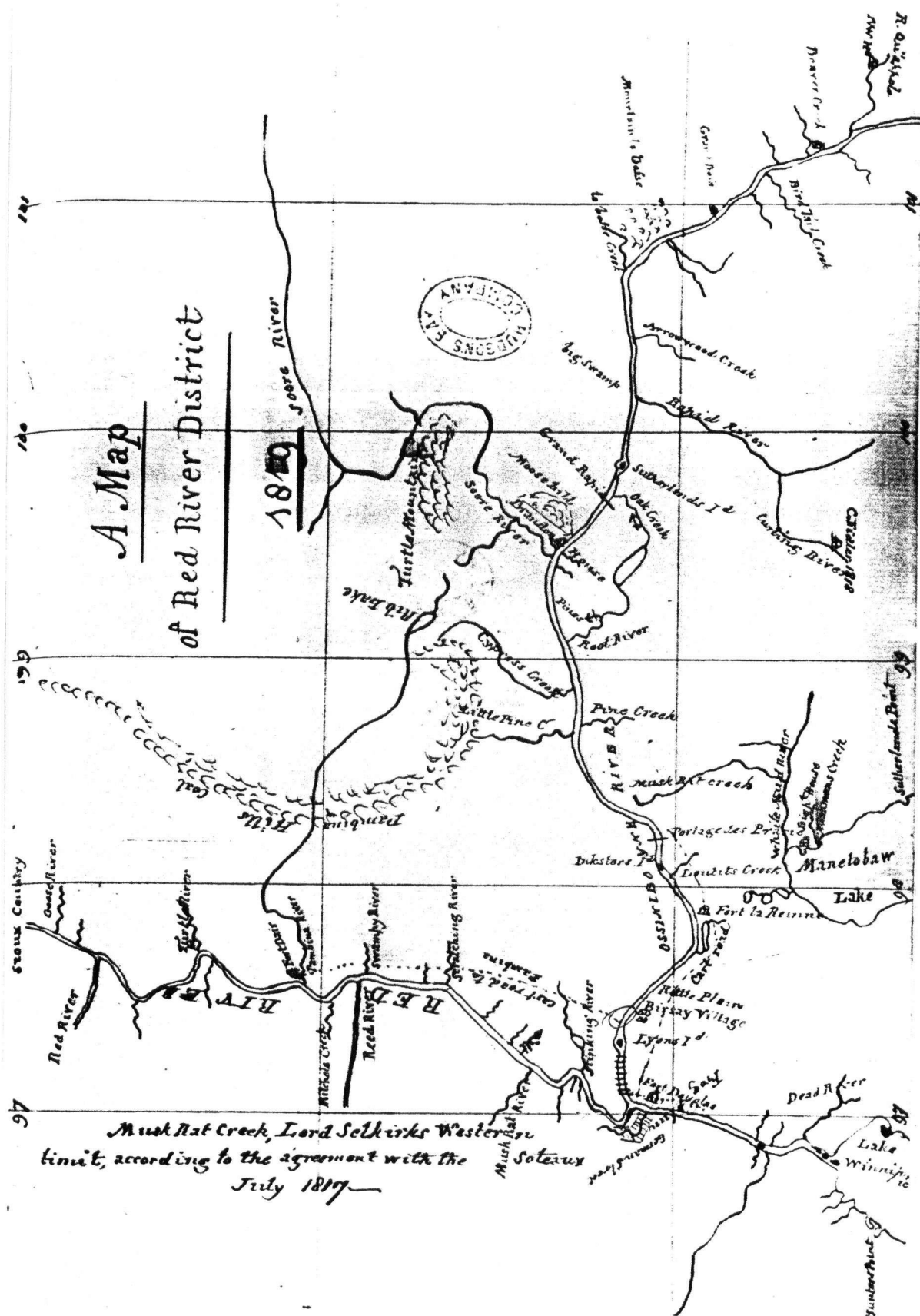


Figure 3.2 Peter Fidler's *Map of Red River District*, 1819.

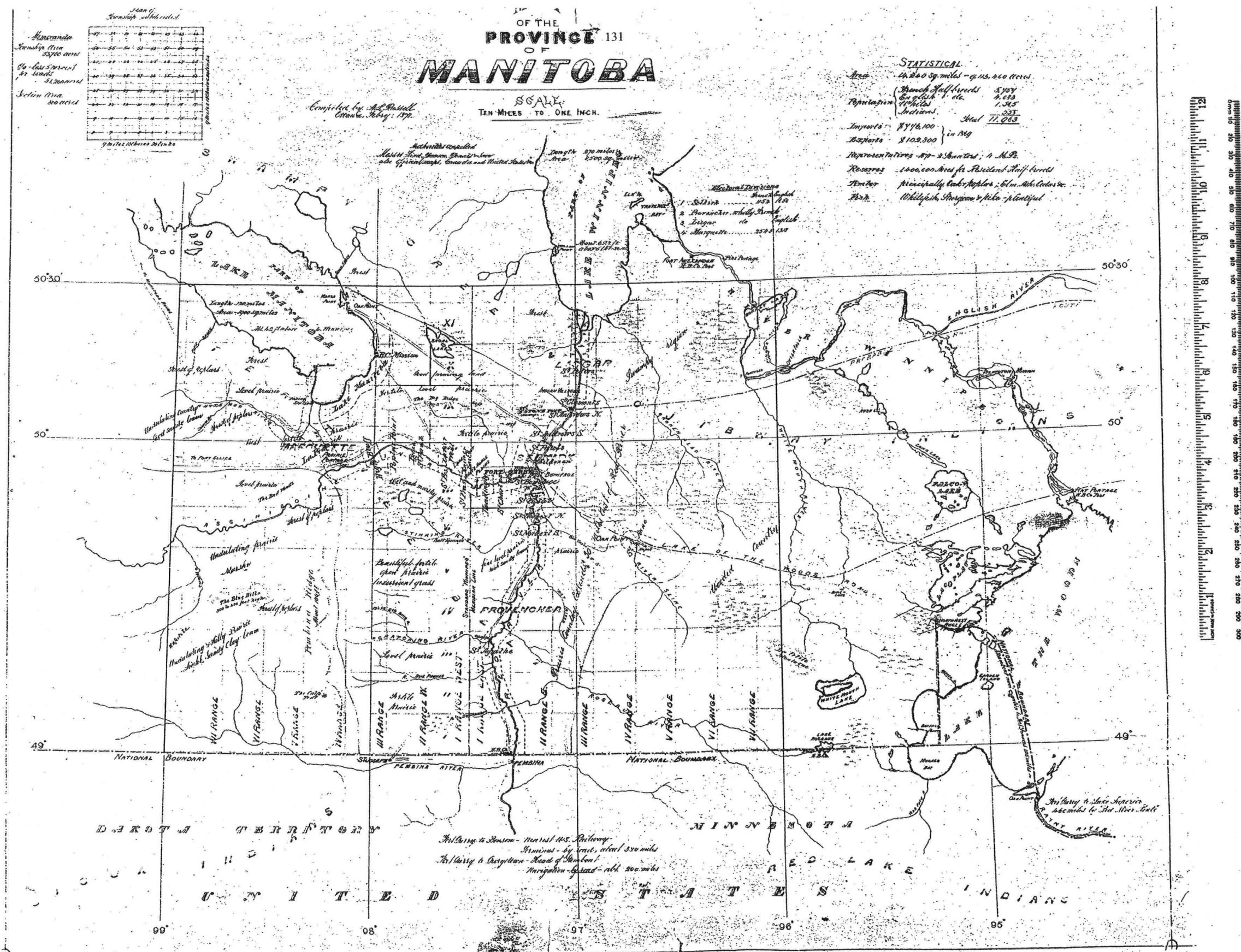


Figure 3.3 A.L. Russell's *Map of the Province of Manitoba*, 1871.

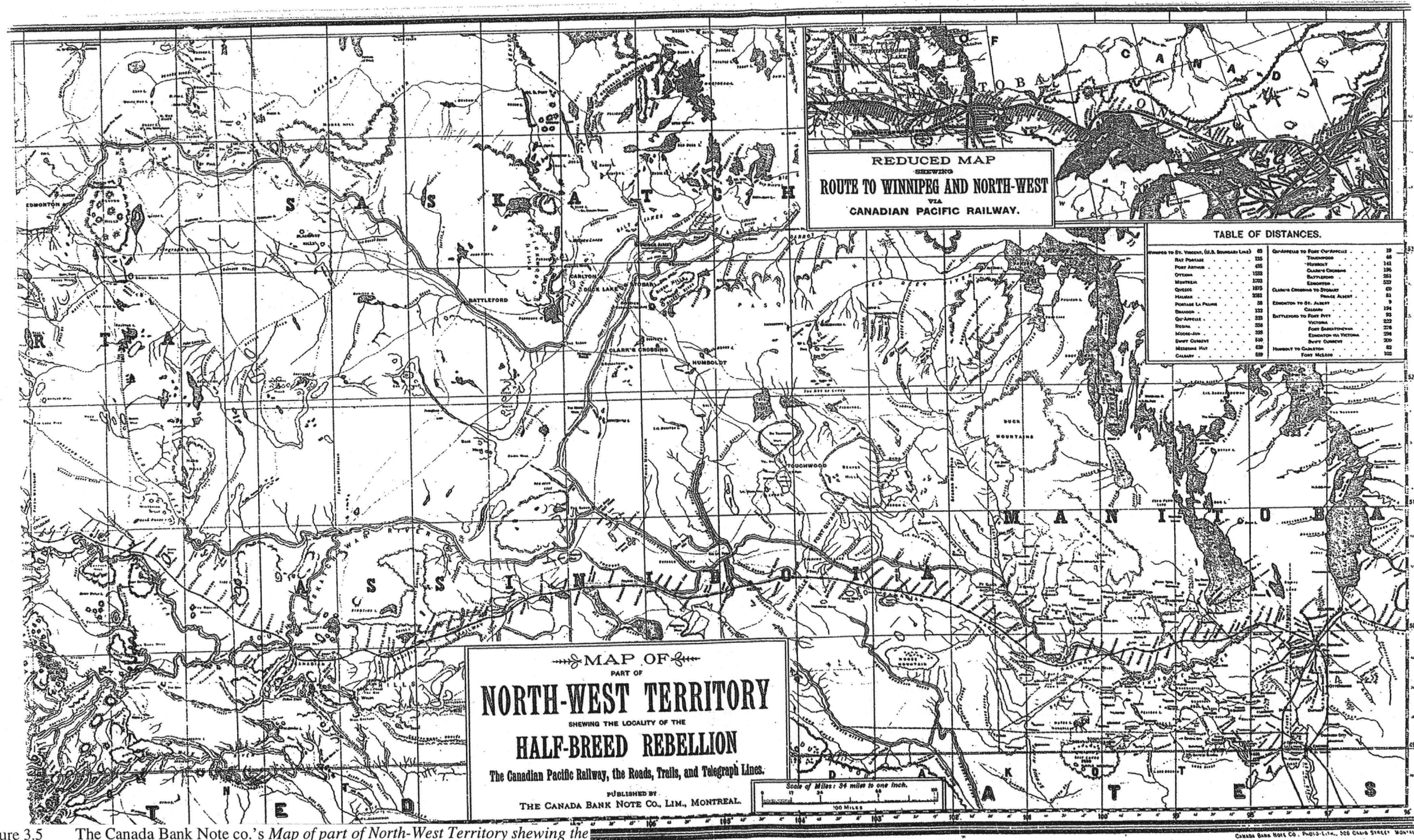


Figure 3.5 The Canada Bank Note co.'s Map of part of North-West Territory shewing the Locality of the HALF-BREED Rebellion..., 1895.

Chapter 4: *Métissage* and Exclusion in the early 20th Century: The Métis, an “Official” Nameless Reality.

Dé-territorialiser une ethnie est la meilleure façon de la voir disparaître pour se fondre dans un magma sociologique.

— Joël Bonnemaïson, “Voyage autour du territoire.”

Ethnicity, de-territorialisation and assimilation are components of the equation of acculturation proposed by the French cultural geographer Joël Bonnemaïson (1981, p. 256). If one accepts that “to see disappearing” (“*voir disparaître*”) implies “to pass out of sight” as much as “to cease to exist,” I would argue that this equation applies to the Métis reality in the first half of the 20th century. During this period Métis territoriality was irremediably changed by the reinforcement of economic and political exclusions. The Métis endured material, political and symbolic losses that deeply impacted their experience of space and their collectivity, particularly on the prairie where a national sense of community had arisen in the 1800s (Stanley, 1978b, p. 76; St-Onge, 1984b, p. 1).

This chapter is not a detailed look at early 20th century Métis territoriality. As my aim is to explore the historical significance of Métis geographies in Canadian socio-spatial transformations, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to treat Métis territorialities during this period in great detail. If over the years successive Canadian political regimes had to cope with *métissage* — generally by opposing — this was hardly true in the early 1900s. Then, I will argue, the Métis were “erased” from Canada’s cultural, historical, political and territorial discourses, and were considered a marginal, if not “invisible,” component of the country’s socio-cultural geography. However, Métis territoriality did change during this period in reaction to exclusion and to Canada’s Aboriginal policy. As these changes need to be addressed to better understand the contemporary Métis, this chapter is a sketch that summarises the impact of such exclusion and of Canadian policy on the Métis sense of identity and territory. Essentially, the chapter is a link between the historical content of the two previous chapters and the contemporary material of the next two.

4.1 Cartographical deletion: the Métis, a “past” people.

As Sealey and Lussier (1975) put it, the Métis were a forgotten Aboriginal people until their re-emergence in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹ Information relating to the Métis in this period is sketchy and the existence of Métis territoriality is barely “perceptible,” a conclusion demonstrated by two sources of information relevant to my study.

The first is cartographic. Apart from a few French place names that persisted on the prairie, the official topographic cartography in Canada makes almost no mention of Métis territorial markers. In fact, this cartography is the logical consequence of the trends I observed for the Québec Métis in the late 18th and early 19th century, and for the Prairie Métis in the last decades of the 19th century — the cartographic fading of Métis geographies. In Québec, as I showed in chapter 2, the obliteration of the hybrid maps of the French regime is accomplished. On the prairies, the Métis are no longer substantial informants for mapmakers, and Métis territorial markers are hard to identify. Métis geographies are confined to a marginal, virtually non-existent, status.

Official mapping was produced, in the early 20th century, by three governmental agencies: the Geological Survey of Canada (1842-1947), the Department of Militia and Defence (1903-1931), and the Department of the Interior (1873-1936) (Dubreuil, 1989, p. 1). Created in 1871, the Department of the Interior was the most active agency in mapping western Canada, and is particularly known for its “Sectional maps of Western Canada” series. If some of these sectional maps were made at the scale of six-miles to one inch, most were at the larger scale of three-miles to one inch. These maps were never meant to be published for the general public, but were for government use (*idem*). Like maps of the late 19th century, the Métis presence is not totally erased on the Department of the Interior’s topographic representations of the West. One notes river lots on sectional maps of La Biche (1918), St. Ann (1933), and Carlton (1935, Figure 4.1), three areas known to have Métis settlements. Sectional maps also sometimes show light dashed lines that the legend identifies as trails;² they are likely old Métis cart trails. However,

¹ This view is supported by the Canadian census, which stopped counting the “Half-breeds” in 1941. While a “Métis ancestry” section was added to the 1981 census (Dickason, 1996, p. 365), it is only since 1996 that Statistic Canada started also amassing data about Métis self-identification.

² Moose Mountain (1915, 1940) and Wood Mountain (1916, 1930) sheets show a rich variety of these trails.

Métis reality is no more than marginal on these maps. Even the Indians are more visible, as the reserves are clearly identified by the legend and by the striking color of their boundaries.

There were also a considerable number of atlases of Canada during that period. These atlases were generally the work of private publishers, although some of them were produced by government agencies (Department of Immigration and Colonization, 1922; Department of the Interior, 1900). They were either addressed to a general public (C.S. Hammond & Co., 1946; Morrison, 1958; Rand, McNally, and Co., 1905; Taylor, 1948; Thomas Allen, 1920) or specifically to school children (Dent, 1949; Lewis & Campbell, 1951; Watson, 1958). In either case (see Figure 4.2 & 4.3), the Métis presence is reduced to few place names, which are surrounded by marks of colonisation such as settlements, roads, railroads and national parks (C.S. Hammond & Co., 1946). The Indians' presence is similarly effaced, except for a few atlases, which meagerly represent reserves (Department of the Interior, 1900; Rand, McNally, and Co., 1905). The textual portions of atlases confirm these cartographic trends as they focus on topics such as fishing, mining, manufacturing, exports-imports, transportation, and cities/towns. The Métis and Indians are not mentioned in the "historical" section of these texts. Although most of the general and school atlases were largely promotional — they emphasised the socio-economic development of the country, the progress of colonisation and, to a certain extent, the growth of the Canadian Nation — promotion was the explicit function of some of them. This is particularly obvious in the Department of Immigration and Colonization's *Canada Descriptive Atlas* (1922). As the name of the Department indicates, this atlas was intended to promote abroad — in the British Isles in this case — the colonisation of Canada.

Other types of mapping sometimes recognise edges of Métis reality. Yet, such recognition generally remained partial, marginal, and quite inadequate to allow the recuperation of Métis geographies in the first half of the 20th century. The map produced by the *Saskatchewan Golden Jubilee Committee* in 1955 is a case in point (Figure 4.4).³ This commemorative map is essentially made of historical and pictorial features and provides a scenic representation of Saskatchewan's territorial history. It shows Métis territorial markers, with icons representing Métis settlement (St. Laurent de Grandin, near Batoche on the South branch of the Saskatchewan River), freighting and buffalo hunting activities, and it mentions cart trails. However, such a

³ The HBCA hold a similar commemorative map published in 1955 by Stanley Turner [G4/182].

portrayal is, at best, an impoverished representation of Métis geography. The recognition of Indian and Métis geographies is limited, and is strongly downplayed by more dominant information emphasising the Euro-Canadian contribution to Saskatchewan, with scenes and icons referring predominantly to newcomers (fur traders, explorers, missions, and new immigrants) and modern (“civilised”) developments (agriculture, mines, oil wells, bush planes, a university, a legislative building, *etc.*). Part of the information related to Indians and Métis focuses on land dispossession or shows how the Métis “rebels” were brought under Canadian control. Two scenes mention Indian treaties (#4 at Fort Qu’appelle and #8 at Fort Pitt). The Métis “problem” is mostly emphasised by icons depicting two rifles in a cross-like pattern and marking each battle site during the 1885 uprising.⁴ More important is the fact that among scenes and icons marking Métis territoriality (positive and negative), none refers to Métis life in the early 20th century. On a map in which nearly 50 per cent of the contents concern the 20th century, it is clear that the Métis were considered solely as inhabitants of a receding past.

Was this really so? Could one argue that the Métis reality was minimised to hide a disturbing influence on mainstream society? Could maps be tools used to express a subtle *antimétissage*? What I argued in chapter 2 with regard to the erasure of Native influence on the cartography and geography of *la Nouvelle-France* could perhaps be argued here. On the other hand, if such a “deconstruction” of these maps might reveal a certain instrumental erasure of Métis reality, I doubt its influence was more than marginal. Much more likely, the lack of information about the Métis on the map was a result of the mapmakers’ focus on colonisation and development. Representing the Métis reality was a much lower priority in the mapmakers’ mind. Métis invisibility on maps is a reflection of the processes of marginalisation and discrimination socially and spatially at work, rather than the opposite. As I will argue below, the dominant society held that the Métis, like other Aboriginal peoples, would be integrated eventually into the “civilised” population of Canada. Maps are socio-cultural representations that mirror and convey “truths” as societies construct them.

The second source of information lies with the early 20th century scholars who worked on the Métis. These scholars, for the most part historians and ethnographers, focused principally on 19th century Métis history at Red River and on Louis Riel, at the

⁴ There is also a scene representing the Canadian army at Loon Lake that is accompanied by a relevant mention:

expense of the contemporary Métis. In English Canada, Stanley's *Birth of Western Canada* (1936) is a good example. Stanley explored at length the importance of the two Métis "rebellions" and the central role of Louis Riel, but never mentioned a persistent Métis reality. In fact, Stanley did not intend to write a native history of the Métis. As his book title indicates, he rather emphasised the importance of Louis Riel's "rebellions" in the making of the Canadian nation (Ray, 1982, p. 93). From such a perspective, one understands that the Métis of the first half of the 20th century were not of interest to the Canadian historian. The same can be said of Joseph Kinsey Howard's *Strange Empire* (1952). Although Howard was not a professional historian and wrote for a wide public, his book is recognised as one of the best ever written about the Métis nation and Louis Riel (Flanagan, 1974, p. 738). His last chapter is devoted to the hanging of Louis Riel, as if the Métis' fate were tied to that same rope. In this respect, French historiography is much the same. Auguste de Trémaudan's *Histoire de la Nation Métisse dans l'Ouest canadien* (1936), A. G. Morice's *Histoire de L'Église catholique dans l'Ouest canadien* (1912), and Clovis Rondeau's *Montagne de bois* (1923), all offer exhaustive depictions of Métis society and culture, but exclusively study the 19th century. An exception is the work of the French ethnographer Marcel Giraud, who made one of the most complete studies of the Western Métis. In *Le Métis canadien* (1945), Giraud devotes a chapter to the contemporary Métis. His description, however, is mostly negative, portraying ill-adapted "nomad" Métis condemned to disappear by their own physical and moral "agonie" (p. 1251). Such a portrait does little to enhance the image of the Métis in mainstream society. Giraud's portrait is only a reflection of western thought with regard to the ideology of primitive people, the principles of which he adopts (Tough, 1989). In Québec, as I noted in chapter 2, a similar neglect of the Métis is apparent in the academic opposition — chiefly promoted by *le chanoine* Lionel Groulx in the 1930s (Mouhot, 1999, p. 56-58; Smith, 1974) — to the "métissage thesis," which challenged the intellectual and nationalistic construction of a "pure" (French) *canadienne* identity.

Things have changed during the last three decades, and the general interest in understanding and documenting the early 20th century Métis has notably increased. Métis and Non-Status Indian organisations have had a great deal to do with this in promoting research on

"last hostilities on Canadian soil: Skirmish at Loon Lake, June 3, 1885".

Métis issues (Ray, 1982, p 93). Along with studies focusing on the political leadership of the Alberta Métis (Bell, 1994; Dobbins, 1981; Driben, 1985; Sawchuk, 1998), there has been a burgeoning of primary sources such as Métis (auto)biographical accounts⁵ and oral history projects. Although these sources do not primarily aim to describe Métis territoriality of the 20th century, they offer a picture of Métis society that includes elements bearing on identity and territory.

But analysis of these sources, especially the oral histories, has its limitations. First, they represent over 200 hours of audio-taped interviews, not always transcribed, nor always devoted exclusively to Métis people, spread all over the prairie.⁶ Second, as I noted in chapter 3, oral histories are performed within a specific context — the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s in these cases — and tell us as much about informants' "present" as about the past to which they refer (Cruikshank, 1994, p. 414; Cruikshank, 1998, p. 41).⁷ If this does not disqualify the historical use of this source, it does suggest that the oral records would benefit from comparison with written or cartographic documents, which is hardly possible here.⁸ Third, the increase of this type of information reveals more about the contemporary nature of scholars' concerns — they are "performing" them too — and about the influence the Métis have on Canadian society today, than about their influence during the period under investigation.

⁵ The best known are Howard Adams' *The Prison of Grass* (1975) and Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973). More recently, the audiotaped *Au temps de la Prairie* has been published in French by Marcien Ferland (2000), relating the life of Auguste Vermette of Manitoba.

⁶ In Alberta: "Jasper-Yellowhead Oral History Project", *Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives*, Jasper; "Lac La Biche Mission", *Lac La Biche Mission Historical Society*, Lac La Biche. In Saskatchewan: "Métis History", *Gabriel Dumont Institute*, Regina; *Saskatchewan Archives Board* (Regina), "Biographies of Two Metis Society Founders, Norris and Brady", "Chipewyan and Métis People of La Loche", and "Ethnocultural Groups of Saskatchewan: The Métis". In *Provincial Archives of Manitoba*: "Métis Oral History Project", two phases conducted in 1984 and 1985 by Nicole St-Onge; "Metis Women of Manitoba Oral History Project", conducted in 1993 by Lorraine Freeman and Doreen Breland-Fines (Fortier, 1993).

⁷ As an example, one could compare St-Onge's (1984a; 1985) oral history projects with Freeman and Breland-Fines' (1993). A quick glance at both sets of interviews reveals that respondents in the latter project refer more to the 19th century Red River tradition, emphasising the role of Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont. One could think that the nationalist movement that drained the prairie Métis affiliated with the MNC of Yvon Dumont in the early 1990s has something to do with the emphasis on the Métis leaders of the past. According to Morisson (1995), this period of "glory days" peeked with the successful negotiation of prairie Métis self-government within the nationally denied *Charlottetown Accord* in 1992.

⁸ Although the previous chapter was partially based on a non-cartographic analysis of Métis territoriality, such information was compared with an exploration of Métis territorial makers as inscribed in colonial maps. It was also supported by substantial secondary historical sources. As I have noted, there is hardly an equivalent for 20th century Métis history.

Moreover, the study of 20th century Métis history still represents an infinitesimal part of the work on the Métis. If the rise of social history has allowed researchers to decenter their focus from the Red River settlements and to express broader visions of Métis reality (Miller, 1988), it has done little to stimulate their attention in the 20th century. This period of Métis history remains in the specialist domain and is hardly passed on to a larger audience. The marginality of such a topic in general histories supports this point. Gerald Friesen's *Canadian Prairies* (1987) is an appropriate illustration. Friesen exhaustively documents the Métis contribution to Prairie history in the 19th century, but says nothing about the Métis during the 20th century. The same can be said of edited books such as John Foster's *Developing West* (1983) and Howard Palmer's *Settlement of the West* (1977), both of which include only "conventional" studies about the Métis. Missed by such accounts are, for example, the foundation of the Métis settlements in Alberta in the 1930s and their consequences for the Métis and for provincial authorities, which have received expert attention: e.g., Catherine Bell (1994), Paul Driben (1985), and Joseph Sawchuk (1998).

The slight importance academics have attached to early 20th century Métis history is echoed by the Métis themselves. Without disregarding this part of their history altogether, the Métis accord it minor historical significance. Rather, they emphasise their roots among the Red River Métis of the 19th century where a positive identity is readily generated. This emphasis is indicated by the MNC definition quoted in the introduction and by the symbolic promotion of a material culture and a way of life that refers to the Métis' "Golden Age" (Red River cart, sash, bead artwork, and buffalo hunt). A similar conception of Métis history can be observed in Québec, as I will demonstrate in chapter 6.

4.2 Canada's Aboriginal policy: ambivalence, *métissage*, and spaceless Métis.

During these years the administration of aboriginality in Canada was marked by ambivalence. At the same time that the Métis were officially expelled from the "Aboriginal family" and previous Métis geographies were absorbed by the colonial perception and cartography of space, Canada was generating, through its legal handling of Aboriginal people, a *new Métis geography* — or "métisation" to use Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown's

expression (1985, p. 5). The 1876 Indian Act⁹ may be considered to have introduced a major shift in the processes of *métissage* in Canada.

The idea behind the Indian Act was, ostensibly, the protection, civilisation and assimilation of indigenous people into mainstream Canadian society (Cairns, 2000; Dickason, 1992; Flanagan, 2000, p. 45; Tobias, 1983, p. 39). There was nothing new about such objectives, for they were the logical conclusion of the Euro-Canadian perception of Aboriginal people as primitive (Laroque, 1983, p. 86). Since Montaigne's myth of "*du Bon Sauvage*" in the 16th century (Delâge, 1992, p. 169; Dickason, 1992), the belief prevailed that primitive people were ill-adapted to the modern way of life introduced to them by western civilisation, and did not have the means to protect themselves from eventual Euro-Canadian encroachments to their land and way of life (Tobias, 1983, p. 40). Europeans had developed an evolutionary perspective of history and the human condition. Not only were primitive and civilised people different in this perspective, but they were also differently located in time, civilisation being the advanced stage of human achievement. Primitive people, these "wandering" souls, were thought to make a superficial use of the land. Farming was seen as a more advanced and efficient way of using land and cultivated land became a visual evidence of the superiority of western civilisation (Harris, 2002, p. 51), and some scholars (e.g. Adas, 1989; Headrick, 1981) have argued that in the 19th century the increasing rates of industrialisation and technological change reinforced the ideology of progress, and the sense of superiority over non-western people that Europe had developed since the 16th century. Hence, the colonial vocation for "civilising" and assimilating *les Sauvages du Canada*. Under these same postulates, Canada justified its opposition to the Northwest Métis grievances in the 1880s, thereby forcing these Métis to "rebel" (Sprague, 1988, p. 1).

The context of the Indian Act set it apart from previous attempts to assimilate Indians. The principal limit of earlier efforts was the need to preserve the "primitive" way of life on which the fur trade economy depended (Innis, 1999, p. 392). "Civilised" agrarian Indians would make ineffective hunters. Consequently, policies of assimilation had always suffered a lack of cohesion and had failed to assimilate. With the decline of the fur trade — which can be traced as far back as the first decades of the 19th century in Québec — this limitation to the "civilising" of

⁹ This is a unique legal text that had brought together disparate policies which were spread from 1851 to 1876. Although it has been subjected to modifications since 1876 (notably in 1952 and 1985), the "spirit" and rationale of the Act has mostly remained unchanged.

Indians was greatly diminished and the path to assimilation cleared. Although an amalgamation of diverse policies and legal actions that were implemented over the years, the Indian Act was drawn in more coherent lines and was a more consistent effort to coordinate the means by which Indian integration would be realised.

The Indian Act was based less on the belief that Indians were of an inferior race than on the premise that they had the potential to become civilised and full citizens of Canada. If the “primitives” were given the opportunity, they would eagerly abandon their Aboriginal identity and take part in the country’s development. They could not be forced, but could be persuaded to assimilate. Persuasion was conceived as a two-fold strategy (Simard, 1992, p. 719). First, the Indian was to be legally defined and categorised by the state, with the creation of a specific status. Thought of as a temporary condition (Green, 1985), this status would allow Canadian authorities to direct measures of assimilation or “enfranchisement” (Tobias, 1983). Second, the Indians would be granted a specific piece of land, the reserve, which was to be allocated and situated in such a way that it would act as a “training” device (Tobias, 1983, p. 39).¹⁰ Overall, this double strategy was based on the creation of a social-legal boundary (Indian status) and a geographical boundary, the reserve, both conceived as ways of demonstrating the advantages of assimilation and of convincing the Indians to cross the thresholds between their “state of nature” and Canadian culture.

Métissage was central to this strategy, although Canadian authorities never admitted that this was the case. No one believed that the Indian would assimilate into an Euro-Canadian way of life overnight as a result of legal and geographical pressures. There was implicit belief in a transitional phase that would allow the gradual integration of the indigenous component into the dominant society. The historian William B. Cameron concluded in 1900 that:

although the future of the redman looks gloomy it is improvable that his blood is altogether to disappear, for there is one agency at work which promises to preserve to posterity some of

¹⁰ This, of course, proved to be true mostly in the east, especially in Lower Canada where colonisation was well advanced when Indian policies were implemented. Aboriginal land was already encroached by the plows and axes of new settlers. The situation was different in treaty areas, notably on the prairie. As the treaties generally preceded the massive arrival of settlers from Canada and Europe, the reserves were not only pieces of land set aside to protect Indians from Euro-Canadian encroachments, but were also the residual land the Indians managed to keep. Put another way, the reserves were the only sections of land that colonial authorities would not take over and open up for colonisation.

the best characteristics of his race — and only one. It is the sole method of civilizing the redman which augurs successfully, and it is the infusion of white blood (p. 216).

Although the historian's comments do not necessarily reflect the view of Canadians as a whole¹¹ they nonetheless shed some light on the ideological and racial conceptions at the time, and on the progressive nature of assimilation.

However, if the socio-geographical boundaries established by the legal apparatus of the country's Indian policy were conceived to be permeable to Indians, the opposite was generally not the case.¹² Such a one-way process not only prevented "whites" from claiming aboriginality by virtue of self-identification and Native influence, it also prevented enfranchised Indians from recovering their status and privileges if they wished to do so. To be Indian or not to be, were the only two possibilities that Canadian society acknowledged. If, whether voluntarily or not,¹³ one had abandoned one's Indian status one became automatically and legally "white." With no "in-between" or Métis category, *métissage* or liminal space was intended to be temporary, a scaffolding to be disassembled once the building was complete.

The ephemeral and unofficial support of *métissage* by the Dominion of Canada did not force the country to recognise the Métis as a distinct reality. Rather, the Métis question had long been settled in Canadian minds. The government's argument is that from 1870 to 1921 the Métis had accepted land or money scrips issued for the extinguishment of any territorial title they could have obtained from their Indian ancestors. There was no longer reason to consider them "Aboriginal." If some Métis had entered treaties, they were then not considered Métis, but rather "Indians."¹⁴ "Métis" was a past reality that had a place only in history books. From a Canadian point of view, the Métis had disappeared as a people.

On the other hand, by the 1950s the Métis were still considered not perfectly assimilated or, if you wish, not fully "white." Academic studies to that date generally considered the Métis

¹¹ Many Canadians rather emphasised that the "isolation" of Native people is the best way to civilise them, not the mixing of blood *per se*. See the special "Report on the Affairs of the Indians in Canada" by W. R. Rawson (1847).

¹² There was the exception, until 1985, of non-Indian woman marrying an Indian; she would gain status. However, this measure of "indianisation" was counteracted by the loss of status for Indian women marrying non-Indian men.

¹³ They were many arbitrary legal ways by which Indians could lose their status against their will: high education, woman intermarrying, or the "double mother" clause (when one's mother and father's mother were not born Status Indian).

as “primitive” as the Indians. I will not review this literature; many scholars have discussed it over the last 20 years (Laroque, 1983, p. 86; Peterson & Brown, 1985; Sprague, 1988; Tough, 1989). But it is noteworthy that the arguments that legitimised the erection of legal and geographical boundaries between Indians and non-Indians were also used to rationalise the unaccomplished Métis integration into mainstream society. Instead of questioning the validity of the ideology of civilisation and assimilation, scholars explained Métis social exclusion in terms of the primitive nature of Métis society. The works of Stanley and Giraud are cases in point (Sprague, 1988; Tough, 1989). More important is the fact that the application of a primitive label to Métis people highlights an ambivalence in the official “erasure” of Métis aboriginality. This idea still persists today, despite the fact that scholars generally consider they have abandoned it.¹⁵

Since the mid-20th century, nonetheless, it has become clear to all that the legal system comprising the Indian Act was not a proper answer to the objectives for which it was conceived: the civilisation and assimilation of the Indians. This system has miserably failed in that matter. The main explanation for this failure lies with the discrepancy between the objective of Indian policy and the strategy of drawing boundaries. Were these boundaries a suitable way to stimulate the integration of the Indian within mainstream society? According to Yinger’s definition of assimilation, such a strategy was bound to be unsuccessful: “[assimilation is] a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies, ethnic groups, or smaller social groups meet” (1994, 39). The Canadian strategy, rather, reinforced the “natural” boundary between primitive and civilised people. As a result, instead of creating “exchange” and “flux,” these *sine qua non* of transcultural processes, Canadian officials have encouraged a system which would perpetuate, and even accentuate, the social distance between Indian and mainstream societies. This gave birth to a vicious spiral where polarisation of these two ethnic categories increased the negative perception of the Indian within mainstream society, perfect ground for discrimination, and for encouraging social distance. As an economically

¹⁴ A fairly large number of these “non-Métis” treaty persons were enfranchised later on by taking scrips (Tough, 1996, p. 119-120).

¹⁵ The anthropologist Adam Kuper questions such abandonment in *The invention of primitive society* (1988). So does the Métis Emma Laroque. For Laroque, although an increasing number of scholars seem aware of the “civilised/savage” dichotomy, rare are those who clearly discredited it (1983, p. 86). The work of the political scientist Thomas Flanagan, who has considerably published on Louis Riel and the Métis land question, proves her right. Flanagan energetically supports the primitive society thesis. He argues that “civilisation” is primarily a matter of technological advancement and state government (2000, p. 27-47).

disadvantaged minority population, Indians would not easily be considered “Canadian” by the dominant society.

Canada’s Indian policy was also mistaken in its “unofficial” conception of *métissage*. Far from being a smooth one-way process, *métissage* is rather a phenomenon built on the ongoing interaction between different symbolic systems. Officials underestimated the enfranchised Indians’ attachment to aboriginality and did not predict that this identity could be redefined out of its social and legal categorisation.¹⁶ The most obvious consequence of this misleading conception was the creation of an unexpected and “illegal” category of people, the “non-status Indian” (hereafter NSI). As the “First Nations” were accepting and institutionalising Canada’s official and legal definition of Indians, which depicts them as antinomic to whites (Sawchuk, 1992, p 3; Simard, 1990),¹⁷ many NSI became victims of this polarisation and faced the discrimination and ostracism of both mainstream and Indian societies. Looking too “red” to be full citizens, or too “white” to qualify as “real” Indians, these NSI confronted a double rejection that forced them to occupy a social and physical *no man’s land*. In this, they were not different from the Métis.

4.3 Métis territoriality in the late 1960s: survival and renewal.

Canadian governance of Aboriginal people in the first half of the 20th century traced two contradictory trajectories with regard to Métis territoriality. A first one, pointed out above, concerns a “perversion” of the system, the genesis of a new process of *métissage*. The second trajectory relates to the silence of “in-between” people (both the “old” Métis and the “new” NSI), and the subsequent denial of the diversity of Aboriginal identity, a diversity existing in the pre-Columbian era and sustained, to some degree, by successive episodes of *métissage*. Therefore, while the Indians were constrained to a “segregated ethnic estate” defining a “geography of

¹⁶ In fact, as I said, aboriginality was to disappear with assimilation.

¹⁷ Some authors define this antinomic promotion by Indians (and by academics) as an “Aboriginal orthodoxy,” which they deplore (Clifton, 1990; Flanagan, 2000). Others, while critical of such a dichotomised perception among both mainstream and Native societies, primarily aim at explaining its emergence as a result of the mainstream society’s categorisation (Dick, 1980; Sawchuk, 1992; Simard, 1990). Finally, there are many authors who think that such a dichotomy seriously limits our ability, as Canadians, to come to terms with the Aboriginal question (Cairns, 2000).

reduction" (Simard, 1990, p. 340), the Métis and NSI often inhabited the same spaces of marginalisation and exclusion.

Despite Canadian Indian policy, the Métis did not completely dissolve into mainstream society. Many authors even affirm that the Métis had preserved most of the territorial array that had marked their occupation of land in the 19th century. This is what two Manitoba Métis, Bruce Sealey and Antoine Lussier, argue in their *Métis: Canada's Forgotten People* published in 1975. In a chapter devoted to the 20th century Prairie Métis, they declare that:

the historical groupings of the Métis were only slightly altered: established groups of small farmers, groups who lived off the land in traditional ways, and people living in roughly constructed shacks on 'the wrong side of the tracks' in towns and villages. The groups constituted the descendants of the original Métis and half-breeds — descendants of the fur traders, cart men, buffalo hunters, tripmen, farmers, guides and warriors of the plains (1975, p. 145).

The work of these authors has been given much academic consideration for it stands at the heart of scholars' increasing interest in the Métis in the 1970s and provides a broad understanding of the Métis past and present. Lussier and Sealey also publicised their views by publishing, in the second volume of their "trilogy,"¹⁸ a study by J. Lagassé in 1959. In describing the Manitoba Métis, Lagassé noted:

The larger concentrations [of Métis] were found in Portage la Prairie, St. Eustache, St. Lazare, San Clara, St. Laurent, St. Ambroise, the Local District of Alonsa, Duck Lake, Camperville, The Pas, Norway House, Churchill, Grand Marais, Richer, Selkirk and Greater Winnipeg. *These sixteen areas account for fifty-seven percent of the total Métis population recorded for the province* (1978, p. 116, my emphasis).

This description identifies groups of people self-identifying as Métis that were concentrated in a relatively limited number of Manitoba communities, a distribution favouring, at least theoretically, the maintenance of distinct Métis ways of life. This distribution can be partially understood as a result of the socio-spatial exclusion and marginalisation (Driben, 1985). At an old Roman Catholic mission such as St-Laurent, religion, and to some degree the priests' influence, probably bore on Métis concentrations. Undoubtedly, there were other reasons as well. In any case, this distribution gives, as Sealey and Lussier claim, a fairly accurate picture of Métis groupings in the late 19th century.

Behind this enduring territorial reality, considerable parts of the old Métis social networks and identity have endured. For Sealey and Lussier, again, Métis identity survived through Métis heritage and history, both of which were passed on by oral tradition (Sealey & Lussier, 1975, p. 145). According to Shore and Barkwell (1997), although the days of national action were over, the core of Métis social activity, based at the local and family level, mostly stayed untouched during these years of exclusion (p. 11). If family networks were no longer conveying “national identity,” they appeared to have been the major channel through which the social interconnections between Métis communities were articulated (Driben, 1985, p. 85-88). Browsing the interviews conducted by St-Onge (1984a & 1985) gives a sense of how crucial the family-local interactions were for Métis territoriality prior to the 1970s. Respondents’ demonstration of genealogical knowledge is recurrent. Such knowledge conveys a collective memory and roots the Métis in land. Similar observations can be made from Maria Campbell’s testimony when she gives detail of her genealogical background: “Great Grandma Campbell, whom I always called “Cheechum,” was a niece of Gabriel Dumont and her whole family fought beside Riel and Dumont during the Rebellion. She often told me stories of the Rebellion and of the Halfbreed people” (1973, p. 15).

4.3.1 The national decay and political (dis/re)organisation of the Métis.

Perhaps the most obvious transformation the Métis faced after the last decade of the 19th century was at the political level. Following the peak of their national identity in the 1870s and 1880s, the Métis saw their political power decline rapidly. The sphere of Métis influence shrank in proportion, and the local scale became the only space left to them to express their sense of common identity. The real change for the Métis lay not with the absence of organisation or sense of common identity, but rather with the loss of an external interlocutor to whom to address their claims. If Métis nationalism had not been permanently eliminated, certainly mainstream society refused to listen to any national promotion other than “Canadian.”

¹⁸ An edited series of three books published between 1978 and 1980 and entitled *The Other Natives, the-les Métis*.

In a report published in 1974, Don Whiteside¹⁹ mentions several “Indian” organisations that began in Canada in the early 20th century, and that were partially composed of (or even initiated by) NSI and Métis members (p. 43). In this vein, in 1943 the Salish Indian, Andrew Paull, and Jules Sioui (Huron from Wendake in the Québec city area) founded a national organisation, the “Brotherhood of Canadian Indians.” Although this organisation was labelled “Indian,” it made an interesting reference to “the great Patriot Louis Riel” when calling the first general meeting (*idem*, p. 120). Moreover, the organisation worked on the revision of the Indian Act, and in that can be seen to deny the country’s legal and ethnic categorisation. It is not surprising that Government officials never really recognised such organisations and often tried to thwart their development (*idem*, p. 3).

On the Prairie, although many organisations were like those described above, others were specifically established to represent the Métis.²⁰ The first one, *l’Union nationale Métisse Saint-Joseph* (UNM), was created in 1887. Its function was cultural and historical. More specifically, the organisation was founded to preserve the heritage of the Métis and to forge the Métis’ own historical version of the events of 1870 and 1885. To this end, the UNM sponsored the publication in 1936 of the *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l’Ouest canadien*, by Auguste de Trémaudan. In the 1930s, another organisation was founded in Alberta, the *Association des Métis d’Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest* or Métis Association of Alberta (MAA).²¹ The purpose of this organisation was openly political and sought to represent the Métis in their settlement negotiations with the Alberta government. Following the “lobbying” pressure of this organisation, in 1938 Alberta passed the Métis Betterment Act, which legally framed the creation of Métis settlements in northern Alberta.

The creation of the MAA reveals how reduced Métis power over land had become. The provincial government never recognised that the Métis held any Aboriginal title, nor did it recognise their right of self-government. The 1936 report of the Ewing Commission,²² the recommendations of which served as foundations for the Métis Betterment Act, made clear that:

¹⁹ Quoted in Dunn, June 20, 2002

²⁰ Comparatively, there was no Métis organisation *per se* in Québec prior to 1972.

²¹ Joseph Sawchuk, who devoted a book to this organisation (1998), notes that it was preceded by an older organisation, the St. Albert Association (1897-1901). There remains little evidence about this organisation (p. 49).

²² This commission was held in 1934 by the Alberta government to review the socio-economical situation of the provincial Métis.

“if the Metis had special rights arising from Aboriginal ancestry, such rights were extinguished through the distribution of scrip. It was clear that the Commission was not responding to Metis title claim to land; rather, it was responding to the needs of a destitute Metis and non-status Indian population” (Bell, 1994, p. 5). Therefore, although the MAA had official jurisdiction in the settlements, the province preserved considerable control over their administration (*idem*, p. 6). The principal reason for this, as Dobbins points out, is that governmental authorities generally considered the Métis culturally unfit to farm, a persistent perspective that Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris, the two main leaders behind the creation of the MAA, had to fight during their political crusade for recognition and land (1983, p. 82). Indeed, the Métis Betterment Act was a step forward in helping the Métis to face their economic predicaments. However, the settlements were not thought of as the land base from which the Métis would govern themselves, but rather as a way to encourage their integration into mainstream society.²³ Under these conditions and in spite of its previous political achievement, the MAA was left with little power and tended to become inactive, as did most of the Métis organisations and Indian brotherhood associations at the time (Sawchuk, 1998).

4.3.2 The “shack:” the material reality of a “Road Allowance people.”

Despite the Alberta government commitment in addressing Métis poverty, the economic situation of the Prairie Métis mostly remained precarious. In a study of Manitoba Métis published in 1959, the *Canadian Association of Social Workers* described the Métis:

Because the Metis are not a clearly defined ethnic group concerning whom accurate statistics can be collected, it is impossible for this report to establish scientifically what was nevertheless unanimously accepted as true by those making the study; namely, that the Metis are, in the main, an economically and socially disadvantaged group (p. 10).

Moreover, the exclusion and discrimination the Métis suffered undermined their hopes for economic improvement. As Howard Adams puts it: “all local employers knew whether I was halfbreed or white. Seeking employment as a native was more than looking for a job, it was

²³ One can wonder if the settlement strategy was the best for assimilating the Métis. In fact, this strategy was based on the same postulates that framed the Indian Act. The settlements had the same geographical effect as the reserves, that is they created a physical boundary between the Métis and the mainstream society (Driben, 1985, p. 149-151).

asking to be insulted" (1975, p. 10). The nature of the jobs available for Aboriginal people and the low wages they procured also limited their economic improvement (*idem*, p. 127).

The Métis undoubtedly shared the Indians' economic predicament (Sawchuk, 1978, p. 34). In addition, however, they were refused annuities and other "advantages," such as land, granted to the Indians under treaties or the Indian Act. As a result:

One by one [the Halfbreeds] drifted back to the road lines and crown lands where they built cabins and barns and from then on were known as "Road Allowance people". So began a miserable life of poverty which held no hope for the future. That generation of my people was completely beaten. Their fathers had failed during the Rebellion to make a dream come true; they failed as farmers; now there was nothing left. Their way of life was part of Canada's past and they saw no place in the world around them, for they believed they had nothing to offer (Campbell, 1973, p. 13).

Maria Campbell's mention of "Road Allowance people" is of interest here. It means that the Métis were left these few acres others thought of no value. It was much the same in Québec. Had one wanted to identify Métis communities, it would often suffice to look for "the worst rundown housing in the town" (Alliance laurentienne des Métis et des Indiens sans statut, 1975, p. 124). As a Québec Métis says: "*Les gens s'installent plus ou moins en squatter*" (Couture, 1982, p. 106). The Métis in Québec and in the Prairie provinces were squatting on lands that offered few, if any, economic possibilities. One may see an obvious correlation and a vicious spiral emerging between geographical and economic isolation. In other words, the Métis occupied the side of the road that nobody looked at. They were out of sight.

4.3.3 The shame, symbolic denial of pride, and identity modifications.

Affected by years of exclusion, powerlessness and discrimination, some Métis abandoned, at least partly, their distinct heritage and assimilated into mainstream society (Lavallée, 1988, p. 193). As Emile Pelletier points out in his social history of Manitoba Métis: "Most French-speaking Métis joined the French Canadian groups who settled in Manitoba, while the English-speaking Métis integrated into their English counterpart. Today, their descendants

And, as did Indian status, the official definition and "biological" requirements for qualifying under "Métis" and living in the settlements had created a social-legal boundary that undermined most of the efforts to assimilate.

have assimilated to the extent that few actually know of their Métis origin” (1977, p. 126). It was not different in Québec, as my interviews reveal (see chapter 6). Common stereotypes about Native people had generated a covert culture among the Québec Métis, who generally hid their Aboriginal origins to avoid discrimination and exclusion. Adding the fact that Québec Métis have never reached the level of political and demographic expression of the Prairie Métis, discrimination had likely magnified the intensity of the difficulties they faced in maintaining their ethnicity.

Keeping Métis heritage alive was demanding even for those who had resisted assimilation. As Maria Campbell says, most of the Métis experienced a “loss of pride” (Campbell, 1973). Once again, discrimination — often subtly institutionalised in every day life (Yinger, 1994, p. 169) — had much to do with the shame Métis people had developed regarding their self-image. This is what the Métis ethnographer and O.M.I. Guy Lavallée emphasises when describing the language hierarchy “naturally” imposed by French Canadian missionaries on his native community of Saint-Laurent in Manitoba. Michif was obviously at the bottom of such a hierarchy: “[T]he Métis people quickly became conscious that their language, Michif French, was being portrayed to them as an inferior language. [...] Thus, for some Métis people, being Métis and speaking Michif French became a source of inferiority and shame” (1991, p. 86). More important is that this hierarchy was supported by concrete attempts at linguistic assimilation, notably at school where Métis children were forced to speak “standard” French (Lavallée, 1988, p. 174-184).

The discrimination the Métis faced from mainstream Canadian society only partially explains the shame many of them felt about their own identity. In fact, while the Métis shared most of the Indians’ political and economical difficulties and often lived close to Indian reserves (Campbell, 1973, p. 26; Driben, 1985, p. 2), they had to face discrimination from their Indian forebears as well: “We all went to the Indians’ Sundances and special gatherings, but somehow we never fitted in. We were always the poor relatives, the *awp-pee-tow-koosons* [the half people]. They laughed and scorned us. They had land and security, we had nothing” (Campbell, 1973, p. 26). This was largely a consequence of the social ostracism and polarisation created by the legal and geographical categorisation of Native in the Indian Act.

As noted above, the Métis shared this “in-between” and marginal position with the NSI. Identity formation was mostly based on the “institutionalisation,” within Métis and NSI populations, of the negation-rejection stereotypes of both Canadian and Indian societies. As the political scientist Kenneth Hoover suggests, such acceptance of the *other*’s stereotypical negative identity generally drives “targeted” individuals and groups towards self-hate (1997, p. 33): “Gradually, I began to hate everything that was halfbreed. I saw my family, relatives, and the Métis girls as ugly creatures. They were becoming hateful people, mostly because of how they looked. I pushed them farther into the background, I wanted them *right out of sight*” (Adams, 1975, p. 142, my emphasis).

4.3.4 The “no way through” mobility.

One can easily imagine the effects of this double rejection and social exclusion on the Métis ability to expose one of their most important ethnic characteristics, their mobility. Constantly declared “strangers” by both Indian and non-Indian relatives, the Métis saw their identity mobility compromised. The ability to be both Indian or non-Indian depending on contingencies was no longer the expression of their identity, but rather the sign of their rejection by both sides.

In spatial terms, it is clear that mobility was not as important as it had been when there were still prairie buffalo hunts. Mobility was no longer a collective behaviour framing Métis ethnicity. Métis tended to entrench themselves in their isolated local communities (St-Onge, 1984b) or were encouraged by Canadian authorities to adopt a settled life as in Alberta with the creation of the colony of Saint-Paul-des-Métis (1896) and the establishment of the Métis settlement in 1938. Mobility became an individual matter influenced by personal, social and economic circumstances (Dobbin, 1981, p. 50). It was sometimes motivated by job or resource opportunities: “Until the 1940’s those who had retreated to the wilderness areas did not suffer too greatly. They found it still possible to fish, trap, hunt and generally harvest the natural produce of the countryside” (Sealey & Lussier, 1975, p. 145). Often, unemployment or negative stereotypes were the main reasons inducing the Métis to move.

4.4 Concluding remarks.

To conclude, this chapter has considered Métis de-territorialisation, survival and re-territorialisation in the first half of the 20th century. Contrary to Joël Bonnemaïson's comment, quoted in the epigraph, the process of Métis de-territorialisation did not result in the complete dissolution of Métis identity into the Canadian "social magma." On the contrary, many of them maintained a distinct sense of identity and territory, although partially metamorphosed by contact with Canadian society. Paradoxically, the geographical, social and economical marginalisation the Métis faced during the first half of the 20th century has not forced them to vanish, but rather has provided them with a barrier against the Canadian mainstream society's assimilation of Aboriginal peoples — much as did the Indian Act and the reserves for "Indians." In occupying abandoned spaces, the Métis "passed out of sight," but have not "ceased to exist."

At the same time, this marginalisation was only one part of the difficulties the Métis faced during most of the 20th century. They also had to endure loss of power, discrimination and feelings of self-hate. Many Métis felt hopeless about their future, realised they had become invisible in Canada, and thought they might disappear as a people, as Campbell's comments quoted earlier in this chapter indicate (1973, p. 13). These difficulties represented the basic challenges that the contemporary Prairie and Québec Métis (from the late 1960s to now) would have to meet to maintain their heritage and historical connections to past Métis geographies. In addition, to improve their socio-economic conditions, contemporary Métis would have to overcome exclusion, discrimination and shame, and to enhance the appreciation of the Métis contribution to Canada. Ultimately, they would need to deal with a new dimension of the Canadian Métis reality, which resulted from the process of "métisation" and the more or less official creation of the NSI category (Shore & Barkwell, 1995, p. 11). All of these achievements will stand as main components of my analysis of contemporary Métis territoriality in the next two chapters.

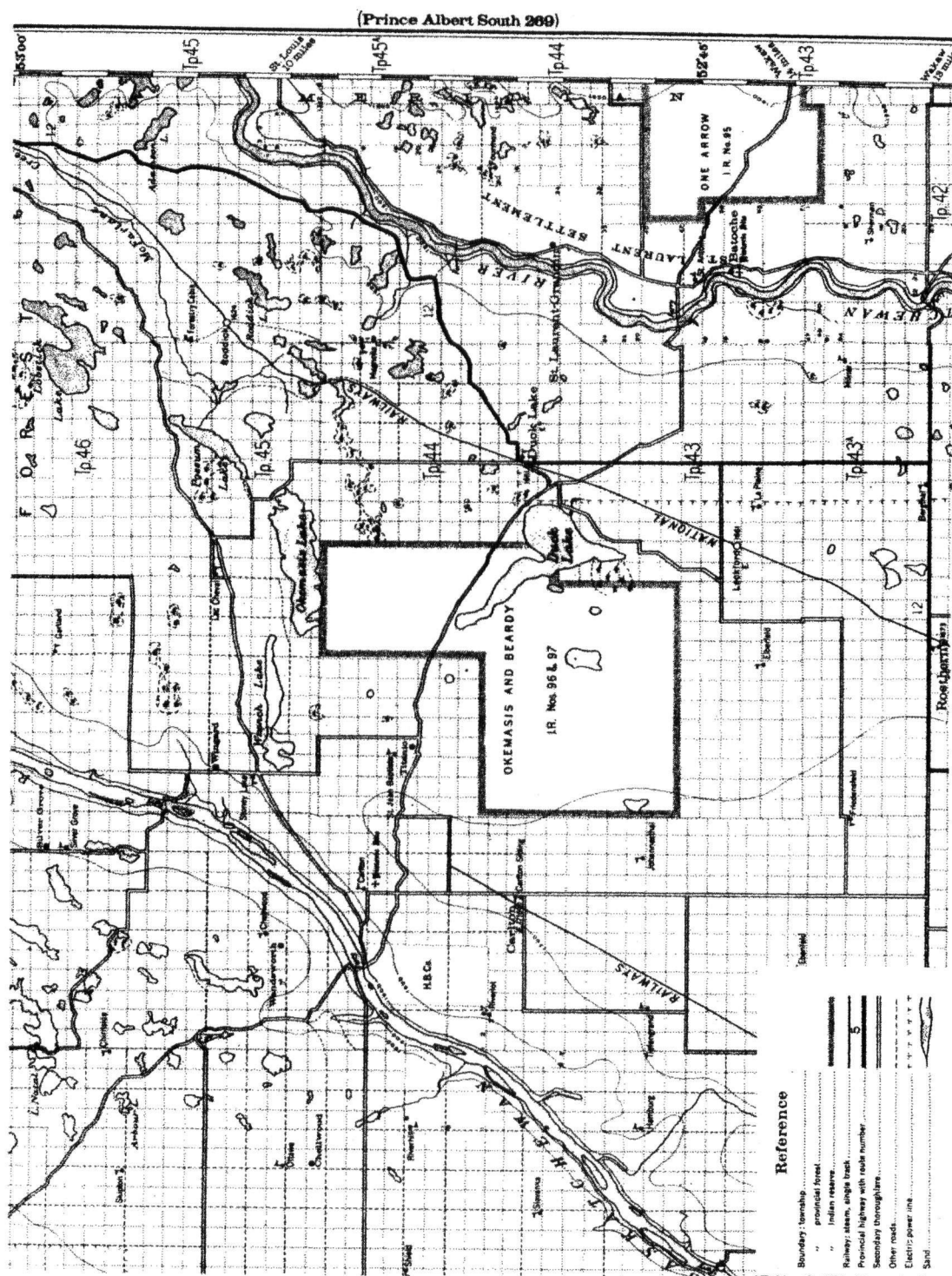
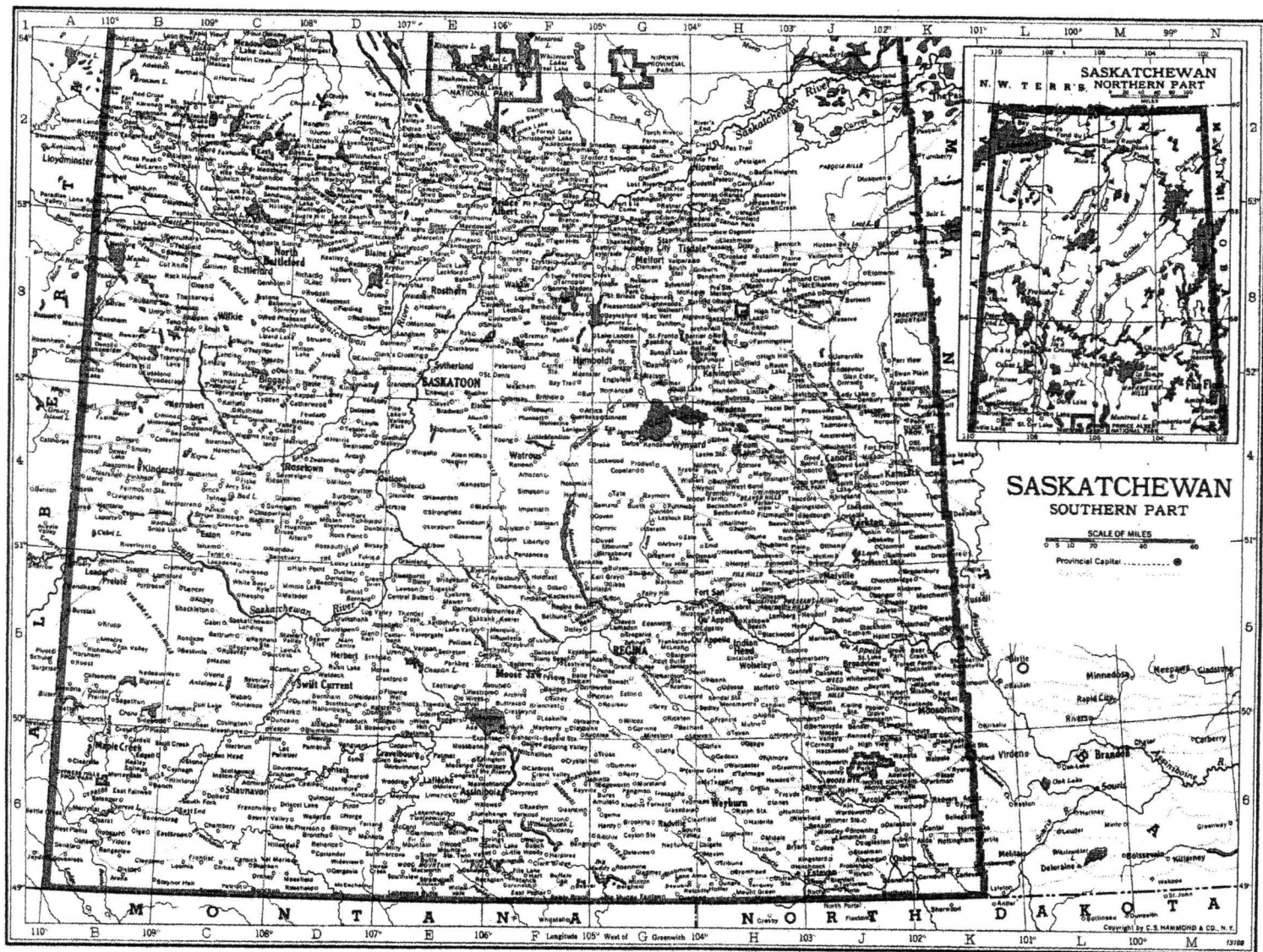


Figure 4.1 Detail from Canada — Department of the Interior's *Carlton Sheet, Saskatchewan (West of Third Meridian)*, 1935.

Figure 4.2 C.S. Hammond & Co., *Saskatchewan. Southern Part*, 1946.



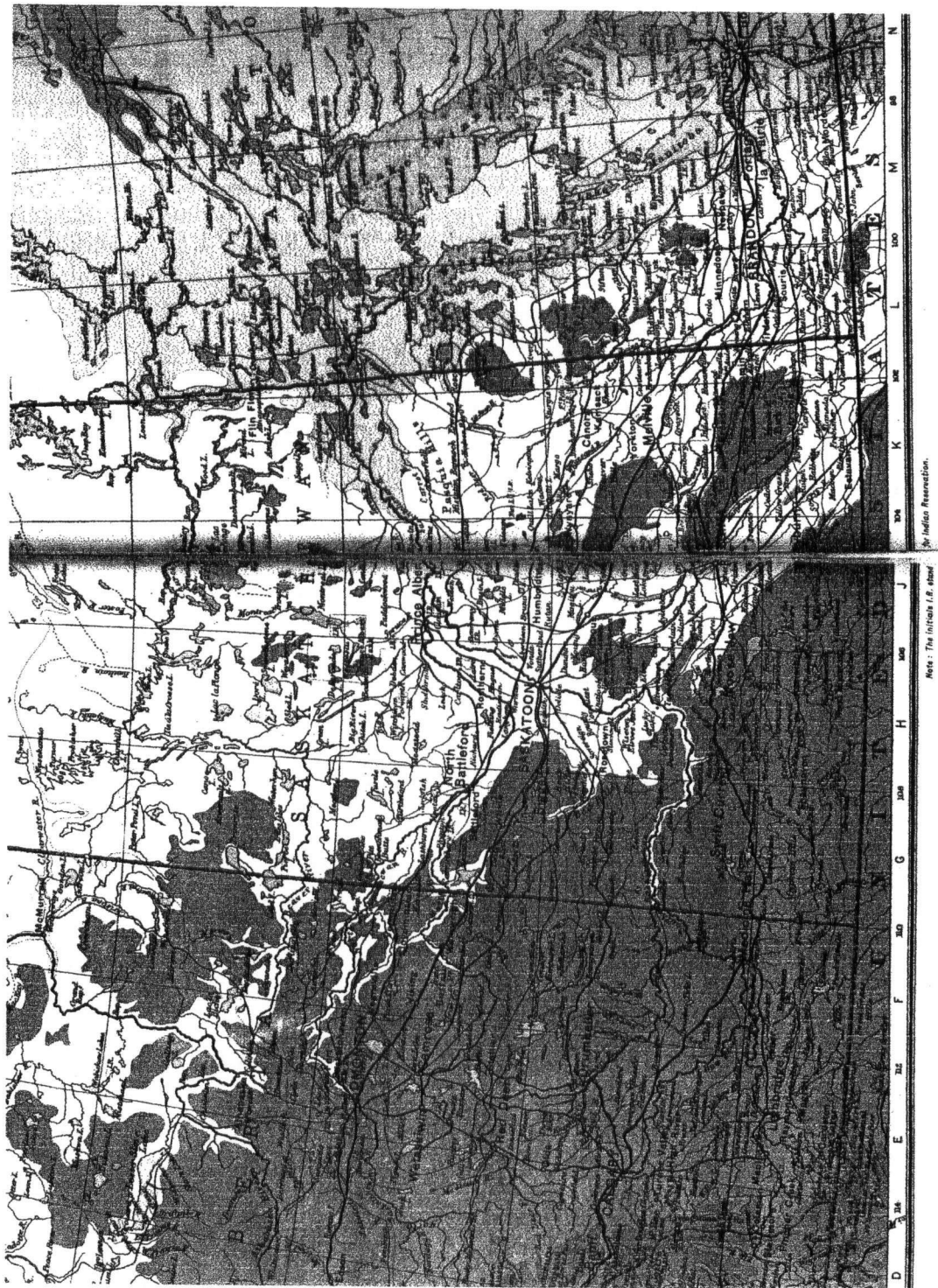


Figure 4.3 Detail from Dent's *Prairie Provinces*, 1949.

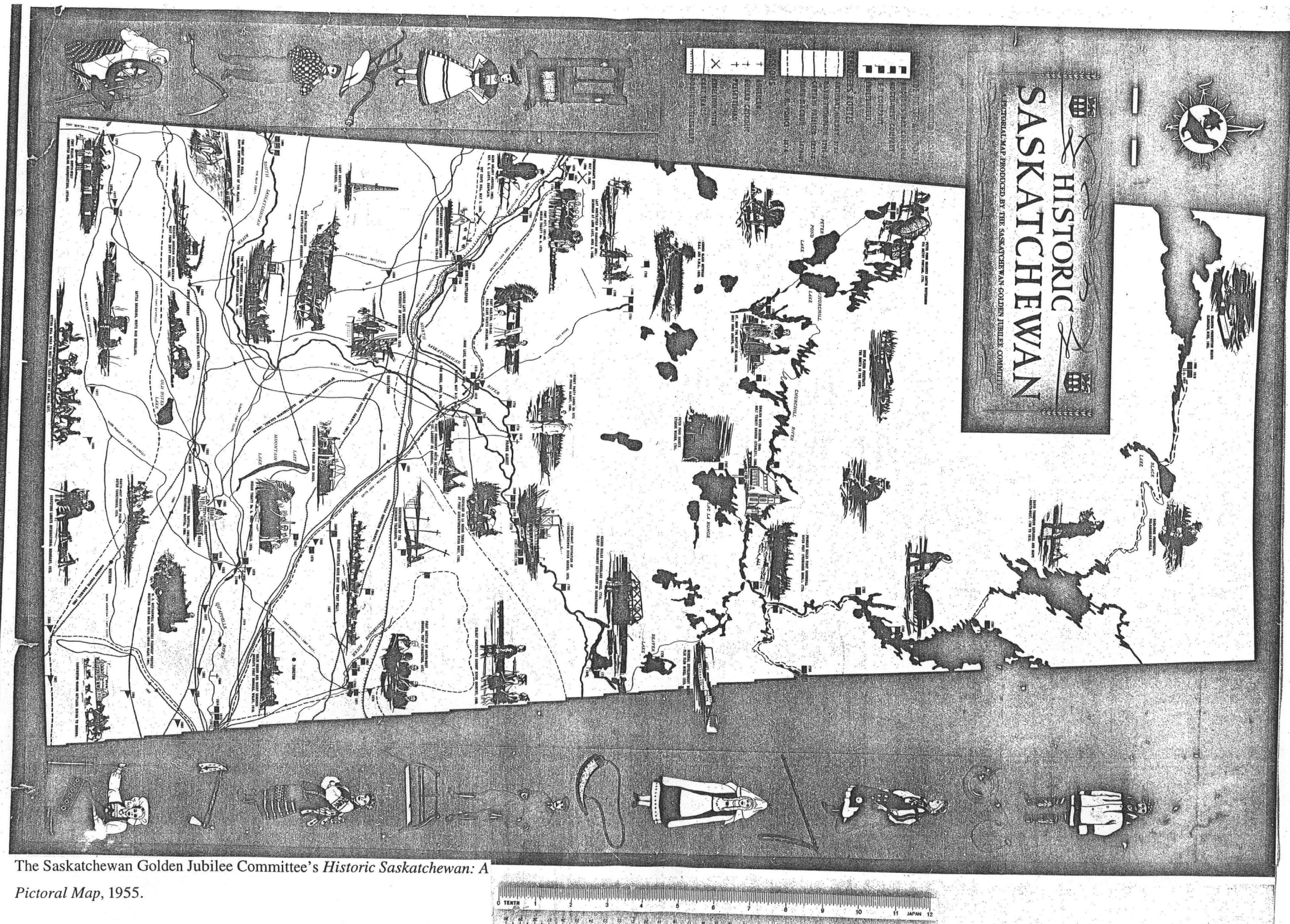


Figure 4.4

The Saskatchewan Golden Jubilee Committee's *Historic Saskatchewan: A Pictorial Map*, 1955.

Chapter 5: (Re)Making of Ethnicity: Métis Territoriality & Cartography on the Prairies, 1960s – Present.

On their Graduation Day, many of our Metis graduating students receive the gift of a traditional Metis Sash. As part of our People's proud heritage, the sash is a symbol of our history and our future. The colours of the sash poetically signify our battles, our virtues, our growth, and our prosperity. The sash is recognition of the sacrifices they and their families have made.

— David Chartrand.¹

In the late 1960s-early 1970s a growing sensitivity to the fate of national minorities in Canadian society brought the Métis and non-status Indians (NSI) back to the front of the Canadian political stage. With the development of provincial political organisations funded by the federal and provincial governments, these two groups were no longer marginal and invisible elements of the country. On the contrary, they came to play a primary role in the contemporary evolution of Canada, a role that culminated in the recognition of the Métis as Aboriginal people(s) in 1982 and in the amendment of the Indian Act (Bill C-31) to allow NSI to be reinstated or registered as Indian in 1985.²

These political changes have modified Métis territoriality. The best-known modification follows from the shifting self-definition of the Prairie Métis. Over the last decades Métis self-definition has changed more than once; if the definition was particularly inclusive in the first two decades in order to integrate NSI, it has lately become much more exclusive with the rise of nationalist feelings among the Prairie Métis. At the same time, these changes also affected the scale of Métis social interaction, making the provincial level the main socio-economic and political driver and the core of national action.

¹ In "Greetings From the President", *Grassroots news [Le Métis]*, June 25, 2003, p. 12.

² This has not necessarily changed the material life of many of these "new" Indians, for the amendment was never accompanied by an increase of annuities and reserve space. Many of them are now "off-reserve" Indians who hold no voting right for the election of the reserve tribe council. Others are membershipless despite their official status. There are some who remained non-status either from personal "choice" or because their application has been rejected. Cases like these are now represented by the nationally-based organisation, the Congress of Aboriginal People (the former Native Council of Canada, which had instigated the constitutional recognition of Métis as Aboriginal people).

My objective in this chapter is to study these modifications. To date, scholars who have focused on Métis self-definition have neglected the territorial dimension. Thus, I will emphasise the effects that the new Métis socio-political reality has had on their sense of territory. In so doing, I also will demonstrate the importance of maps in the process by suggesting that they both mirror and shape the Métis sense of territory. In this context, it is worth noting that for the first time in their history the Métis produce their own maps — their own representation of space — on a regular basis. I will also examine the influence of this sense of territory on Métis self-definition. Finally, this leads me to suggest that questions bearing on Métis territory are central to defining Prairie Métis ethnicity.

Most of the maps I have selected here are found in books and on the web.³ They are broadly accessible to all, including Métis people. This is crucial since my analyses assume the importance of maps in the territorial and identity process experienced by contemporary Prairie Métis. As usual, I made sure my map selection is representative of the cartographic material I found. To date, Métis map production is relatively modest, although it is possible there are many other Métis maps of which I am not aware. The parts of my analysis that relate to the political and economic dimension of Métis ethnicity have been heavily influenced by Joseph Sawchuk's work. Since the mid-1970s, this University of Brandon ethnology professor has focused his fieldwork on Métis communities, and has worked for Métis organisations, notably in Manitoba and Alberta. This chapter also attempts to represent Métis' perspectives on their territoriality. In addition to maps, I refer to my informal discussions with Prairie Métis, Aboriginal newspapers, official publications, and web sites. I limited myself to official web sites. Some are virtual storefronts for Métis provincial and national organisations, while others have an educational and cultural focus and are broadly accepted sources of information on Métis matters. Although it would be worth exploring the profusion of personal web pages, this was beyond the scope of my thesis. My premise is that Métis institutions are generally representative of the opinions of individuals.

³ Most of the books were published by Métis companies and political or cultural organisations: the Manitoba Métis Federation Press, *les Éditions Bois-Brûlés*, the Métis Association of Alberta, and the Gabriel Dumont Institute. Other books were written by authors who have closely worked with or within Métis organisations. Some of these authors are Métis themselves — like Clem Chartier (1988) — while others are “outsiders” like Joseph Sawchuk (1978).

5.1 From exclusion to (re)emergence: the Métis provincial reality.

In the late 1960s, the provincial level became central for the Métis (as for other Aboriginal peoples). This change was instigated by the Federal government recognition of the poor socio-economic conditions within which both Métis and NSI lived. As I have shown in the previous chapter, years of marginalisation left the Métis with insufficient resources to survive. As a solution, the government decided to fund Métis and NSI provincial organisations and to launch a series of programs (in housing, employment, and education) to be administered by these organisations. As both Métis and NSI had a similar experience of social, economic and geographical exclusion, they often grouped themselves in the same organisations, regardless of their distinct identity and history (Chartier, 1994, p. 200). The Federal government supported these groupings.⁴ From the government's perspective, the objective of provincial and regional organisations was not to promote culture and identity, but rather to reduce their members' economic predicaments. The affiliation of two distinct socio-cultural experiences was not thought to prevent these organisations from working properly to achieve this end.

This is not to say that the Métis had no previous sense of a provincial reality. In fact, as has been shown in chapter 4, they had created provincial organisations through much of the 20th century. However, these organisations did not always represent all the Métis of a province — the *Métis Association of Alberta* (MAA), for example, originally represented only the Métis living in the Métis settlements. In order to profit from the government core funds, the MAA had first to make sure it was serving all the Métis in the province (Sawchuk, 1995, p. 79; Sawchuk, 1998, p. 60-61).

5.1.1 Preeminence over land: new Métis materiality.

Since the poor socio-economic conditions of the Métis were the primary rationale for funding political organisations, it is not surprising to note the place occupied by the material dimension in the Métis sense of identity and territory. Suffice it to look at the Métis provincial organisations' web sites to understand that the emphasis is on the development of prosperity and

economic self-sufficiency; improvements in the Métis economy, housing and education are important goals for these organisations (Government of Alberta, n.d.; Manitoba Metis Federation, January 16, 2003).

These improvements are not directly exhibited on Métis maps. I am not aware of any thematic map, for example, that shows the (positive) evolution of any Métis socio-economic variable such as income. However, Métis materiality remains a key element on maps and in the provincial conception of a Métis sense of territory. In fact, the real material presence of the Métis in space is undoubtedly exaggerated on these maps — in presenting the Métis as an inescapable reality, one could hardly presume that the Métis are still a marginal people. The first cartographic emphasis is demographic. In spite of their relative importance compared to their eastern counterparts, the Prairie Métis still represent a fairly small percent of the total population in each of their respective provinces. Yet, maps present the opposite perspective. The use of filled black dots to represent Métis local chapters on the provincial organisations maps (Figure 5.1, 5.2, & 5.3) in the Regina Gabriel Dumont Institute's (GDI) *Canadian Atlas of Aboriginal Settlement* is an example. These dots, along with the numbers that refer the reader to the legend of locals' names, make Métis locals a striking reality on the map and exaggerate the demographic reality of the Métis. The fact that neither "white" nor Indian settlements are represented adds to this magnified demographic density.

These three maps present another cartographic emphasis, which is shaped by regional divisions. These divisions create the impression that the Métis have an efficient and indubitable control over the land and its resources, and in so doing, they suggest a certain level of Métis independence. The straight-line pattern of these divisions has the effect of rationalising the Métis organisation of land and of accentuating the image of Métis control over land and natural resources; in fact, natural features, such as hills and rivers, do not seem to have much to do with dividing and managing Métis space, but for a few boundaries — those of the Manitoba "Interlake" and "Southeast" regions for example. The names of the regions, which are the most dominant elements of the maps, amplify this impression of control. All of this hides the fact that the contemporary Métis material reality is highly dependent on government funds (Sawchuck, 1998, p. 73).

⁴ Actually, the Federal government has sometimes imposed such groupings. It required, for example, that the Native

This raises the issue of whether it was the mapmakers' intention to emphasise the Métis material reality. At first glance it would not seem so. There is no indication that the GDI intended to accentuate the Métis material reality or control over the land. The principal function of GDI's maps is informative; these maps simply picture the structure of Métis provincial organisations. This specific function explains, to a great extent, the relatively simple style of these maps. Details of human (roads, power lines, Indian reserves, or Métis fishing sites) and physical features (vegetation and topography) do not appear on these maps for they would be irrelevant information. They are primarily the reflections of their authors' concerns to represent the Métis locals and the regional divisions that compose the provincial Métis political organisations.

But whatever the intentions behind the production of these maps, one fact remains, Métis reality is depicted as a preeminent element — the Métis are no longer constrained, at least cartographically, to the wrong side of the road or considered squatters on crown land.⁵ These maps offer an image that has the potential to influence the Métis perception of land. Although I have no information proving that Métis people are aware of the GDI's atlas and have any special interest in it,⁶ there are indirect indicators that suggest this. First, the atlas is made available to Métis. Cheap and widely distributed, GDI's atlas is easy to find.⁷ One of the GDI's specific missions is to offer educational programs to Métis and access to its library and material. Second, the atlas is also one element in the GDI's fundamental mission — to promote Métis culture, and to develop and distribute education material — and is considered as a teaching resource in grade school by the Saskatchewan Teacher's Federation (May 6, 2004). It receives public recognition. Apparently, the GDI's atlas is known to the Métis and has some credibility with them. In this sense, one may argue that these maps have the potential to influence the way Métis perceive their material reality as a people. I will return to this below.

Council of Canada represented both Métis and NSI in order to be funded (Sawchuk, 1985, p. 140).

⁵ One has to keep in mind, as Dennis Cosgrove points out, that "like any text or image, once completed and produced, [a map] escapes the context of its production, and enters into new circuits of culture" (1999, p. 14).

⁶ It may be interesting to further investigate this question in the future and to: 1) evaluate Métis awareness about maps; 2) identify Métis' own interpretation of maps; and 3) measure the importance of these maps for the way the Métis conceive of their territoriality.

⁷ The atlas is now available online at www.metismuseum.com/media/document.php/03147.pdf. One can also find hard copies of it in the public library of each of the most important cities of the Prairie provinces: Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg.

5.1.2 Spatial hierarchy of Métis organisations: political integration?

Control over land (real or impressionistic) is a mark of political power. While Métis power mostly remains in the hands of local communities (Lavallée, 1988, p. 151-163; Sawchuk, 1978), the means for action (money, organisation, communication, *etc.*) are concentrated at the provincial level, which becomes a natural site of “shared institutions,” common identity and collective action (Spickard & Burroughs, 2000, p. 10). In other words, provincial organisations extend and connect the existing social networks at the local and family level that had survived marginalisation and discrimination during most of the 20th century (Lavallée, 1988, p. 164-165; Sawchuk & Gray, 1980, p. 277). Their influence is also due to their success in launching and operating programs that have improved Métis materiality. Joseph Sawchuk shows how successful results help build members’ trust in their association (1978, p. 74).

The political importance of the province finds its way onto maps through the establishment of a spatial hierarchy dominated by the province. The three maps of the Prairie Métis organisations in *The Canadian Atlas of Aboriginal Settlement* are good examples of this hierarchy. If the locals are represented by dots and numbers, they appear, however, subordinated to the regional level, which is divided in many parts by clear boundaries. The regions are directly identified on the maps (not referenced to the legend by numbers) by their names with a bigger font than that used for the locals’ reference numbers. The titles of these maps confirm that the provincial level culminates this hierarchy: *Métis Nation of Alberta*, *Métis Nation of Saskatchewan*, and *Manitoba Métis Federation*. On a map (Figure 5.4) in Sawchuk’s *The Métis in Manitoba* (1978, p. 59), the locals are not even represented, simplifying the cartographic representation, while keeping intact the regional-provincial hierarchical pattern.⁸

Such a spatial hierarchy appears as a normal consequence of the mapmaker’s intentions, which were to represent the provincial structures of Métis political organisations. This is very much the case for Sawchuk’s map (1978), for the Brandon University ethnologist uses the Manitoba Métis Federation’s (MMF) actions and realisations to show the importance of the political dimension of ethnicity. These maps are reflections of how central the provincial level

⁸ One can find other cartographic examples of this spatial hierarchy in MMF (1972, p. 62), Chartier (1988, p. 106), and Beharry (1984).

has become for Métis politics. The fact that these maps represent a substantial part of the Métis cartographic production adds to their significance.⁹

This hierarchy also reveals the Métis dependence on Canadian territorial structures (Morrison, 1995, p. 115). Maps echo a reality of which the Métis are well aware. As the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MNS) puts it: "The Historic Métis Nation Homeland today is dissected by other borders, in our case the province of Saskatchewan. The Métis within this provincial boundary while recognizing the Nation as a whole, also has a regional/provincial reality" (March 3, 2004d). This view is shared by Sawchuk who points out that Native organisations really do not have the choice of whether to abide or not in Canadian territorial and social structures for they are dependent on government funding (1998, p. 43). This is a power situation that sometimes plays against Aboriginal organisations, which consistently face threats of funding cuts from federal and provincial governments (*idem*, p. 73).

Is such conformity to Canadian territorial structures a sign that the Métis and other Aboriginal peoples are assimilating into Canadian political culture? Paradoxically, marginalisation and the socio-spatial boundaries it created have prevented the Métis from completely assimilating in the 20th century. Perhaps the thinning of such boundaries today may entail the disappearance of Métis distinctiveness. For the sociologist Milton Yinger, political integration is only one of four distinct, if complementary, components of assimilation: integration, a structural assimilation that allows shared interactions; acculturation, which supposes the cultural convergence of two or more symbolic systems; identification, which is the psychological dimension; and, amalgamation, the biological dimension (1994). On the one hand, while it would be premature to consider that Métis are already culturally assimilated, it cannot be said that they are immune to Canadian cultural influence. In fact, integration may presage Aboriginal peoples institutionalisation of the dominant society's socio-cultural, legal and territorial categories and affect their identity (Sawchuk, 1992, p. 3). Hence, integration may be a first step towards assimilation, and the map may be its mental catalyst. On the other hand, integration does not necessarily lead to this end, and may also be a more or less conscious tactic for preserving distinctiveness. In this vein, Sawchuk points out that in spite of their dependence on funding, the Métis are not inexorably tied to their "providers'" political interest (1995, p. 85).

⁹ Nearly one fourth of the maps I found for this chapter (about 30) are representations of the provincial

Their organisations have their own political agendas. The ethnologist identifies Métis self-definition as a fundamental element of this agenda, exercising a certain control over the “identification” element of Yinger’s assimilation model (Sawchuk, 1998, p. 117-118). Similarly, as I will argue below, maps may also convey a distinctive territorial agenda.

5.1.3 Pride, mobilisation and socio-spatial cohesion: redefining identity boundaries.

Métis maps are not only graphic expressions of a sense of territory, but sometimes appear to influence Métis self-image. A first example relates to the revival of Métis pride. Closely tied to the contemporary feeling of pride is the fact that the Métis have now the political means to overcome their self-image as marginal elements of Canadian society. Likewise, maps may be seen as cartographical erasures of Métis spatial and social marginalisation. Not only are the Métis back “on the map,” but they are also portrayed — in fact, the Métis portray themselves — as a people responsible for their own wealth. The broad distribution of these maps (through publications and web sites) makes them common representations that have the potential to affect both individual and collective mental images of land and identity.

With the return of collective pride, cohesiveness is less a matter of “shared” exclusion and marginalisation, but is rather a matter of choice. The choice is rendered easier if the political structure on which social interactions have relied provides a basis for collective pride and confidence in the future. Provincial organisations profit from their success in improving the material existence of their members, which in turn encourages mobilisation and a sense of belonging. The MMF even allowed NSI, who would have not identified as Métis decades ago, to consider themselves as such and to make theirs the Métis history of the region (Sawchuk, 1978, p. x & 34). Although the “Métis” label did not guarantee a status or recognition of any sort before the entrenchment of the Métis as Aboriginal people into the Constitution in 1982, it did recall the 19th century Métis history and the unique Métis contribution to the Northwest and Canadian society, both of which are matter of pride (Waldram, 1992, p. 16). As a group, NSI were missing such a collective heritage; in becoming “Métis,” they gained one. Accordingly, Métis self-definition tended to be inclusive. In the 1970s, for example, the Métis Association of

Alberta (MAA, now the Métis Nation of Alberta) defined a Métis as “any person of mixed Indian and Non-Indian blood” (Sawchuk, 2001).

Maps may have something to do with the emergence of contemporary Métis cohesiveness, although this might have not been the mapmaker’s intentions. The cartographic spatial hierarchy that I noted above on the maps of Métis political organisations (Figure 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, & 3.4) is a good example. In establishing “order” in the Métis political landscape, these maps and their regional limits rationalise space in such a way that it appears homogeneous. Local differences are diminished if not silent. The only difference that persists is in the number of locals per regions, a reflection of variations in demographic patterns. But these visual concentrations reveal nothing about the regional distinctions in political will that members may have developed in their specific communities. As the function of these maps is to give prominence to the political dimension of the Métis reality, this silence about identity diversity appears to be more significant than, say, the lack of topographical features. Maps indirectly suggest that Métis interests, needs and ambitions are the same across provincial space. If both NSI and Métis first regrouped into the same organisations with their respective socio-cultural characteristics, maps present them alike; they are all “members” no matter what their ethnic origin. In fact, the “Northern Métis”¹⁰ in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta may have much more affinities with each other than with the southern Métis of their respective provinces:

The northern and southern areas provide interesting contrasts in a study of Métis history and identity, in addition to shedding light on the knowledge and recollections held by the Metis of their history of Alberta. The oral tradition and Cree identity is still very strong in the north, while we found that in the south the Metis ties have been replaced by an affinity for non-native traditions (Sawchuk & Sawchuk, 1980, p. xx).

This effort of ethnic rationalisation indirectly mirrors the inclusiveness that marks Prairie Métis self-definition. It could also be argued that maps accentuate Métis perception of ethnic homogeneity and reinforce the inclusive nature of self-definition, although this would be difficult to prove. Maps and the mental images they convey may be only elements of a complex process of socio-cultural cohesiveness. Whether maps mirror or shape the way Métis define themselves as a people, they could be substantial parts of the cohesive forces that animate contemporary Métis identity.

5.2 From (re)emergence to consolidation: the Métis land base.

Paralleling the emergence of the province in Métis organisation and consciousness has been the revival of the Métis land question. While this question was never completely abandoned, the political tools the Métis were given in the late 1960s opened new possibilities for launching land claims and negotiating Métis title.¹¹ The Federal government's decision to fund Aboriginal land claim research projects in the 1970s greatly influenced Prairie Métis claims in this regard. Land claim questions culminated in the 1980s and early 1990s with the negotiation of the Alberta Métis Settlement legislation in 1990 (Bell, 1994), and the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Métis' decision to bring their claims to court in 1981 and 1994. Today, while the material condition of the Métis remains an important element (the official one when applying for funding), questions bearing on land claims dominate the Métis political scene.

The Métis land claim dynamic is two-fold. First, Métis land issues reveal a strong provincial dynamic. Each Métis organisation has its own case in hand and seeks to serve the specific interests of its members — which tends to confirm the Métis structural dependence on the Canadian legal, political and geographic order. However, the Métis also define their relation to space at another scale, that of the *Métis Nation*, which overlaps provincial geographies. In so doing, the Métis promote the existence of their *homeland*.

In addition to these land claims are other court cases involving Métis Aboriginal rights to use land for traditional purposes, such as hunting and fishing. These rights presuppose the use and occupation of a traditional territory (Teillet, 2003, p. 15). Although the courts have provided Aboriginal peoples with lawful means since the 1960s (*idem*, p. 11), Aboriginal rights became central legal-political issues only after their official recognition in the 1982 Constitutional Act. The Constitution does not define new Aboriginal rights.¹² It only recognises existing rights and protects them from extinguishment by federal or provincial legislation. In her annual summary report, the Métis lawyer Jean Teillet (2003) points out several Prairie cases that involved s. 35 and

¹⁰ "Northern Métis" generally identify more closely to their Indian ancestry than to Red River Métis (Sawchuk, 1978, p. 7).

¹¹ "Renegotiating" would certainly be a better term for the Manitoba Act of 1870 comprised, to a large measure, the issue of Métis land.

ruled in favour of the Métis: *McPherson & Christie* in northern Manitoba; *Morin & Daigneault* in northern Saskatchewan.¹³ Even though it is outside the Prairie provinces, the Powley's case (Sault-Sainte-Marie, Ontario) is the first judgement heard before and ruled by the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) in favour of the Métis. The SCC established the Powley's test as a basis for ruling on Métis rights all across the country.¹⁴

5.2.1 Material accentuations: mental conceptualisation.

The material dimension of the Métis land question is what makes it a concrete reality on which the future of a people can be built. This is the pragmatic spirit that lay behind the land legislation in Alberta in 1990. To date, the Métis of "Wild Rose Country" are the only ones in Canada to have an official land base. However, the Métis of all provinces have, at one time or another, claimed the existence of their title to the land. Variety is what best describes these land claims for they all rely on specific legal grounds,¹⁵ historical arguments, and geographical extents. In all cases, however, self-sufficiency is the primary reason for claiming land.

Another element common to all Prairie Métis is the importance of the land-base dynamic in their mapping. Almost all contemporary Métis maps treat the historical and/or contemporary land question.¹⁶ Maps generally accentuate the visual effect of the land base. A good example of this is the Alberta Métis Settlements map (Figure 5.5). The eight settlements are identified by

¹² "Indians," "Inuit" and "Métis"—and those other peoples not enumerated in s. 35 but who might be included—were "Aboriginal" before official recognition. The term "Aboriginal," however, was not steadily used before then.

¹³ Métis rights in the southern parts of these two provinces are not considered proven. *Blais'* case is an example (Teillet, 2003, p. 24). This case was heard before the SCC in March 2003 at the same time as Powley's. Blais' rights were denied by the SCC. However, Blais did not claim his rights under s. 35 as did Powley, but under the 1930 *Manitoba Natural Resources Act* (Supreme Court of Canada, March 1, 2004a).

¹⁴ The SCC's judges established two important points in this case: 1) they accepted self-definition as a main criterion in defining who is Métis, although they used belonging to a historic community as a means to bound such a definition; and 2) they confirmed that Métis rights do not have to be proved to have existed prior to contact, but rather before effective colonial control over land was established (Supreme Court of Canada, March 1, 2004b).

¹⁵ While the Manitoba Métis' case is based on the Manitoba Act of 1870, the Saskatchewan Métis' action is grounded on the Dominion Lands Act (Chartier, 1994, p. 210).

¹⁶ I must admit that this predominance is not surprising. It is common for a collectivity thinking of itself as a "nation" to fight for land and, consequently, the Métis are not the only Aboriginal people to focus their mapping process on land issues. There would be no Aboriginal self-governance without first securing a resource base. In another vein, to my knowledge, there is no Métis map that describes in detail the different traditional and/or contemporary Métis land uses; none identifies, for example, the hunting, trapping or fishing sites that are traditionnally Métis. Yet it is not rare to see Native peoples present this kind of map as a piece of evidence before

striking colors (one color for each), and the numbers used to identify them are also dominant on the map and relegate the Métis Nation of Alberta Association's regional zones to a second level. But the emphasis is also situational. Comparing the representation of the Indian reserves on this map with the Métis settlements, one is left with the impression that the Métis were offered larger land resources than most Indian bands. The map makes it easier to ignore the fact that Métis control over the settlements land is limited. While the Métis use of timber is partial, water, roads and subsurface resources are strictly under provincial jurisdiction (Bell, 1994, p. 25-44).¹⁷

The place names on *Carte de l'Ouest au temps de Louis Goulet* (Figure 5.6) — the map made by the *Franco-manitobain* artist Réal Bérard¹⁸ to accompany Louis Goulet's narrative (analysed in chapter 3) — have a similar effect. They present Métis reality (as did the old Goulet himself in his account) as dominant, supplanting both whites and Indians in the foreground of the Western Canadian landscape. Although the primary function of this map is to illustrate Goulet's narrative, one must keep in mind the specific context within which the map and narrative were published, in the mid-1970s. The Métis were then particularly active in advancing their own vision of Métis history. The Manitoba Métis Federation Press and *les Éditions Bois-Brûlés* (Louis Goulet's narrative publisher) were both founded for this purpose. The editor of *L'espace de Louis Goulet* — made from Guillaume Charette's interview notes — the Métis Émile Pelletier was also involved in many similar projects, including his *Social History of the Manitoba Métis* (1977). One may consider that this map was also meant to illustrate "une époque importante de la vie d'une nation" (Pelletier, 1976, p. 9), a specific vision of the Métis past.

Maps of the Alberta Métis' "isolated northern settlements" (a series of 7 maps inserted into the report of the Alberta Métis land claim project published in 1980) display the Métis land base at a much larger scale, the community (Figure 5.7 & 5.8). This has the advantage of presenting a more detailed view of Métis households location. Yet these maps display the

court as did the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Nations in 1997 in what is known as *Delgamuukw v. The Queen* (Sparke, 1998).

¹⁷ This is a reality that the Métis work in changing: "[In fall 1992], the settlements inked a deal with the province that allows them to control development on Metis lands. While the province retains ownership of the resources, communities control access to their lands. Companies wanting to develop in settlement areas must negotiate agreements with the communities that can include extra royalties, training and hiring clauses as well as environmental protection and conservation agreements." (The Windspeaker, 1993, p. 8).

¹⁸ Bérard also drew a series of maps of Manitoba canoe routes while working for the provincial government. These maps contain pictures and descriptions of historic nature. *Rivière aux Rats Canoe Route* is particularly rich in

distinct communities in a standardised way and create a relatively homogeneous representation of them. More interesting is the mention of individual names that situate Métis households in space. An overview of the surnames reveals that their diversity is relatively limited, and that many of them recur: Trindels, Andersons, Cardinals, Laboucans, Sinclairs, Houles, Letendres, and Augers are found in two or more communities. This corresponds to the observation that many families are spread out in different settlements and that intermarriage is common among communities (Sawchuk & Gray, 1980, p. 277). These communities are closely related and form together a much bigger spatial reality that the maps were not intended to show.

However, the principal outcome of maps is to conceptualise and intellectualise the Métis land base. I am not suggesting that the Métis land base is a mental construct with no intrinsic historical and material reality, but I am saying that maps create a cohesive mental image that is the sum of individual experiences of space. It is unlikely that an individual has a personal *vécu* of the entire land at stake. Neither does any Canadian have a total experience of the country, nor of a province, not even of a city. Canadians owe their sense of territory to the intermediate role played by their institutions (particularly those bearing on land management and education) as in any nation-state type of collective identity. Métis organisations perform a similar intermediate function, in spite of the relatively limited control they have over the land they claim. The old social networks — local and familial — are also relevant Métis “institutions,” as confirmed by Sawchuk and Gray’s study of the “isolated northern communities” (1980). Métis maps play a unique role in fixing the mental limits of their collective sense of space. If individuals do not need maps to make sense of the limits of their personal relation to space, maps are tools that give the collective sum of spatial experiences a concrete shape or mental image. The map of the “Métis Nation Homeland,” as its name indicates, is a good example (Figure 5.9) for it provides a clear and well defined image of what this collective homeland is. As I will argue later, this specific shape may also affect the political and symbolic ways in which the Métis perceive their spatial reality.

Yet, this shape or image of the Métis homeland is at odds with the material influence the Métis have over this land. In addition to the relatively limited control they have today, their land claims are much more modest than the representation of the homeland suggests. The Manitoba

historic information regarding the Métis. *Le Centre du patrimoine*, in Winnipeg (Saint-Boniface), holds this

Métis do not claim a land that encompasses the whole province, but only a limited portion of it, that is Winnipeg and its vicinity. Considering the land at stake, it is not surprising that they do not even claim the land itself, but rather expect a monetary compensation that is worth billions.¹⁹ The Saskatchewan Métis have faced similar difficulties when launching their court case and limiting the land to be claimed to northern Saskatchewan: "This decision was based on a number of factors including a smaller geographic area, scrip distributed most recently (1906), less research required, thereby costing less and finally, that land was not available in northern Saskatchewan at that time [for Euro-Canadian settlers], as the area was not surveyed" (Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, March 3, 2004c).

5.2.2 Self-(re)integration: delineating political reach.

The achievement of self-determination and self-government is clearly one of the goals of Métis organisations, especially since the mid-1980s when it was a focus of the constitutional conferences that followed the repatriation of the Constitution in 1982. For the Prairie Métis, self-determination would remain wishful thinking without a land base (Chartier, 1994, p. 207). The Alberta Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC), for example, emphasises the importance of its authority and ability to enact laws concerning membership and land matters such as hunting, fishing, trapping and land dealings (March 25, 2004). Self-governance may sometimes take the form of co-management (Métis and non-Métis altogether) of natural resources such as game (Chartand, November 2003). From a Métis perspective, self-governance and land title are the logical consequences of their Aboriginal rights.

Land claims show, however, how dependent the Métis are on the Canadian legal and territorial structure. As the land claims projects are generally contingent upon funding, governments dictate the limits of the research to be undertaken, and affect their possible findings.²⁰ The map of *Selkirk's Grant and Successive Increases in the Area of Manitoba* is a good example (Figure 5.10). This map was drawn by Réal Bérard — who also drew the map of

collection.

¹⁹ Indeed, a lot can be done with such a sum to insure the material presence of the Métis on the provincial land.

²⁰ Referring to his experience in working for the Métis Association of Alberta's Land Claims Research Department in the late 1970s, Joseph Sawchuk gives a few reasons for the restrictions imposed by governments: the problems of

Louis Goulet's space — and is in a book by the Manitoban Métis Bruce Sealey (1975a) and published by the MMF after the results of a study on Manitoba Métis land rights. The map depicts the evolution of Manitoba's provincial boundaries, and implies that it was at the expense of the Métis territoriality, as the text itself argues. What is worth noting here is that the Métis argument is based less on Métis traditional/historical land uses — the reasons Métis land title was recognised under the Manitoba Act of 1870 — than on how the Métis have been dispossessed by the imposition of Canadian territorial structures. As I showed in chapter 3, Red River Métis territoriality extended well beyond what is today Manitoba. Yet, the MMF territorial arguments seem to be restricted to the limits of contemporary Manitoba and show how Métis reasoning is affected by Canadian society. Most of the other maps presented in this study are either made under the same model or are facsimiles of colonial maps (*idem*, p. 51, 64, 65, & 80). One of these colonial maps projects a traditional Métis land use by representing river lots in the Red River settlement. But again, this is a limited representation of Prairie Métis historical land use.

But mapping of the Métis land base or homeland is not entirely dependent on Canadian legal and territorial structures. The map of the "Métis Nation Homeland" (Figure 5.9) is indisputably the best illustration. The Métis homeland is represented in a way that respects neither provincial nor international boundaries. These boundary overlappings give the impression that official territorial structure is inconsequential when it comes to Métis territorial perception, which is confirmed by the map provider, the MNS (March 3, 2004h). The map that serves as cover page for *The Canadian Atlas of Aboriginal Settlement* (Figure 5.11) presents a similar image. While the international border is respected, the boundaries that separate the Prairie provinces are "trespassed" by the Métis sense of territory. Covering the entire space of the three provinces, and in so doing fading their administrative boundaries, is a Red River cart, symbol of Métis territoriality. I will come back to the symbolic dimension of this cart later, but for now I note that it represents a clear political statement that Métis dependence on Canadian structure is only superficial, instrumental, and transitory — a means of insuring the passage from a past Métis territoriality to a future one. As a political statement, the map of the Matrix project (Figure 5.12),²¹ the purpose of which is to bring evidence regarding the Canadian denial of Saskatchewan Métis land title and to support Métis land claim before the Court of Queen's

jurisdiction between the Federal Government and the province of Alberta; the fear that the Association would take advantage of the research for recruiting and "indoctrinating" new members, *etc.*

Bench (School of Native Studies, August 1, 2002), imposes itself in a very different way.²² The map makes the point that Métis rights to land have never been extinguished — not inside the claim region. It shows how late and superficial the work of scrip commissioners had been in the claim region as compared to the southern part of the province. The boundaries of Indian treaties support this “visual” argument. As the Métis land claim overlaps the territories of three different treaties, it shows that the Métis form a territorial entity distinct from Indians. At first glance, it would not appear that the Matrix map challenges the official territorial structure, as the claim region is well integrated into the province. The limits of the claim are contained inside the province and even follow, along its western margin, the 110th meridian, the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. However, it certainly does challenge the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly’s jurisdiction over a territory that represents nearly one third of the province. The grey-shade filling used to identify the claim region makes it more dominant (it contrasts with the white) and certainly makes it harder for provincial authorities to ignore. All of these cartographic examples show that Métis maps convey a distinct vision of “national” territory, which is often miles away from that imposed by Canadian legal and territorial structures.

Lastly, as land issues prove important for Métis politics, they become means of political mobilisation. Maps are instrumental in this process. As I noted above, maps “collectivise” individual spatial *vécus*; in so doing they provide a concrete form to what Métis leaders are claiming on behalf of those they represent, and they give the national territory its specific shape, its unique “signature” or “personality.” It is easier to mobilise for tangible goals. Without suggesting that maps are land propaganda (although they certainly can be), they do provide the Métis with a knowledge that assists them in choosing whether to support the political and territorial discourses of their political elite. Put differently, maps have become major tools for Aboriginal organisations and leaders to communicate their conception of land to Canadians and, not least, to their own communities. Actually, the land claim process itself has a good deal to do with Métis self-awareness. It can be seen as a way for Métis leaders to educate their people about Métis rights and history, and to generate popular interest in promoting them. This is a point I will discuss in chapter 6. For now, I note the importance of maps in the legal process as in the rise of Métis awareness and mobilisation.

²¹ I am grateful to Dr. Frank Tough and the *Metis Aboriginal Title Research Initiative* (MatriX) for providing me this copy of the map.

5.2.3 The historic Métis Nation homeland: mapping Métis geosymbols.

Today, Métis territoriality is largely built on symbols that relate to their 19th century reality: the Red River cart, the buffalo hunt, the flag and its infinity sign (∞), Louis Riel, and as the epigraph reveals, the sash. Suffice it to look at the home pages of Métis political and cultural web sites to see how central these symbols are. In the MNS web site home page alone, one observes one icon of “Louis Riel,” two images of the sash, three buffalos, and no fewer than 14 infinity signs (March 3, 2004b).

All these symbols reveal the importance of traditions for contemporary Métis and explain why those who maintain Métis memory, the elders, are given a central place in Métis institutions and social life. The Métis regularly hold elders’ conferences in order “to rebuild the basic structures of their Nation” (Shore & Barkwell, 1997, p. 1) as they did in Manitoba in 1991 and in the Alberta settlements in September 2003 (MSGC, September 10, 2003), or refer to their elders to shed light upon the socio-cultural, political and legal issues encountered by Métis society (Chartrand, 2003c, p. 12). In addition to their contribution in preserving and promoting Métis culture and heritage (Chartrand, 2003a, p. 16; Oelke, November 9, 2001), elders also have a large role to play in governance — notably in the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan where the Senate has a “quasi-judicial authority” (MNS, March 3, 2004f) —, and full responsibility for establishing a registry of Métis based on oral traditions, genealogies and family histories. All of these functions play a significant role in Métis reclamation of rights (MNS, March 3, 2004a). In this the Métis are not very different from almost all Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Métis symbols are not only recollections of the past, but also are re-actualised versions of it that help make sense of the present and pave the way for the future. In so doing they serve to revitalise Métis identity and group consciousness (MNS, March 3, 2004g; Leclair, 2002). *Michif*, a critically endangered language (RCAP, 1996), does this (Lavallée, 1988, p. 170). As Bruce Flamont puts it: “Michif identifies you and allows you to identify yourself. Michif demands that you think, feel and thus react in a Michif way. Michif allows for a psychological independence. Michif is the language the Creator gave us as a People” (August 13, 2003). To preserve Michif is

²² A more simple copy of the map may be found in the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan web site at

to promote a specific Métis heritage on which to build (Hodgson-Smith, August 13, 2003). The Métis give themselves the means to achieve this: they create committees to develop ways of preserving the Michif language (*idem*), and hold an annual conference to deal with this issue.²³ They offer practical lessons,²⁴ publish dictionaries and kids books,²⁵ and post advertisements — as does the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) — to find and connect Michif speakers. Michif itself has become an emblem of mobilisation. The sash also re-actualises the past for present and future purposes. As the material purposes of the sash no longer exist, the Métis have put in place a new array of significations. For example, “the Manitoba Metis Senate started a tradition of draping the sash over the table wherever Metis people are gathered for discussion” (Métis Resource Centre, May 4, 2002).

Maps reveal another important symbol of Métis identity, the historic Métis territory. Reference to Métis history and territory is observed through Métis historical land use maps. These maps can be sorted in two categories: 1) maps that have a historical purpose and depict past realities or past land use; and 2) maps that focus on the contemporary land as legitimised by historical land use. The *Métis Wintering Villages* map (Figure 5.13) of the Métis Association of Alberta belongs to the former set of maps. It presents Métis occupation of the southern parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan as it was in the late 19th century. The material importance of the wintering sites is strongly suggested by very obvious black dots and by the numbers that refer to the names of these sites: Rivière la Biche, Prairie Ronde, Laboucan, Coulée-Chappelle, Rivière Blanche, *etc.* The importance of these sites is also indirectly emphasised by the use of a comparatively less salient symbol — a plain white square — to identify other settlements, which are dominantly Euro-Canadian: the fur trade posts (e.g. Fort Qu’appelle, Fort Carlton and Fort Edmonton), the North West Mounted Police posts (Calgary, Fort Macloed, Fort Walsh...), and some Métis missions such as Prince Albert, Victoria, *Saint-Albert* and *Lac Saint-Anne*. The very limited representation of physical features also accentuates the visibility of the Métis wintering villages. Most important is the representation of provincial and international boundaries, which

<<http://www.metisnation-sask.com/rights/land.html>>.

²³ The last one, the third, was held in Richmond, BC, March 5-7, 2004, and focused on the development and revival of Michif.

²⁴ The best example is the *Métis Resource Centre inc.*, a non-profit organisation located in Winnipeg and founded in 1996 for the preservation of Métis history and culture (<http://www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca/>), which offers courses for beginners.

²⁵ See Normand Fleury’s *La Lawng: Michif Peekishkwewin — The Canadian Michif Language Dictionary* (2000), and The MMF (Pemmican Publications) has published kid books (*Le Métis*, 2003, http://www.mmf.mb.ca/lemetis/issues/2003/may2003_1.pdf).

are obviously proposed here as contemporary references. Their presence on the map only serves to show their irrelevance to the historical Métis use of the land.

Réal Bérard's map of Louis Goulet's space is another historical example of the Métis sense of space (Figure 5.6). Dominant on this map are the Métis place names used by Louis Goulet and his fellows in the 19th century. As I argued in chapter 3, toponyms are significant symbolic elements for they provide ethnic groups with the means to distinguish themselves in space (Akin, 1999, p. 34; Guillorel, 1999, p. 64). These names express the extent and deepness of Métis experience of the *Nord-Ouest*. They are the expressions of both Métis traditional ecological knowledge and oral tradition. More importantly here, place names expose the Métis antedance on the land and recall a time when Métis territory was barely defined, if at all, by colonial boundaries. Despite the presence on this map of the "49th parallel," which is drawn by a slight dashed line, Métis place names appear on either side of the border. This contemporary recollection of past names adds another symbolic dimension to the map and to the Métis sense of territory, and shows how "*...les toponymes peuvent être mobilisés pour prouver une thèse relative à des problèmes d'antériorité et de légitimité sur un territoire*" (Guillorel, 1999, p. 84).²⁶

"The Métis Homeland" map (Figure 5.9) participates in the second set of maps, those that represent contemporary Métis land as defined by historical use. In this case, reference to the past is not manifest, but is made known by the provider of the map, the MNS, which informs us that "the homeland of the Métis Nation is defined by community and traditional land use boundaries" (March 3, 2004h). This map is the symbolic connection between past Métis territorialities — especially that of the 19th century (chapter 3) — and contemporary land claims. The symbolism of the Red River cart on the cover map of the GDI's atlas is even more obvious (Figure 5.11). The cart brings us back to a time that preceded the expansion of colonisation and railways when Métis geography was preeminent. It also is a reminder of Métis mobility as a dominant socio-cultural element of their geographical knowledge and land use. The icon does not refer only to the past. It also recontextualises the historical nature of the Métis homeland and expresses the

²⁶ Goulet's maps is rather an exception for I have found no other map emphasising the contemporary Prairie Métis reappropriation of the place names. A modest effort was made by the Métis Association of Alberta's map of winterings sites, but everything considered, beside the location of the sites themselves, the map reveals no other Métis toponyms. In a different vein, the reader will find other cartographic examples of contemporary maps revealing historic Métis territory in the *Canadian Atlas of Aboriginal Settlement* (1994) in p. 8, 9, & 12.

contemporary Métis perspective about the past. The cart remains a vehicle of the Métis sense of territory.

5.2.4 In-between spaces of Métis distinctiveness: supremacy of territorial discourses.

The Métis cart also reminds us of Charles Nolin's metaphor of the two cart wheels — which, as mentioned in chapter 3, symbolised Métis cultural duality — and indirectly outlines another important element of what makes the Métis a distinct Aboriginal people in Canada, *in-betweenness*.

Maps often display Métis geography as in-between space. As opposed to the first half of the 20th century, this spatial in-betweenness is no longer the result of the geographical exclusion of the Métis, but rather is a Métis expression of their own sense of territory. The Alberta Métis Settlements and the Matrix project's maps are cases in point (Figure 5.5 & 5.12). While these maps make clear that Métis space is neither Indian nor Canadian, they also necessitate the comparison of Métis reality with both Indian and non-Indian spaces. Because of the material dominance of non-Aboriginal Canadians, the distinction between Métis territorial markers and the rest of the province is inevitable. This is particularly noticeable on the Matrix map for it supports a land claim that challenges Canadian territorial organisation. While less obvious, the differentiation from Indian space is also apparent on these two maps. The presence of reserves on the Alberta Métis Settlements map shows how distinct Métis land is from Indian. On the Matrix map the Métis claim region overlaps the spaces of many different treaties, showing that Métis historical and contemporary territorial realities are different from those of the Indians.²⁷ Overall, these maps state that the Métis are an Aboriginal people, but distinct from Indians, and that they occupy a specific but intermediary space.

By exposing many of the 19th century Métis place names, the *Carte de l'Ouest au temps de Louis Goulet* (Figure 5.6) also expresses the historical Métis in-betweenness and identity mobility. The map juxtaposes toponyms from different origins. For example, Euro-Canadian

²⁷ On the other hand, in-betweenness is not really expressed at a larger scale. This map does not display a considerable number of Canadian and First Nations' landmarks such as roads, settlements and reserves. While these

names such as Saint-Norbert and Portage la Prairie coexist with toponyms of Native origin such as *la Rivière Gratias*. Moreover, as many of these place names have since been translated into English (Moose Jaw, Wood Mountain, Birdtail River, Duck Lake and so on), it also discloses a French-Métis subreality that official maps and toponymic gazetteers have long ignored, and indirectly suggests the intermediarity of *franco* and Métis realities.²⁸

5.2.5 Territory of the *Métis Nation*: social boundaries and exclusion.

Along with other socio-cultural characteristics, in-betweenness is significant to contemporary Métis sense of identity. The Métis are quite aware of what distinguishes them from Indian and non-Indian societies. The numerous cultural and educational Métis institutions — the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research (Regina), the Louis Riel Institute (Winnipeg), the Métis Resource Centre inc. (Winnipeg) and the Alberta Métis Historical Society (Edmonton) — are the best illustrations of Métis cultural and heritage awareness. Most of these institutions have created web sites to present the diversity and richness of Métis ways. The GDI offers the *Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture*,²⁹ which gives access to a huge collection of learning resources and archives (documents, photos, videos, *etc.*) produced by the Institute in the last 20 years. In addition to Michif language material, the Métis Resource Centre provides a genealogy service and a large quantity of historic and biographic information. Therefore, it is no coincidence that maps exhibit in-between space. It is part of Métis national identity strategy to emphasise their historic and contemporary cultural duality. The Alberta MSGC, for example, is active in developing a mixed economy that combines Métis traditional activities — farming, ranching, lumbering, hunting, fishing and trapping — and the imperatives (and advantages) of industrial and commercial enterprise (MSGC, March 5, 2004). Similarly, and as a Métis scholar puts it: “Our elders urge a balance between Aboriginal and Canadian education. To be balanced in education means to keep in mind that books ought not to be our only teachers” (Leclair, 2002).

“silent” elements accentuate Métis exclusiveness and presence in space, they diminish the cartographic expression of Métis in-betweenness.

²⁸ The English edition of Goulet’s narrative is not as rich in this matter, since many original French names were replaced by existing contemporary English versions (e.g. “Moose Jaw” instead of “*Mâchoire d’Orignal*”). However, the publisher reproduced the original map at the end of the book.

However, the importance the Métis attach to their in-betweenness and socio-cultural characteristics cannot hide the fact that the sense of belonging to the Métis historic homeland is today the primary criterion of official self-definition (Sawchuk, 2001). According to the Métis National Council (MNC):

Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation. [...] "Historic Métis Nation" means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in Historic Métis Nation Homeland; "Historic Métis Nation Homeland" means the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-Breeds as they were then known; "Métis Nation" means the Aboriginal people descended from the Historic Métis Nation, which is now comprised of all Métis Nation citizens and is one of the "Aboriginal peoples of Canada" within s.35 of the Constitution Act of 1982 (November 11, 2002).

This definition does not specify any peculiar Métis way of life or cultural characteristic, nor does it mention in-betweenness as a criterion. What matters is that a Métis individual's ancestors lived in the historic homeland of the Métis Nation.

Accordingly, Prairie Métis self-definition has become particularly exclusive at the national scale; it no longer suffices to be of mixed Indian and non-Indian ancestry to qualify as Métis. Those whose ancestry is not in the historic Métis Nation homeland are disqualified. Many political events are at the source of this narrowing of Prairie Métis self-definition. The first was the recognition of the Métis as Aboriginal people in the Constitution in 1982, which raised the question of Métis rights and self-governance. At the other end of the political spectrum, the NSI were not officially recognised as a distinct Aboriginal people — persistent rumours of an amendment to the Indian Act (which became Bill C-31) and a reinstatement of the NSI were circulating (Sawchuk, 1995, p. 90).²⁹ As a result, the Métis formed the MNC and split from the NSI and the Native Council of Canada — which became the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) in 1993 — in 1983 when the constitutional conferences started. The second event occurred during the Charlottetown Accord debate in the early 1990s when the Prairie Métis and the MNC, then led by Yvon Dumont, negotiated the recognition of a land base and self-government for Prairie Métis. In so doing, the federal government was to recognise the Prairie Métis as the only

²⁹ <http://www.metismuseum.ca/main.php>

³⁰ This does not mean that the NSI have no Aboriginal rights at all. In fact, s.35(2) of the Constitution states that "... 'Aboriginal peoples of Canada' includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada" (my emphasis). The word "includes" means that the enumeration is not necessarily exclusive.

people addressed by s.35 of the Constitution (Chartier, 1994, p. 202). Although the Métis accord was shelved after the Charlottetown proposition was rejected by national referendum in 1992, the distinction between the Métis Nation and the Other Métis has been maintained. On the other hand, a fair number of the Prairie NSI who came to identify as Métis over the last few decades — and who often have no geneological connections to the historical Red River Métis — are still considered as such by many of the organisations that emphasise the significance of the traditional Métis homeland (Chartrand, 1991, p. 14). The MMF regional office at The Pas, for example, still represents and serves the Métis as well as the NSI and Inuit who lived in the region (MMF The Pas Region Inc, n.d.). Therefore, the Métis self-definition often remains inclusive at the provincial-regional level, although it has narrowed at the national level.³¹

It has been suggested that potential land claim settlements explain Prairie Métis' rationalisation of "national" territory, as well as their emphasis on being the only "real" Métis in Canada, and their exclusion of "Other Métis." The argument is that if the Métis people were to be spread all across the country, it would seriously limit the opportunity to settle their land rights. The divide is between those Métis who have a real chance to have their rights recognised and those others who hardly do — which does not mean that they have no case. Moreover, with Aboriginal rights go title to the land and self-government. The question of Métis self-governance and land base settlement was the focus of the Métis Accord. In addition to the political support the Prairie Métis gave to the Tories' constitutional proposition,³² the Métis Accord was a way for the federal government to circumscribe the "Métis" constitutional category to a specific and well defined geographical and historical Métis reality, to enumerate the Métis,³³ and to settle the Métis question once and for all (Morrisson, 1995). Clearly, external political pressures have a great deal to do with the narrowing of the definition (Kathy Hodgson-Smith, November 9, 2001).

In dealing with Métis rights in the courts, the questions that arise more and more are: "How does one determine who is Métis?" and "what is the definition of Métis?" To date we have been successful in persuading the judges not to adopt a definition. We

³¹ Actually, the split between the MNC's provincial constituents and the CAP has never been absolute. Until early 2003, the CAP still sits alongside the MMF as plaintiff in the Manitoba Métis land claim launched in 1981 (*Le Métis*, March 2003). In the same vein, it is interesting to note that the MNC web site proposes a link to the CAP: see <<http://www.metisnation.ca/LINKS/home.html>>. Although the CAP returns the favour, it is much harder to find this link.

³² The Métis Nation was the only Aboriginal people to publicly support the Accord (Morrisson, 1995).

³³ A national registry administered by the Métis Nation was to be created (Chartier, 1994, p. 205-206; Morrisson, 1995).

maintain that it is up to the Métis people/nation to come up with that criterion. In this connection, through the Métis National Council we have been undertaking extensive consultations in order to come up with a Métis Nation-wide definition, which it is expected will be accepted by the courts. However, if we don't achieve a consensus relatively soon, the courts likely will impose a definition (MNS, March 3, 2004e).

In the current climate of Aboriginal rights, narrowing the definition of métisness represents political necessity or advantage.

Nonetheless, it would be misleading to reduce Métis self-definition and territorial discourses to mere political calculation. My informal discussions with many Prairie Métis lead me to a two-fold observation. First, even those Prairie Métis who are not necessarily politically involved are concerned about the question of definition and broadly accept the "historic Métis homeland" as a criterion.³⁴ The question of what defines the Métis is certainly of importance among users of two of the most accessed mailing lists on Métis genealogy: the Métis Resource Centre's *Message Board* and the *Rootsweb's Métis-L*.³⁵ Métis definition is among the most popular "unrelated" issues — those issues that have nothing to do with family ancestry and kinship — raised by participants. The idea that the "real" Métis are of Red River ancestry is recurrent. Second, regional differences in Canadian *métisness* are the primary sources of the Prairie Métis' exclusive definition. As the Prairie Métis feel distinct, it is odd for them to share their identification with other mixed-blood peoples. While many Prairie Métis would recognise that there are historical links between them and some eastern "mixed-blood" populations, notably in Québec, this does not weaken their sense of separate identity.

There is another reason why "territory" has become so important in Métis self-definition. Any Prairie Métis can identify him or herself with this definition. You are or you are not from the historic Métis Nation homeland. On the contrary, the extent to which traditional economic activities are practiced by the Métis is uneven. If hunting, fishing and trapping are central to many, they are unfamiliar to many others (RCAP, 1996). Today, Métis can hardly say, unlike their 19th century ancestors, that they occupy a unique and central socio-economical niche within (or

³⁴ On the contrary, Joan Taillon, writer for a Canadian Aboriginal newspaper, points out that the Prairie Métis "...who are not in the political spotlight say they are not themselves very concerned with definitions" (2001). While it may be right that less politically involved Métis have fewer concerns for the legal background of self-definition, it does not mean that they have no interest in matter bearing on definition.

³⁵ <http://www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca/cgi-bin/mforum/view.pl> and <http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/index/METIS/>.

in-between) Indian and/or non-Indian societies. To define membership by cultural specificities could disqualify many applicants. In the long term, such a definition would likely become obsolete, for ethnicity is evolving and the social boundaries that compose it are not fixed in time (Barth, 1969). In the same vein, and recognising the importance of territory in defining national identity, the anthropologist Richard Jenkins points out that there are two types of "territorial nationalism." For him, there are "nationalisms which claim territory on the basis of putative common ethnicity and those which attempt to construct ethnic commonality within an already-occupied territory" (1997, p. 146).³⁶ Prairie Métis nationalism draws mostly, if not entirely, on the first type.

Maps certainly facilitate the inscription of the Métis homeland into the popular imagination. They fix and give shape to its limits. "The Métis Homeland" map (Figure 5.9) leaves no doubt as to its extent. The red color and the name used to identify the homeland add to its visual importance and to the enforcement of its "boundaries," which are anything but ambiguous. The "Red River" cart on the GDI's cover map does the same (Figure 5.11). The cart reminds us that Métis reality is constrained in space to the three Prairie provinces. In fact, while the cart fades the boundaries that separate these provinces, it leaves intact the administrative limits with other provinces and territories. The cart also makes obvious that the Métis homeland is the result of the historical Métis mastery of and preeminence on the whole prairie, and accentuates the Métis sense of belonging to their homeland. Overall, both maps suggest a land that is distinctly delineated and cohesive. The Métis homeland appears as a solid block that shows no sign of fragmentation or internal weaknesses.

And yet, the limits of the Métis Nation are far from fixed, as revealed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996, vol. 4), which throws some doubt as to the cohesiveness and socio-spatial homogeneity of the Métis homeland. If one day Prairie Métis stretch eastward to support the Powleys in their court case and to include Sault-Sainte-Marie Métis in their extended family, the day after, as I was told by a Métis politician, some would

³⁶ For many authors, the former nationalism would be labeled "ethnic nationalism" and the latter "territorial nationalism." For Jenkins, however, such a categorisation is irrelevant for all nationalisms are by nature "ethnic." Nationalism, as goes the British anthropologist's argument, is like all others "-isms" (regionalism, localism, etc.), that is an ideology of ethnic identification (1997).

rather leave the Ontario Métis behind.³⁷ There are still debates as to whether the Métis Nation homeland is unifocal — constrained to the Red River area — or multifocal. While the MNS's map of the Métis Homeland opens the door to the acceptance of the latter position, the GDI's map does the opposite. The MNC's definition, quoted above, does not decide the issue. Its description of the historic Métis Nation homeland as "the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-Breeds" never specifies whether or not these Métis and Half-Breeds were exclusively from Red River.

In floating over these ambiguities, maps are central to the Métis' "nation building" enterprise. As argued above, maps are tools for Métis leaders to communicate their territorial discourses. However, their contribution to national identity is often more subtle and has more to do with "(re)stimulating imagination" than with strict territorial "rhetoric." Métis maps of the homeland reappropriate a portion of land that Canadians think of as theirs. Beside the political statement that lies behind this reappropriation, there is the visual evidence of a historic and contemporary territory that belongs to all Métis, and that supports Métis cohesiveness and group consciousness. Métis homeland is portrayed as recovered Métis patrimony: "Once the patrimony—or at least a fundamental part of it—is recovered, the relation to the territory returns to being as it was before: a natural relation. Inasmuch as it was born in those lands, in the middle of that landscape, identity is something about which there can be no doubt" (Canclini, 1995, p. 133). "The Métis Homeland" and the GDI's atlas cover maps are widely distributed, accessible, simplistic, and iconographic representations that makes each of them a perfect "map-as-logo," to use Benedict Anderson's phrase (1991, p. 175). They present a recognisable and emblematic territory that defines what it was and is to be Métis. Overall, these maps expose the Métis "collective(-national) interest" in the form of a territorial reality to preserve, protect, and develop.

³⁷ There are other examples of this "back and forth" attitude. On the one hand, I was informed in March 2003 by a Métis from Québec that there have been negotiations between his organisation and leaders of the MNC to include some Métis *de la belle Province* in the Métis Nation. This information was confirmed by David Chartrand, president of the MMF (see Taillon, 2001). On the other hand, some have recently pointed out the possibility that "NSI"

5.3 Concluding remarks.

Prairie Métis territoriality has been greatly affected by government fundings since the late 1960s and by the subsequent revival of Métis political organisations at both provincial and national levels. In improving the socio-economical conditions of the Métis, these changes proved to be sources of pride and political mobilisation among the Métis, and confirmed that they were no longer marginal in Canadian society. More precisely, these changes resulted in the emergence of the provincial scale as the principal site of Métis political mobilisation and social interaction, and in the rise of "territory" as a crucial criterion in defining Métis ethnic boundaries.

Maps have played a large role in supporting existing territorial and identity discourses, and in forging new ones. Maps are sometimes the reflections of territorial realities, as exemplified by the Métis political integration within Canadian administrative structures. On the other hand, maps help shape Métis territoriality by accentuating the Métis material presence in space, or by shaping group consciousness at the provincial as well as the regional-national levels. As maps and the territorial discourses they convey influence Métis self-definition, they make territory, even more than the David Chartrand's sash in the epigraph, the central symbol of Métis history and future.

members of Prairie organisations would have to prove their genealogy to Red River Métis if the federal government comes to accept the MNC's narrow definition (*idem*). This, however, has yet to happen.

Figure 5.1 Gabriel Dumont Institute's *Manitoba Métis Federation*, 1994.

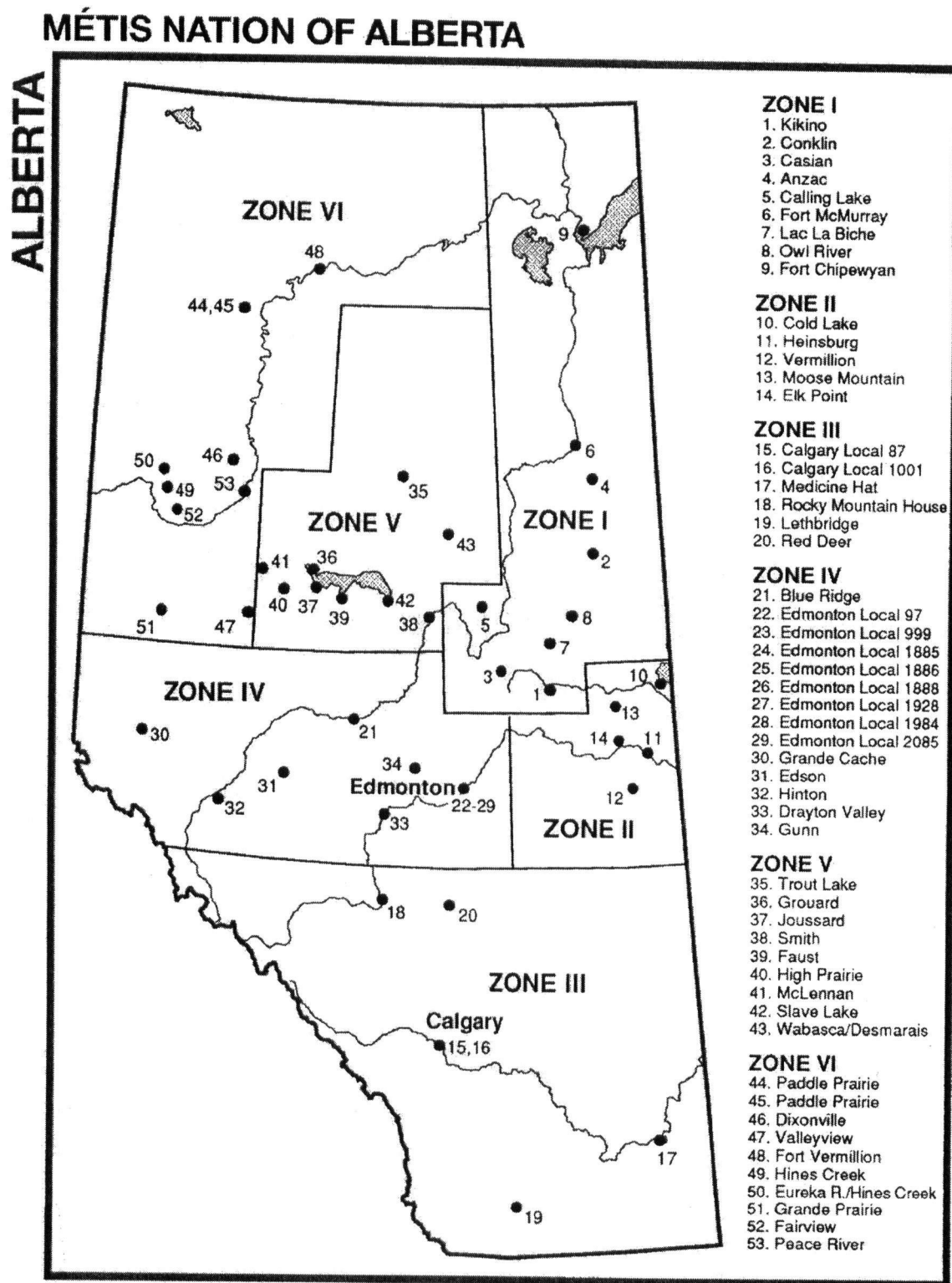


Figure 5.2 Gabriel Dumont Institute's *Métis Nation of Alberta*, 1994.

MÉTIS NATION OF SASKATCHEWAN

SASKATCHEWAN

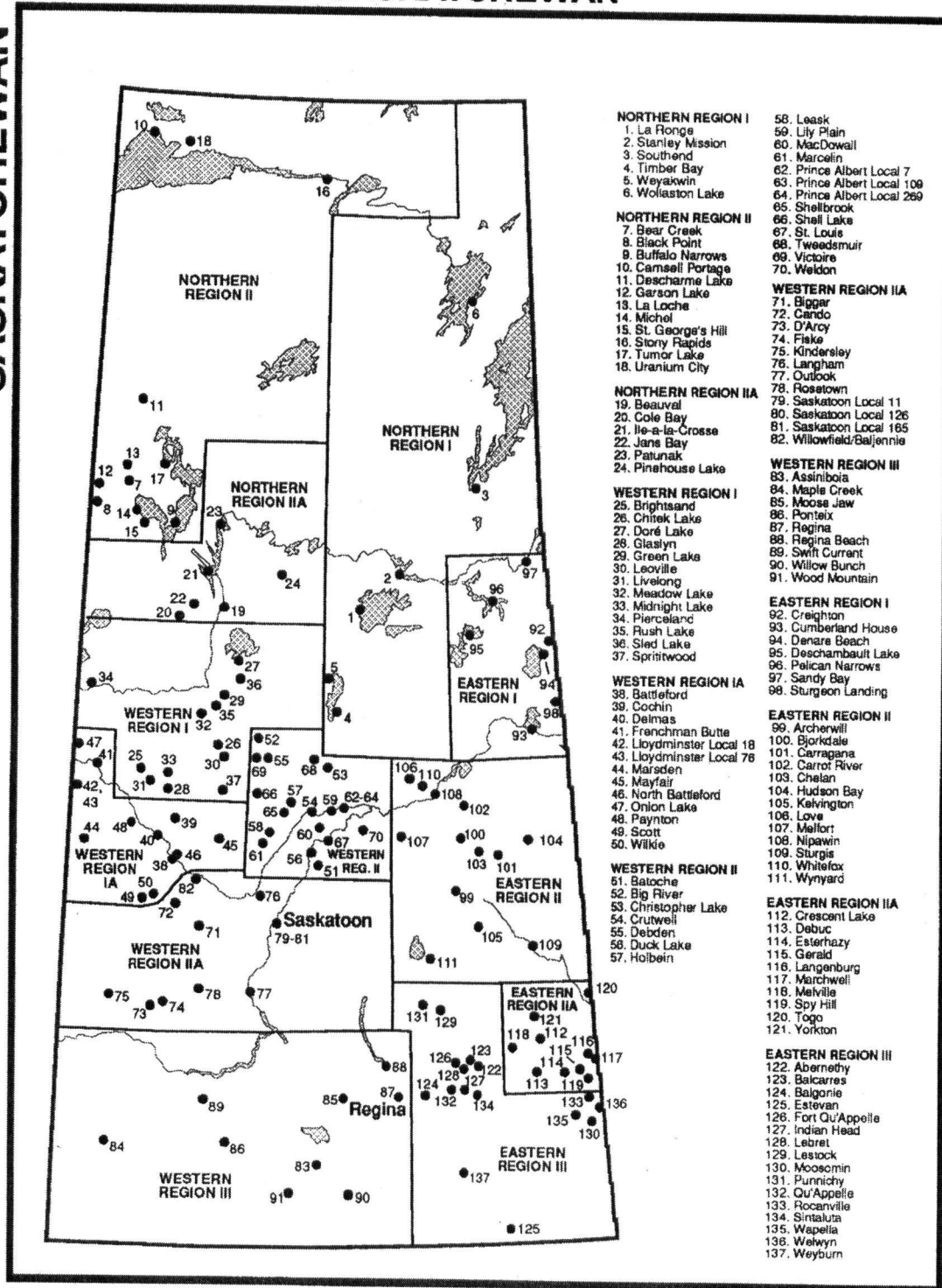


Figure 5.3 Gabriel Dumont Institute's Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, 1994.

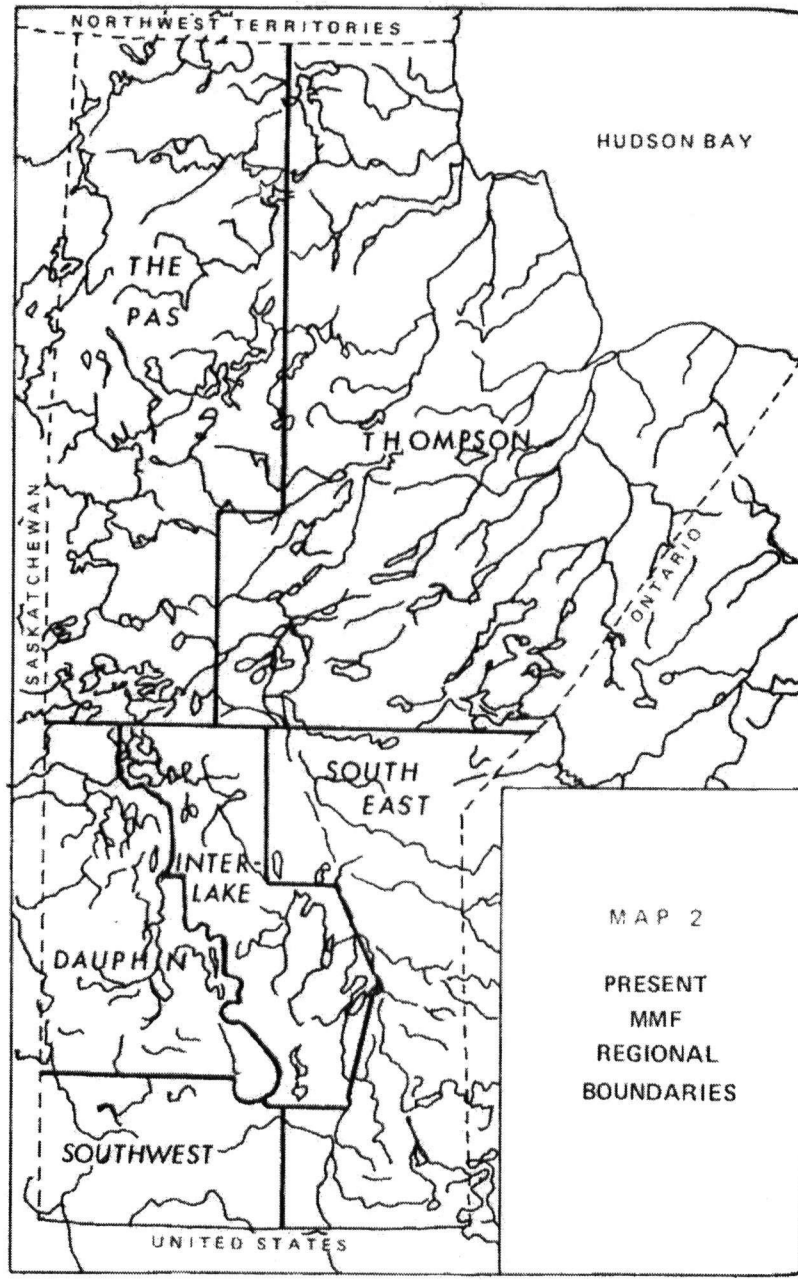


Figure 5.4 Anonymous' *Present MMF Regional Boundaries*, 1978.

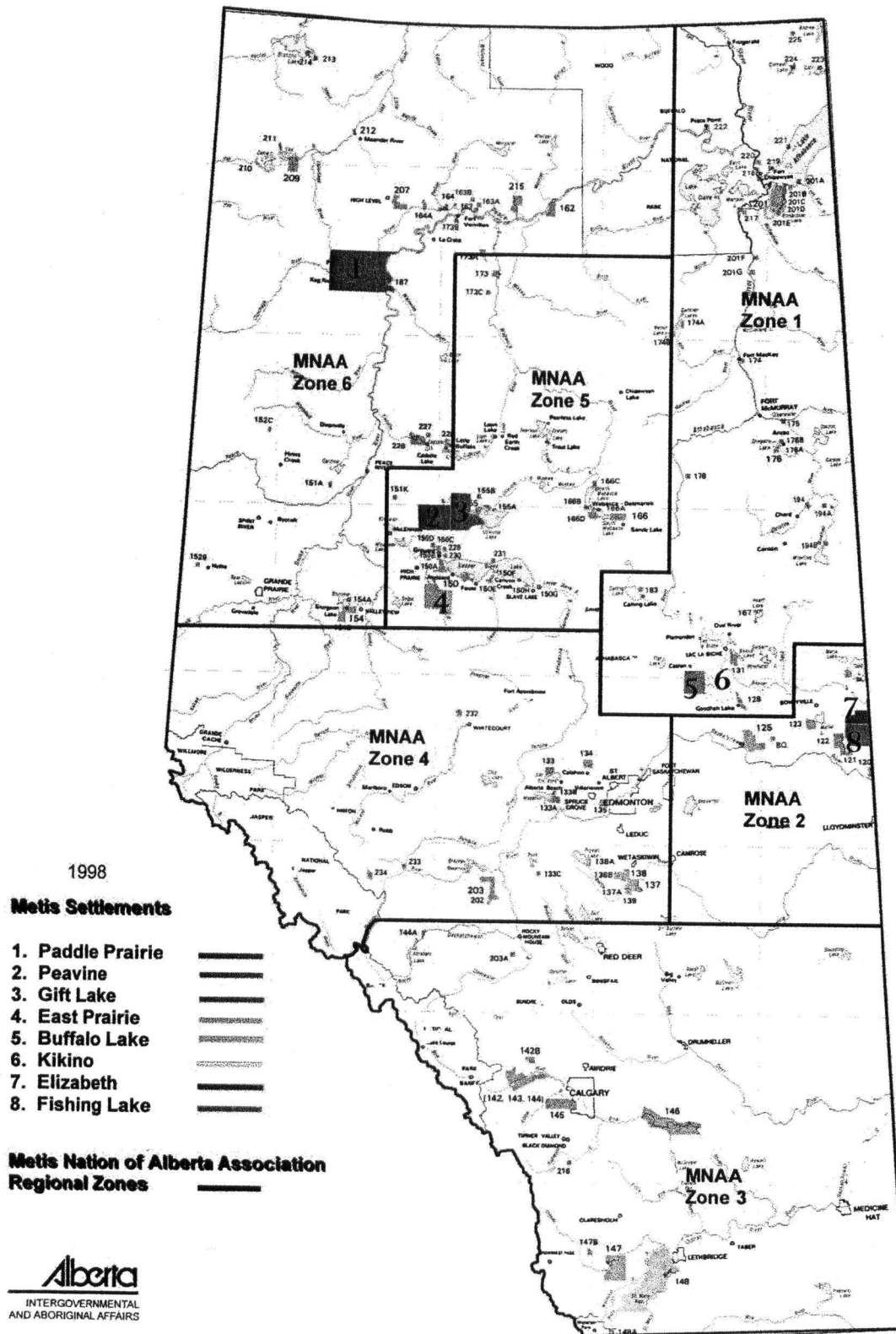


Figure 5.5 Alberta – Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs' *Alberta Métis Settlements*, August 1, 2002.

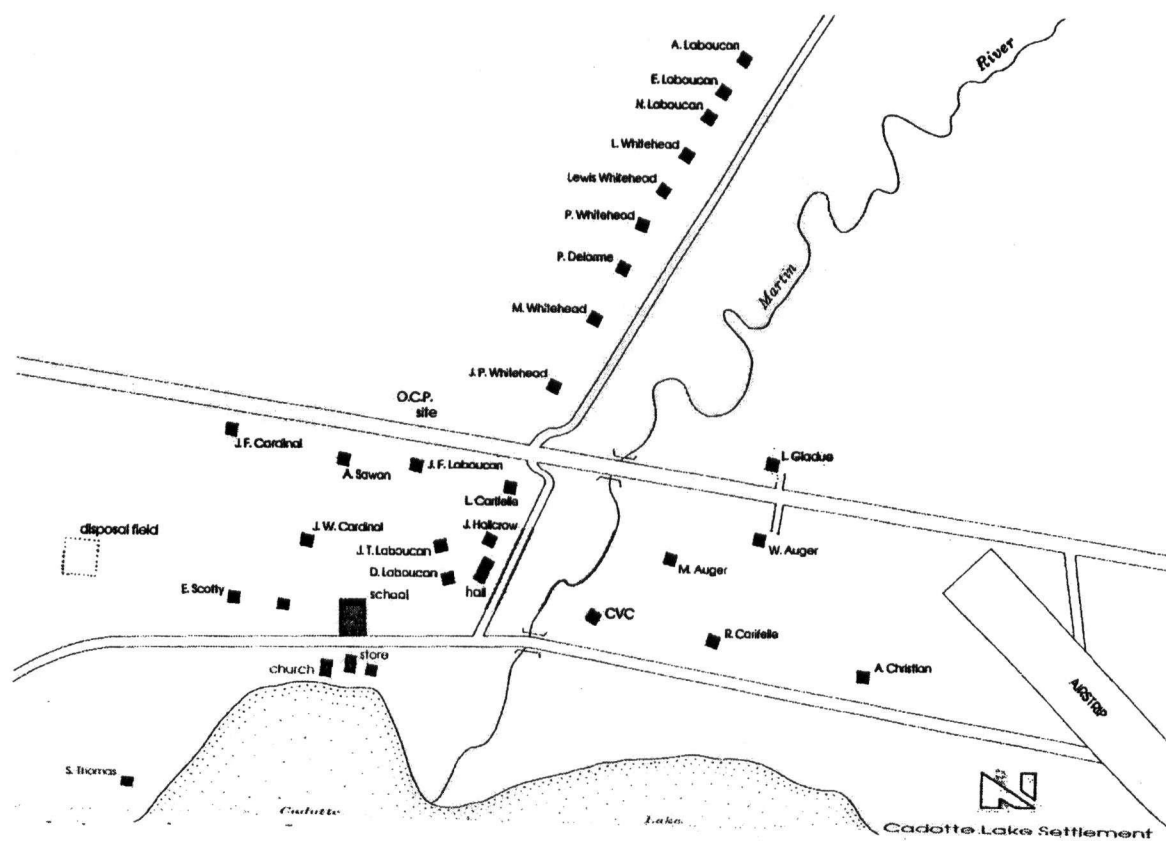


Figure 5.7 Métis Association of Alberta's *Cadotte Lake Settlement*, 1980.

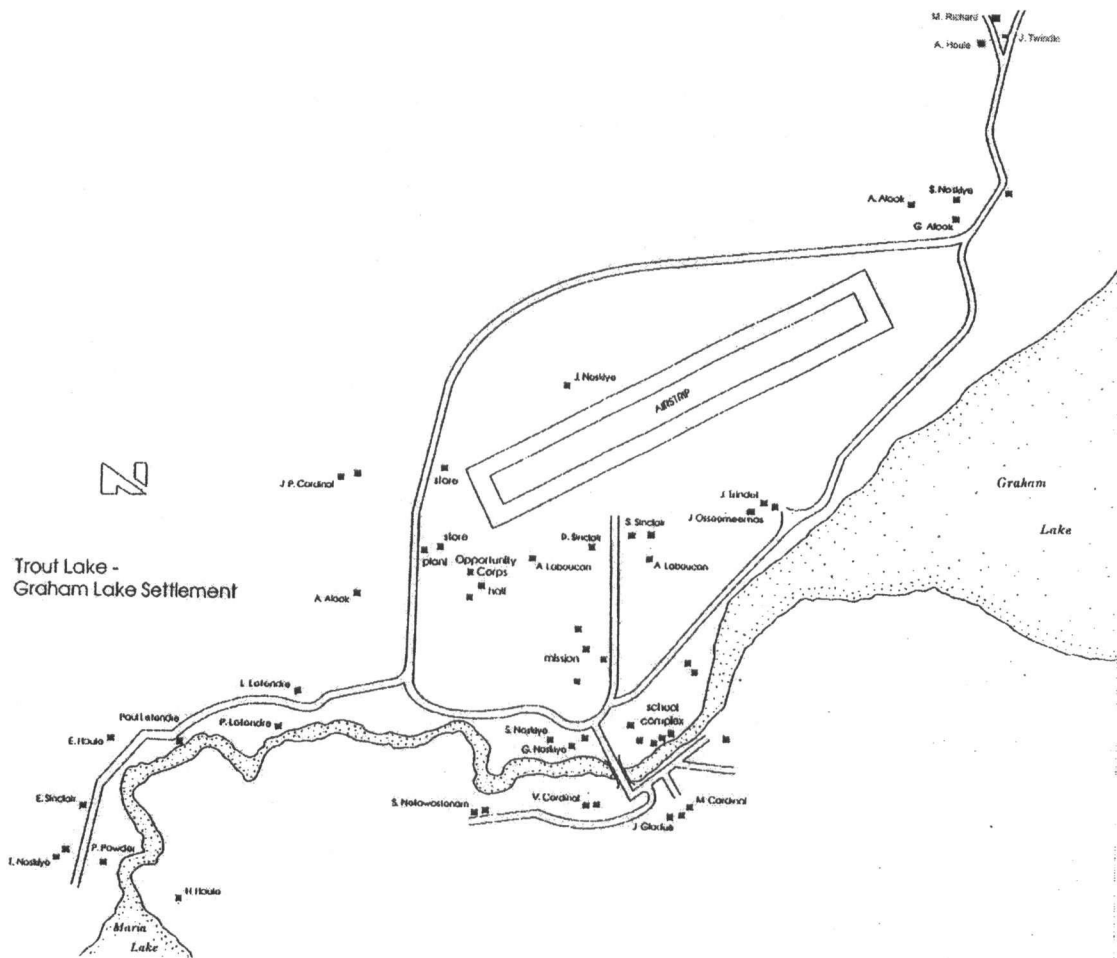


Figure 5.8 Métis Association of Alberta's *Trout Lake – Graham Lake Settlement*, 1980.

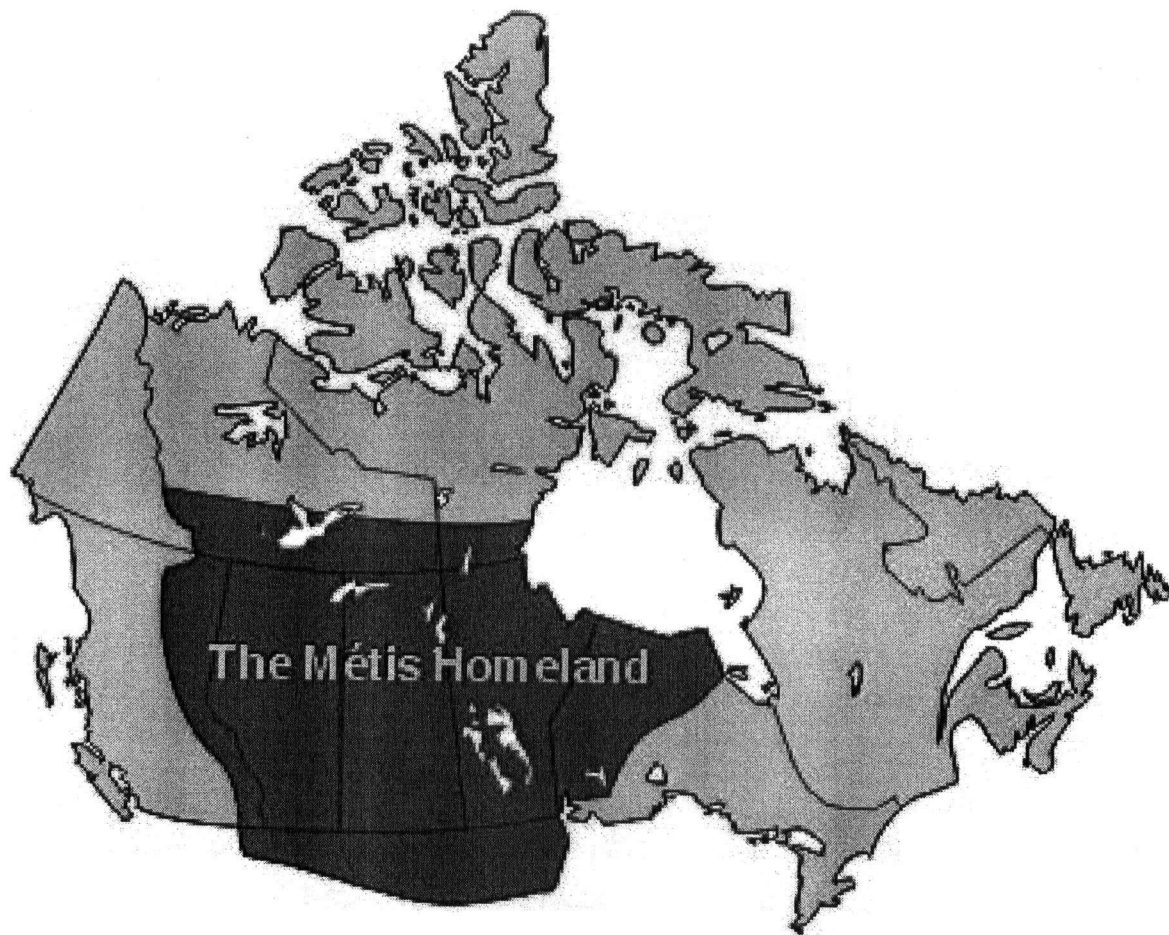


Figure 5.9 Métis Nation – Saskatchewan's *Métis Homeland*, March 3, 2004.

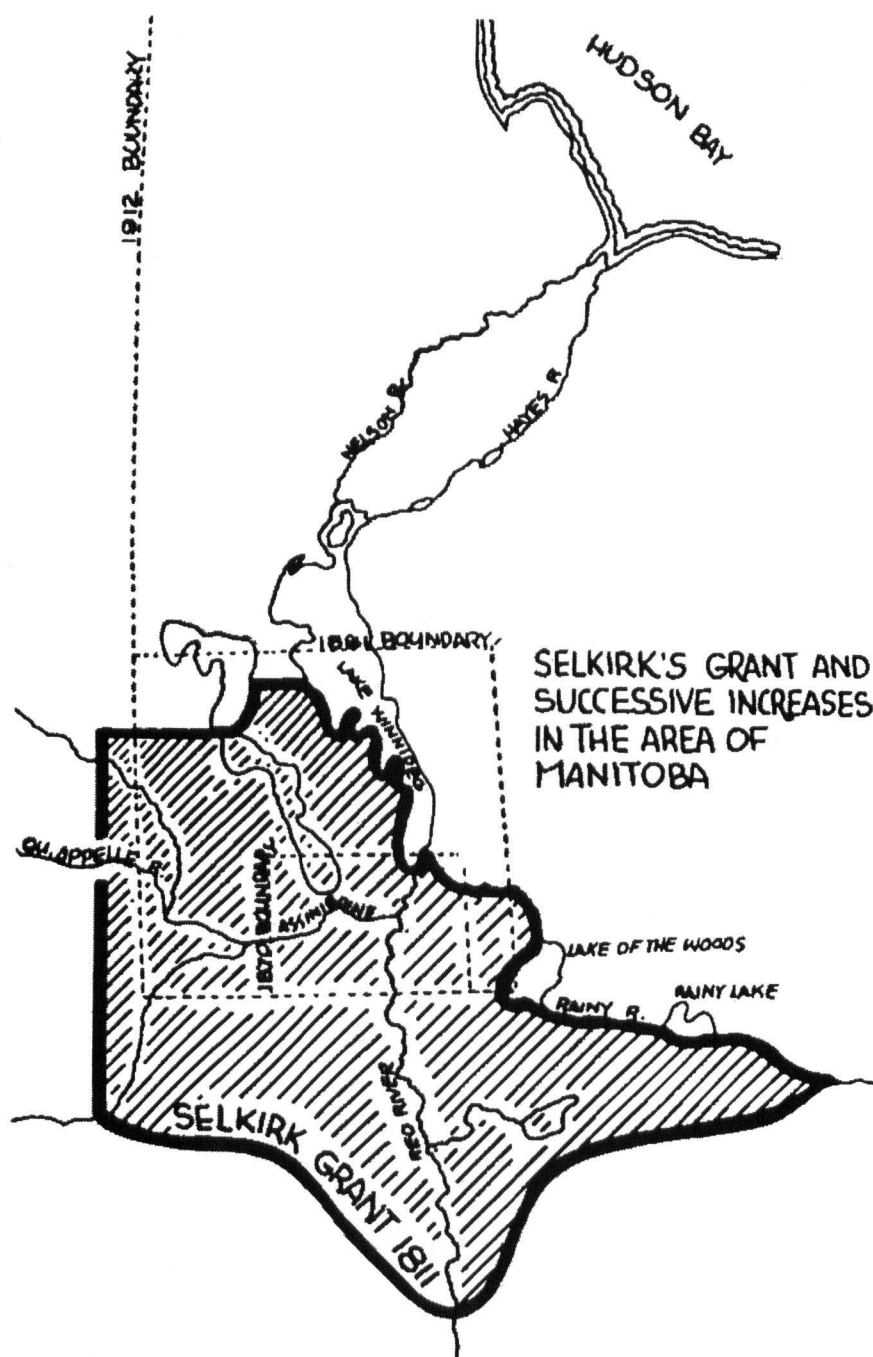


Figure 5.10 R  al B  rard's *Selkirk's Grant and Successive Increases in the Area of Manitoba*, 1975.

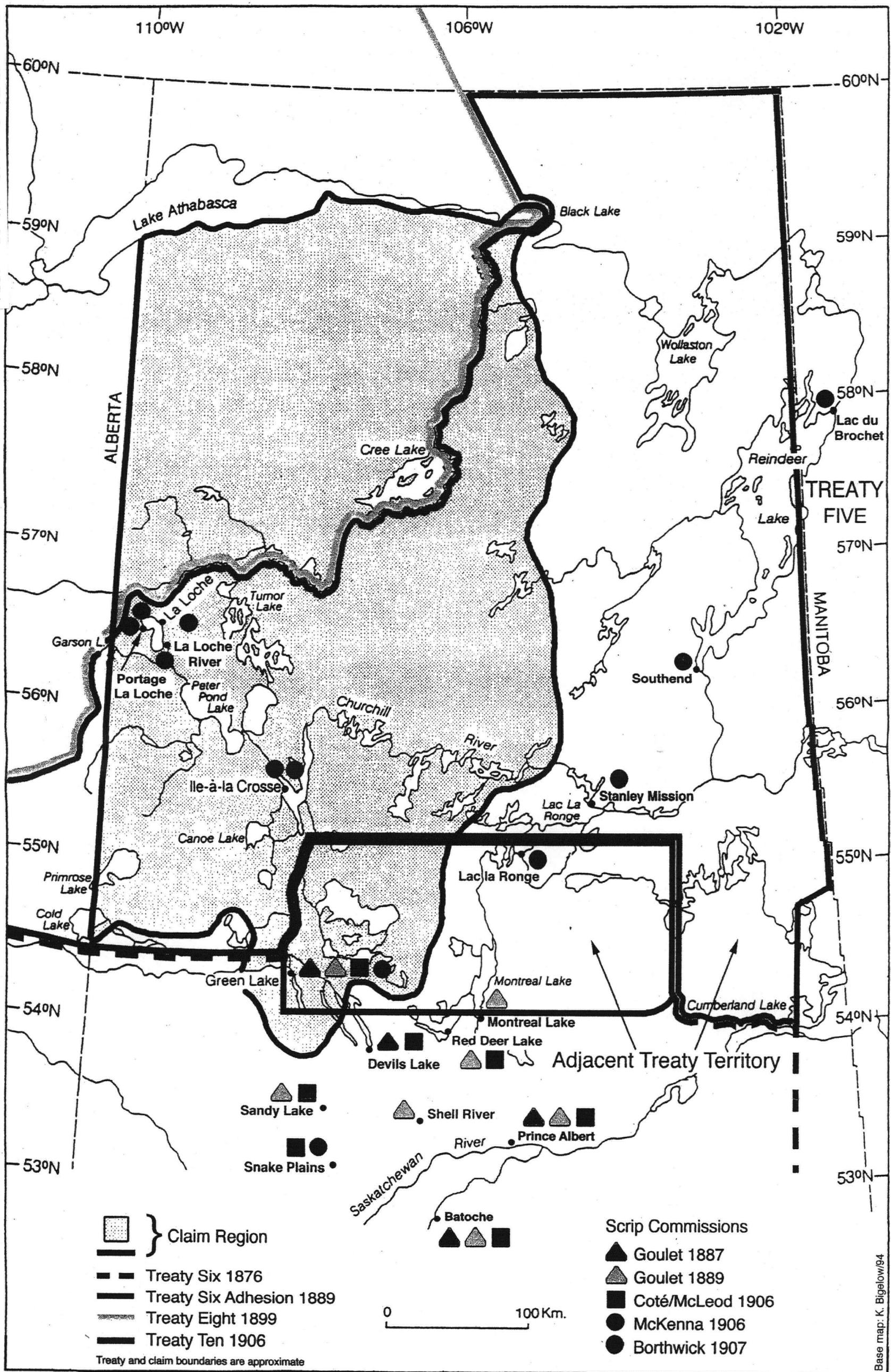
The Canadian Atlas of Aboriginal Settlement



Gabriel Dumont Institute
of Métis Studies and Applied Research Inc.

Figure 5.11 Gabriel Dumont Institute's *Canadian Atlas of Aboriginal Settlement* (Cover Map), 1994.

Figure 5.12 K. Bigelow's *Matrix's Map*, 1994.



Base map: K. Bigelow/94

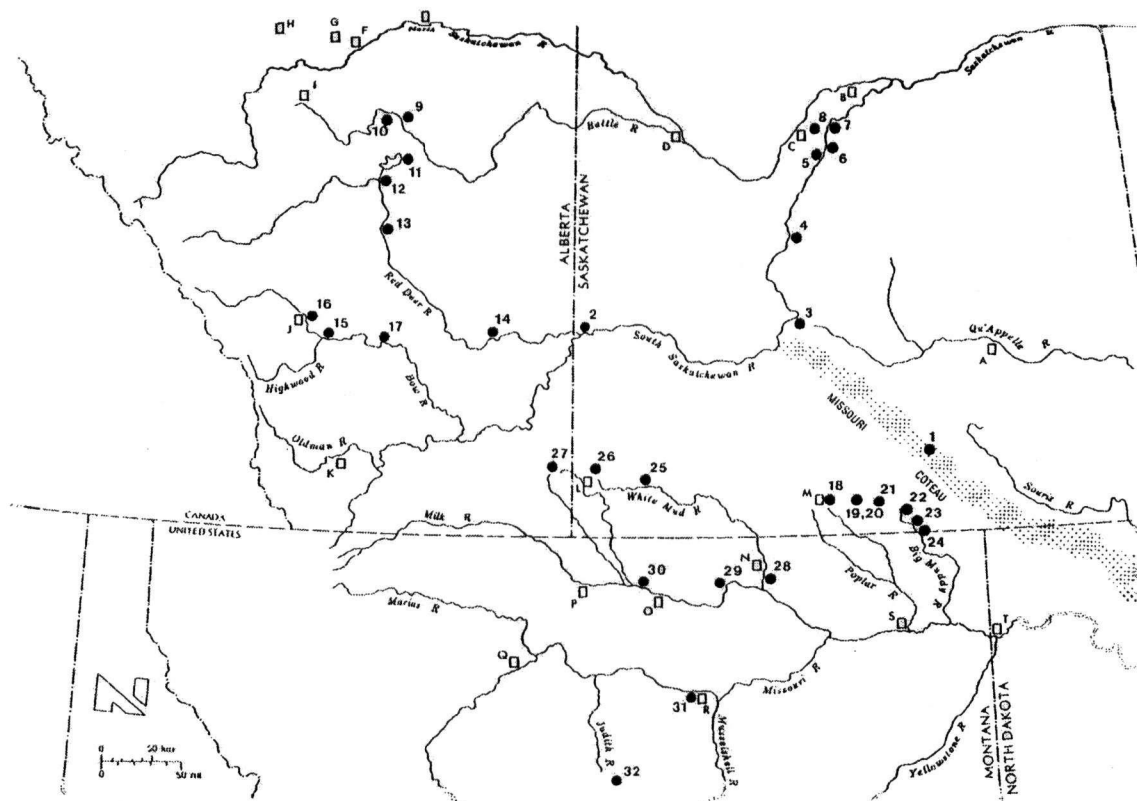


Figure 5.13 Métis Association of Alberta's *Métis Wintering Villages*, 1980.

Chapter 6: La territorialité contemporaine des Métis au Québec: la *médianité* comme base territoriale d'une autochtonité repensée.

Écrire l'Histoire, c'est foutre la pagaille dans la Géographie.

— Daniel Pennac, *La fée carabine*.

Au chapitre de la mémoire, c'est en effet l'avenir qui doit être dans la mire des contemporains.

— Jocelyn Létourneau, *Passer à l'avenir*.

L'éveil des autorités canadiennes, vers la fin des années 1960, au sort peu enviable des populations de Métis et d'Indiens non inscrits (INI) aura eu aussi des effets non négligeables sur la territorialité métisse au Québec. Comme pour les populations métisses des Prairies, les Métis du Québec se sont vu offrir une vitrine socio-économique et politique pour se sortir de l'exclusion dans laquelle ils avaient été maintenus au cours d'une bonne part du XX^e siècle. Ils profitent depuis de programmes d'aide à l'emploi, à l'éducation et au logement mis à leur disposition par leurs organisations politiques, notamment l'*Alliance autochtone du Québec* (AAQ)¹, fondée en 1971 et affiliée au Congrès des peuples autochtones (CPA), et l'*Association des Métis et Indiens hors réserve du Québec* (AMIHRQ) incorporée en 1972 et ayant son siège social à Roberval.

Depuis le début des années 1990, un autre type d'organisation politique a vu le jour. Moins préoccupées par les nécessités socio-économiques, ces organisations ont des objectifs plus précis qui consistent à défendre les droits autochtones des Métis au territoire et à l'auto-détermination tels que reconnus par l'article 35 de la Constitution. Le défi est cependant de taille pour ces dernières organisations, car le Québec ne reconnaît toujours pas les Métis vivant sur son territoire comme formant un peuple autochtone selon les termes de la Constitution. La position officielle du gouvernement cherche sa justification dans l'absence de preuves historiques concernant l'existence et la persistance du peuple métis au Québec. Il ne fait pourtant aucun doute dans l'esprit des principaux intéressés que les Métis composent une réalité qui trouve une

¹ Anciennement prénommée l'*Alliance laurentienne des Métis et Indiens sans statut*.

partie de ses fondements dans l'histoire même de la Province. Cette opinion affecte grandement l'image que les Métis se font d'eux-mêmes et la relation qu'ils établissent avec le territoire.

L'objectif principal de ce chapitre est donc de donner voix aux Métis du Québec et de mettre en relief les perspectives qu'ils ont sur leur identité, sur leur territoire et sur leur histoire collective. Bien qu'Internet représente une source importante d'information², notre analyse repose largement sur une quinzaine d'entrevues semi-directifs que nous avons eus avec des Métis vivant dans différentes régions du Québec, notamment en Outaouais, au Saguenay et dans le Bas-Saint-Laurent³. Ces entrevues nous ont permis de recueillir des informations complémentaires sur ce qu'est un Métis, sur les comportements ou les expériences pouvant résulter d'une telle catégorie identitaire et sur la nature du savoir historique que les Métis ont sur eux-mêmes comme peuple distinct. Nous cherchions aussi à identifier des lieux et/ou des noms de lieux associés au fait métis et qui pouvaient représenter des marqueurs territoriaux. Les perspectives métisses seront explorées en deux mouvements: dans un premier temps, on explorera les éléments marquants du discours historique des Métis; dans un deuxième temps, l'emphase portera sur les marqueurs socio-culturels de la territorialité contemporaine des Métis.

En guise d'observations préliminaires, on note d'abord la diversité des perspectives métisses. Ces perspectives, parfois contradictoires, révèlent en quoi être Métis au Québec peut signifier différentes choses selon les intervenants. Les limites identitaires entre Blancs, Indiens et Métis sont souvent outrepassées. Alors que certains Métis mettent parfaitement en évidence leur

² Comme pour le chapitre cinq, l'analyse s'est concentrée sur les sites plus officiels, tels ceux des organisations politiques et les portails autochtones reconnus (*la Piste amérindienne* par exemple).

³ Les entretiens ne furent pas enregistrés. La prise de notes fut préférée pour éviter d'intimider les participants (l'idée d'être enregistré peut effectivement rendre certaines personnes inconfortables). L'objectif n'étant pas de faire une analyse socio-structurelle des réponses obtenues, nous n'avons pas cherché à identifier des groupes d'âge ou sociaux particuliers. De nos répondants, la grande majorité furent des hommes, environ le quart avaient moins de 40 ans, près de 60 pour cent avaient entre 40-65 ans et environ 15 pour cent avaient 65 ans ou plus. Les répondants furent questionnés directement: sur leur identité métisse; sur ce qui compose la culture métisse; sur la manière dont ils ont pris conscience de leur origine; sur le rôle de leur famille dans cette prise de conscience; sur leur connaissance historique du fait métis; sur le dynamisme communautaire et national des Métis au Québec; sur leur implication personnelle dans les affaires publiques de leur communauté métisse; et enfin, sur les repères territoriaux marquant les dimensions matérielle, politique et symbolique de leur vécu métis — individuel et collectif. Les répondants furent approchés via trois différentes organisations métisses au Québec, l'objectif étant d'obtenir une diversité de perspectives. À prime abord, il fut plus difficile que prévu d'obtenir cette diversité. En effet, de toutes les organisations contactées, une seule a su nous procurer une liste substantielle d'individus à interviewer. Toutefois, le processus d'entrevues allant, cette diversité tant recherchée a atteint un niveau satisfaisant; certains Métis de la

différence identitaire, d'autres restent plutôt évasifs sur ce qui les distingue des populations indiennes ou de la société québécoise. On aura noté au passage une bonne dose de dissensions politiques et de conflits personnels qui ajoute un degré de confusion identitaire supplémentaire. Pareillement, on observe une connaissance historique des plus inégales et une mémoire métisse aux contours imprécis. Si certains répondants ont eu beaucoup à dire sur l'histoire des Métis du Québec, la plupart sont restés muets, ou au mieux équivoques. Fut-ce par ignorance ou par méfiance face au jugement possible de l'intellectuel-interviewer? Possiblement un peu des deux. D'un autre côté, on constate l'émergence sensible d'une «histoire nationale» métisse, soit un discours plus spécifique et mieux articulé de la mémoire et de la territorialité métisses. Cette histoire nationale trouve son origine dans le discours des leaders métis et dans les publications «officielles», notamment les sites Internet des organisations politiques. On en retrouve aussi des bribes chez nos répondants, marquant ainsi l'influence de ce discours sur les perspectives individuelles. La mémoire joue donc un rôle dans la construction et la légitimation de l'identité métisse et s'avère un outil essentiel dans les revendications au droit d'exister des Métis au Québec (Mageo, 2001, p. 2; Megill, 1998, p. 44).

Autre observation, la territorialité des Métis du Québec diffère de celles de leurs cousins des Prairies. D'abord, la conscience territoriale ne s'exprime pas selon les mêmes termes que dans l'Ouest du pays. Bien qu'elle soit en germination, l'image du territoire métis au Québec ne s'avère pas aussi précise et concrète que ne l'est le *Métis Nation Homeland* pour les Métis de l'Ouest canadien. Ceci coïncide assez bien avec le nombre limité de représentations cartographiques métisses du territoire québécois. Parmi les quelques cartes qu'il a été possible de recueillir, aucune ne cherche à préciser les limites et la forme mentale du territoire ancestral. L'autre différence repose sur la prééminence de la *médianité* — cette manière de vivre l'entre-deux — dans la définition identitaire métisse. Si la médianité n'est pas sans importance dans l'expression identitaire et territoriale de la Nation métisse de l'Ouest, elle est sans nul doute la pierre angulaire de la territorialité métisse au Québec.

6.1 Les Métis au Québec, une nouvelle perspective historique.

Comme le rappelle le rapport de la Commission royale d'enquête sur les peuples autochtones (RCAP, 1996), il n'est pas facile de retracer l'histoire des Métis de l'Est du pays. Si la question du métissage franco-indien a suscité l'intérêt des historiens (Delâge, 1991, 1992; Dickason, 1985; Jacquin, 1987; Morisset, 1983b, 1997; Perrault, 1982; van Schendel, 1994), on ne saurait en dire autant de l'étude du peuple métis au Québec. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que les Métis aient repris dernièrement l'initiative dans la formulation du discours historique les concernant.

6.1.1 Un problème historiographique et conceptuel: l'ethnicité, l'identité nationale et le nationalisme.

L'existence du métissage sur le territoire du Québec dès les premiers contacts entre Européens et Amérindiens a lui aussi longtemps souffert d'un problème de documentation historique — archivistique et orale (Dickason, 1985; Hébert, 1984; Peterson, 1985). C'est ce problème de source qui fit d'ailleurs dire à George Stanley qu'il n'y a eu que très peu de mariages mixtes au Québec durant le Régime français même en tenant compte des unions illégitimes — c'est-à-dire des mariages à l'«indienne» (1978a, p. 64)⁴. Depuis Stanley, toutefois, les historiens ont trouvé des moyens pour contourner le problème des sources et ont su identifier des indices indirects du métissage au Québec. Olivia Dickason, laquelle démontre l'ampleur du métissage en Acadie et au Québec durant le Régime français, identifie plusieurs de ces indices: la faiblesse des effectifs européens; le déséquilibre marqué dans le ratio homme/femme des populations européennes en Nouvelle-France; les impératifs politiques et économiques de la traite des fourrures, soit les alliances maritales à l'indienne et, enfin, la négation missionnaire de ces alliances (1985, p. 21-23).

⁴ La conclusion de l'historien anglo-canadien est sans surprise puisqu'elle s'appuie sur *La naissance d'une race* de Lionel Groulx, lequel s'est avéré un ardent opposant à la thèse du métissage franco-indien au Québec.

Toutefois, l'absence de preuves directes concernant l'émergence identitaire des individus issus du métissage franco-indien au Québec fait dire aux spécialistes que les collectivités métisses n'ont pas existé, ou du moins, qu'elles n'ont pas subsisté. C'est ce que Léo-Paul Hébert affirme en ce qui a trait à la population sang-mêlée du Saguenay qui, selon lui, fut dans l'obligation de s'«indianiser» avec l'arrivée des colons et du commerce du bois vers le milieu du XIX^e siècle (1984, p. 432). Olivia Dickason avance même que les populations sang-mêlées de la vallée du Saint-Laurent et de l'Acadie n'ont jamais pu développer, contrairement aux populations du Nord-Ouest, une conscience identitaire qui leur soit propre. Ces populations de l'Est se seraient assimilées aux sociétés coloniales ou indiennes avant même «...*the emergence of a clearly defined sense of separate identity, of a "New Nation."*» (1985, p. 31).

Malgré ce qu'en dit Olivia Dickason il n'est pas impossible que les Métis du Québec aient développé une identité — même «nationale»⁵ — qui soit restée invisible à l'observateur extérieur, à savoir les autorités coloniales ou étatiques. Dans la mesure où elle revêt un sens particulier pour le groupe ethnique lui-même, une identité n'a pas à être reconnue de l'Autre pour exister. Les identités nationales ne s'expriment donc pas toutes de la même façon. Certaines résultent d'un nationalisme actif et revendicateur. En revanche, d'autres existent malgré un nationalisme silencieux ou même inexistant (Jenkins, 1997, p. 160). De toute manière, le manque de preuves directes n'a pas empêché les ethno-historiens de documenter l'ethnogenèse métisse dans les régions du Nord-Ouest éloignées de la Rivière-Rouge⁶. Comme nous l'avons mentionné au chapitre deux, la théorie de l'ethnogenèse métisse pourrait aussi s'appliquer à plusieurs régions périphériques du Québec.

⁵ Nous considérons qu'une identité est «nationale» lorsqu'elle représente l'appartenance communautaire la plus importante d'un groupe précis, contrairement aux identités «régionale» ou «locale». L'auto-définition reste le critère primordial.

⁶ Il faut admettre que la théorie de l'ethnogenèse métisse n'était qu'à ses tous débuts au moment où Dickason a publié cette dernière version de son texte en 1985.

6.1.2 Les perspectives historiques métisses: l'entre-deux spatio-temporel d'une identité clandestine.

On assiste au Québec, surtout depuis les années 1990, à l'émergence d'un révisionnisme historique métis qui n'est pas sans rappeler celui ayant eu lieu dans les Prairies au cours des années 1970 et au début 1980 sous la plume d'auteurs métis reconnus tels que Maria Campbell (1973), Howard Adams (1975) et Duke Redbird (1980). Comme l'explique Pierre Montour, directeur général de la Corporation métisse au Québec (CMQ), il est temps de proposer «une tout autre version de l'histoire que celle enseignée par le clergé et le ministère de l'Éducation» (2003, p. 35). Si Internet est le véhicule le plus prisé pour communiquer cette version révisée de l'histoire métisse du Québec, il n'est pas le seul. La place publique représente une autre façon de faire entendre la voix métisse. C'est ce que la CMQ et son directeur général ont cherché à faire le 6 mars 2003 devant la Commission permanente des institutions du gouvernement du Québec lors d'une consultation générale sur l'entente de principe avec la nation innue. Profitant de la tribune ainsi offerte, Montour a demandé au gouvernement de mettre un frein à tout processus de traité autochtone dans lequel les Métis seraient exclus. Le directeur de la CMQ a basé son intervention sur une version renouvelée de la place des Métis dans l'histoire du Québec et de sa relation au monde autochtone. C'est un peu au même moment que Montour (2003) lança son livre sur la question métisse au Québec, *Ô Canada! Au voleur!* Ce livre représente une source riche d'information et offre un regard novateur sur l'histoire du Québec. La question du droit métis à l'auto-détermination et au territoire y occupe une place centrale.

Le livre de Montour n'est cependant pas toujours clair quant à l'origine de l'information historique sur laquelle il se base. Il est difficile de discerner si cette information a pour origine les «livres d'histoire» ou si elle émane de la mémoire collective et orale métisse. Du strict point de vue scientifique, donc, ce livre comprend des lacunes certaines. Toutefois, son objectif n'est pas d'établir une preuve historique irréfutable. Le livre s'adresse d'abord à un public général et non pas seulement à la communauté intellectuelle. Son objectif premier est d'éveiller les sentiments identitaires des Métis, de leur rappeler leurs droits comme peuple autochtone et de les presser de revendiquer ces droits avant que les autres peuples autochtones se partagent le territoire québécois. Il est trop tôt pour dire si le livre est en voie d'atteindre ses objectifs, mais un fait demeure, il n'est pas passé inaperçu, se méritant même une recension dans le quotidien québécois *Le Devoir* (Lapierre, 2003).

Le livre de Montour révèle plusieurs éléments historiques entendus lors de nos entretiens et lus sur les sites Internet métis officiels, principalement ceux de la CMQ et de la *Nation Métis au Québec* (NMQ). Une telle concordance entre ces différentes sources révèle un discours identitaire et territorial dominant. Bien que cette histoire métisse réponde souvent à sa propre logique narrative — souvent contraire au discours historique généralement accepté par la société québécoise — cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle soit un exercice purement rhétorique visant à forcer la main des gouvernements sur la question des droits métis. Effectivement, il serait difficile de douter de la sincérité de nos informants et de dénigrer l'importance que prend cette trame narrative dans leur vie et dans leur conscience identitaire et territoriale. Que leur histoire soit vérifiable, c'est-à-dire qu'elle souscrive aux règles scientifiques de la discipline historique, importe peu du moment qu'elle représente une «authenticité vérité» aux yeux des Métis⁷ (Mageo, 2001, p. 6). Cette histoire leur permet de comprendre ce qu'ils sont et de susciter une image positive d'eux-mêmes. Elle joue donc un rôle de premier ordre dans l'émergence d'un certain nationalisme métis au Québec.

L'idée que l'histoire et la mémoire d'un peuple sont des constructions subjectives (ou même des «inventions») du passé qui trouvent leur raison d'exister dans le présent n'est pas nouvelle. Elle s'inscrit dans un corpus littéraire qui conclut que la mémoire participe au processus de «mise en commun» et qu'elle est une source authentique d'auto-identification (Friedman, 1992, p. 856; Hanson, 1989, p. 898; Megill, 1998, p. 56). C'est même sa fonction principale selon l'historien québécois Jocelyn Létourneau pour qui la mémoire devrait servir de source de motivation et déterminer l'avenir d'un peuple. Dans un tel cas, la mémoire collective doit soulever des éléments positifs et ne pas représenter un «fardeau écrasant» (2000, p. 22). Dans la mesure où la conscience identitaire est un élément central de notre étude, il serait impertinent de porter une attention trop particulière à la justesse «scientifique» des sources historiques métisses. De toute manière, il nous faut garder à l'esprit, comme le dit l'historien Allan Megill (1998, p. 51), que la preuve historique n'est pas à l'abri de la subjectivité. Il

⁷ Nous sommes bien sûr conscient qu'une telle forme de discours historique a bien peu de chance de convaincre des juges si la question des droits autochtones des Métis québécois venait à se retrouver devant les tribunaux. Il serait en effet bien difficile pour les Métis du Québec de satisfaire au test «Powley». D'un autre côté, les cours canadiennes se montrent de plus en plus ouvertes aux traditions orales des peuples autochtones, comme en fait foi le jugement rendu en 1997 dans l'affaire *Delgamuukw c. Colombie-Britannique* (Supreme Court of Canada, n.d.).

n'existe pas de preuves «pures» qui ne soient inscrites dans une logique narrative ou argumentaire particulière, fut-elle scientifique. L'essentiel reste donc l'élément rassembleur et mobilisateur de la mémoire et le rôle que cet élément occupe dans la (re)construction identitaire et territoriale des Métis contemporains.

6.1.2.1 De l'émergence du «pays métis»: une trame narrative originale.

Il y a trois événements principaux dans la trame narrative du discours historique métis qui se traduisent en autant d'émergences: celle de l'univers d'entre-deux (la médianité ou l'intermédialité); celle des communautés métisses et celle du «pays métis».

Le premier «événement-émergence», la médianité, est présenté comme le fondement même de l'identité métisse au Québec. Si les Métis reconnaissent que le regard de l'Autre a joué pour beaucoup au développement de leur médianité — ils étaient sauvages aux yeux des Français et français aux yeux des Indiens — leur discours historique se concentre toutefois moins sur les causes profondes de l'univers d'entre-deux que sur ses résultats matériels et politiques. C'est ainsi que certains intervenants ont mis l'emphasis sur l'économie mixte pratiquée par les Métis, lesquels couplaient des activités de chasse à une agriculture de subsistance. D'autres ont mentionné l'importance politique jouée par les Métis comme intermédiaires dans les alliances franco-indiennes, notamment lors de la signature de la Grande Paix de Montréal en 1701 (Aubin, 1995)⁸. Un autre répondant a évoqué la mobilité identitaire des Métis et les liens socio-culturels ténus ayant existé entre les populations sang-mêlées du Bas-Saint-Laurent et les Malécites⁹. Ces quelques exemples historiques ne sont pas nécessairement connus et mentionnés par tous les répondants. Chacun de ces exemple s'inscrit avant tout à l'intérieur d'une perspective individuelle sur l'histoire métisse. Ce qui importe ici, cependant, c'est que la médianité constitue

⁸ Pour Denys Delâge, le processus de paix lui-même fut une entreprise «métisse». Si la manière d'entreprendre les pourparlers a largement emprunté à la diplomatie autochtone (à preuve, le rôle joué par le chef Kadiarok), l'entente finale a signé l'emprise définitive du pouvoir colonial français en Amérique (2001).

⁹ L'historien des Abénaquis, l'abbé Joseph A. Maurault, précise dans une note de bas de page que le nom «Malécite» serait une corruption «de "Mar8idit" ou "Mal8idit", ceux qui sont de Saint-Mâlo. C'était le nom que les Abénaquis donnaient aux métis parmi eux, parce que la plupart de leurs pères venaient de Saint-Mâlo» (1866, p. 6). Aussi cité dans Dickason (1985, p. 33).

le fil conducteur de tous ces exemples et qu'elle s'impose comme un fondement du discours historique métis.

La formation graduelle des communautés métisses est le deuxième événement marquant de ce discours. Cette formation représente la consolidation des liens socio-culturels créés et entretenus par la médianité. Durant les audiences publiques de la Commission royale, tenues à Montréal en 1993, Sylvie Plouffe a témoigné que:

Over the centuries our people have developed their own physical communities with a social, political and cultural community structure that is unique to us and that we, like the other Aboriginal nations, wish to preserve. Île du Grand Calumet, Fort Coulonge, Saint-Epiphanie, Otter Lake, Quyon, Mont-Laurier, Chicoutimi, Trois-Rivières, les Escoumins are examples of these communities (1993).

Selon l'un de nos répondants de l'Outaouais, il y aurait même eu bon nombre de lieux — lieux de rassemblement, de campement, de fabrication de pipes, ainsi que des cimetières — qui auraient disparu, tous inondés à la suite de l'édification de plusieurs barrages sur la rivière des Outaouais. Les Métis voient dans ces quelques exemples autant d'indices de l'émergence historique d'une vie sociale métisse distincte, avec ses propres lois coutumières et ses modes de vie (Montour, 2003).

Le troisième «événement-émergence» mis en relief par les Métis concerne l'interconnexion socio-spatiale de communautés métisses locales éparpillées sur un vaste territoire et formant un réseau de lieux à l'origine du «Pays métis». La généalogie des familles souches et la mobilité spatiale en représentent l'armature principale. D'abord, les familles souches présentent la réalité métisse comme ancienne et bien ancrée dans l'histoire et le territoire québécois. Le site de la CMQ offre d'ailleurs une liste toujours grandissante d'informations relatives à ces familles souches, en particulier sur les Couc dit Montour, les Prévost, les Héon, les Pelletier, les Léveillé et les Lambert¹⁰. Comme le propose Pierre Montour, l'analyse des actes de mariage, de naissance et de décès de ces familles souches permettrait sans doute de dessiner plus précisément les contours du territoire métis en Amérique du Nord et cela dès le Régime français (2003, p. 103-104)¹¹. Il donne d'ailleurs l'exemple de ses propres ancêtres (la famille

¹⁰ <http://www.metisduquebec.ca/genealogie.htm>

¹¹ L'étude de la distribution spatiale de ces familles métisses en comparaison avec des familles non métisses reste à faire. Il pourrait être instructif de comparer la cartographie des unes et des autres et de chercher à identifier des

Couc-Montour), lesquels auraient délaissé l'agriculture pour se joindre aux coureurs de bois après le meurtre impuni d'une de leurs membres (*idem*, p. 104).

La géographie des familles souches met aussi en évidence la mobilité spatiale des Métis et la dispersion des liens familiaux au-delà du cadre territorial québécois. Si ces familles ont des racines profondément ancrées dans le sol québécois, elles ont aussi dispersé leurs «rhizomes» — pour reprendre la métaphore de Deleuze et Guattari (1980, p. 9-37) — vers l'Ouest, soit dans la région des Grands-Lacs, dans l'Illinois, en Ohio et aussi loin que dans les Prairies. Pierre Montour pointe ainsi le rôle joué par un arrière-petit-fils de l'union métisse originale des Coucs, Nicholas Montour, dans l'établissement de la Nation métis de la Rivière-Rouge alors qu'il était capitaine d'un groupe métis en 1816 (Montour, 2003, p. 106). Ces liens familiaux entre Métis de l'Est et ceux du Nord-Ouest sont confirmés par les propos de la NMQ:

Il ne faudrait jamais oublier que l'histoire des revendications des Métis du Bas Canada, au Québec, au Nouveau Brunswick, en Nouvelle Écosse, au Labrador et à l'île du Prince Édouard a établi la forme de pensée et a soutenu la philosophie politique Métis de la région des provinces des prairies à laquelle adhéraient déjà les familles Métis au Québec tel la famille Riel, la famille Dumont, la famille Morin, la famille Bohnet, la famille Desmeules la famille Rivard et bien d'autre pour ne pas tous les nommées (*sic*). Le départ du Bas Canada de ces familles déjà imprégnées de leur identité Métis pour la terre promise de la Nation Métis et orchestré par Louis Riel, était la promesse d'un territoire accessible aux Métis, loin de l'emprise et des contraintes politiques que tout (*sic*) les Métis vivaient dans le Bas Canada (March 14, 2004b).

Le témoignage de Marie Joseph-Riel devant la Commission royale en 1993 est particulièrement éloquent:

The Métis nation in the West, in Manitoba, we all know where it came from, okay, a member of my family, Louis Riel, who was one of the founders, but Louis Riel was originally from Lavaltrie and he was a Métis in Lavaltrie before he became a Métis in the West (1997)¹².

Ce qui est novateur dans ce discours, c'est la réintégration du Québec dans la logique territoriale et identitaire métis au Canada. Contrairement à ce que les spécialistes de la question ont véhiculé

comportements géographiques métis distincts qui mettent en évidence les chevauchements territoriaux entre les sphères autochtone et non autochtone. En somme, une telle étude serait similaire à ce qui se fait dans le cas des proto-Métis dans l'Ouest.

jusqu'ici, les Métis québécois ne seraient plus exclus de la famille élargie métisse sous prétexte qu'ils n'ont jamais développé une identité digne de ce nom. En outre, la territorialité historique des Métis au Québec ne saurait se définir en circuit fermé, c'est-à-dire à l'intérieur des frontières de la Province. L'identité métisse n'aurait pris tout son sens que grâce aux connections familiales entre les communautés métisses du Québec et les communautés qui forment aujourd'hui la *Nation métisse*. Cela rejoint d'ailleurs la discussion du chapitre deux sur le *Canadien métissé* et sur son rôle dans l'ethnogenèse des groupes proto-métis dans le Nord-Ouest du XVIII^e siècle et du début du XIX^e siècle.

Ce sont ces connections qui ont échappé aux cartographes durant le Régime anglais. En effet, en dehors de l'effet hybride et de l'intermédiation de l'élément francophone sur les cartes du Nord-Ouest à la fin du XVIII^e et le début du XIX^e siècle, le Nord-Ouest fut généralement présenté en isolation totale avec la région laurentienne — *the Province of Quebec*. Les réflexions contemporaines que les Métis jettent sur leur propre territorialité historique remettent en perspective la carte de l'Amérique septentrionale et accentuent davantage le rôle de la carte dans l'entreprise coloniale.

6.1.2.2 Le bâillon institutionnel anti-métis: les raisons du silence historique métis.

Mais comment expliquer qu'une telle version des faits ait été gardée si longtemps sous le couvert du silence? Comment les Métis peuvent-ils dépeindre une réalité identitaire qu'ils disent si bien ancrée au Québec — bien qu'elle ne s'y limite pas — alors qu'elle a échappé à la plupart des commentateurs d'hier et d'aujourd'hui? Encore une fois, les Métis semblent avoir réponses à ces questions.

¹² Louis Riel, le père comme le fils, sont tous deux nés dans le Nord-Ouest et non pas à Lavaltrie comme l'affirme Marie Joseph-Riel. Toutefois, l'arrière-grand-père de Louis Riel, fils, s'est marié à Lavaltrie avec Marie-Charlotte Sylvestre en 1755 (Morisset, 1997, p. 67). Peut-être les Riels étaient-ils alors déjà Métis.

Le combat identitaire métis: entre la réalité virtuelle et la condition nominale.

S'il est arrivé que le mot «Métis» fut utilisé pour identifier les enfants d'origine mixte sur le territoire québécois, et cela dès les tous débuts du pays, l'usage ne s'est jamais vraiment généralisé avant tout récemment. Toutefois, il se pourrait bien que les Métis du Québec aient été identifiés par d'autres désignations. Que voulaient donc réellement dire le père de Charlevoix et ses contemporains lorsqu'ils réfèrent aux *Créoles canadiens*? S'il est vrai qu'au XVIII^e siècle l'usage du mot «créole» identifiait généralement les enfants d'origine européenne nés sur le continent américain, il est tout de même indiqué de penser que le terme ait véhiculé une autre signification — à la fois plus spécifique et complémentaire à la première — et marqué une certaine reconnaissance (indirecte soit) du métissage franco-indien:

Les Canadiens, c'est-à-dire, les Créoles du Canada, respirent en naissant un air de liberté, qui les rend fort agréables dans le commerce de la vie, & nulle part ailleurs on ne parle plus purement notre Langue. [...] Leur agilité & leur adresse font à eux égaux: les Sauvages les plus habiles ne conduisent pas mieux leurs Canots dans les Rapides les plus dangereux, & ne tirent pas plus juste (Charlevoix, 1744b, p. 117 & 255).

Même de rien, le jésuite décrit le Canadien comme un Métis. Son «Créole du Canada» est à la fois plus français que le Français en raison de la pureté de sa langue et plus «sauvage» que l'Indien dans sa maîtrise des gestes associés à la vie autochtone. Charlevoix décrit en quelque sorte l'identité métisse de la canadianité telle qu'elle fut introduite au chapitre deux sous les vocables «coureurs de bois» et «voyageurs».

Comme l'a affirmé l'un de nos répondants, les Métis du Québec ne voient généralement pas de problème au fait que la plupart d'entre eux n'utilisent le terme «Métis» que depuis tout récemment, soit surtout depuis la fondation de l'AAQ en 1971: «Avant l'Alliance, ajoute-t-il, le mot était utilisé, mais avec hésitation, car au Québec tu étais soit Blanc, soit Indien (si t'avais du Blanc, tu n'étais pas Autochtone mais Blanc), alors que pour les gens d'origine mixte, l'idée de métissage a toujours été là». À titre d'exemple, le grand-père paternel de notre répondant, Métis déclaré, se disait «Canayen». Le répondant affirme enfin que «seuls les Français ou les Anglais faisaient la différence. Les vrais Canadiens sont ceux du mélange, ce sont les Métis, les Blancs/Indiens».

Les «lois sauvages»: les relations métisses au pouvoir colonial et étatique.

Le discours historique métis se veut aussi très critique à l'endroit des autorités canadiennes. L'image que ce discours renvoie de la relation des Métis à l'État n'a rien de positif. Selon Montour, le droit, l'histoire et l'identité des Métis auraient été bafoués dès l'arrivée du pouvoir britannique en 1763 (Commission permanente des institutions, April 17, 2003). En raison de la participation des Métis aux guerres franco-indiennes et de la vengeance iroquoise, ajoute le directeur général de la CMQ, les Métis vont choisir de disparaître. Plusieurs d'entre eux décidèrent de quitter définitivement pour les pays d'en haut — devenus pour l'occasion le Pays indien de la Proclamation Royale de 1763¹³ — et, dans une moindre mesure, pour le Nord-Ouest naissant. D'autres purent se fondre aux populations autochtones et/ou non autochtones (Montour, 2003, p. 107 & 116).

Ce sont toutefois les politiques autochtones canadiennes qui accusent le plus gros des critiques métisses. La première politique mise au pilori est l'*Acte pour mettre à part certaines étendues de terre pour l'usage de certaines tribus de Sauvages dans le Bas-Canada*. En plus de créer les réserves du Bas-Canada, le gouvernement profita de cette loi pour mettre la main sur les anciens territoires de la traite des fourrures en les transformant en «terres de la Couronne». Ce faisant, le gouvernement aurait signé l'acte d'expropriation des Métis pour qui les terres associées aux fourrures représentaient le territoire ancestral (Montour, March 19, 2003). On accuse aussi la *Loi sur les Sauvages* de 1876 d'avoir mis en péril l'existence des collectivités métisses. Cette loi serait responsable de leur perte de statut autochtone. Or, avec la perte de statut vient évidemment la perte des territoires de chasse et de pêche, lesquels n'étaient généralement accordés qu'aux seuls Indiens statués.

¹³ Plusieurs d'entre eux quitteront pour la Louisiane — espagnole depuis le Traité de Paris — pour y fonder le village de Saint-Louis à la fourche des rivières Mississippi et Missouri.

L'identité clandestine: une stratégie de survie collective.

Si l'on s'en tient au récit historique métis tel qu'évoqué ci-dessus, on n'est pas surpris que l'identité métisse québécoise soit décrite comme une réalité clandestine. La chute du Régime français — et avec lui la fin des alliances franco-indiennes sur lesquelles il reposait¹⁴ — et la perte du statut autochtone seraient autant de raisons expliquant la formation graduelle d'une telle clandestinité. Il existe aussi d'autres facteurs. Le premier de ces facteurs tient aux réticences de l'Église catholique canadienne envers le métissage. Si ces réticences sont existantes dès le Régime français, elles sont particulièrement mises en évidence avec l'arrivée des autorités britanniques au Canada. C'est à ce moment que Mgr Bryand fit parvenir à tous les missionnaires un mandement dans lequel on retrouve une condamnation en règle des unions mixtes:

Que nos chère filles les Montagnaises apprennent que les excès où quelques unes se laissent aller, dans l'espérance d'épouser leurs complices, n'attireront jamais les bénédictions de Dieu sur leurs mariages: et que les François se fouviennent de la réserve mise depuis long tems sur le crime de ceux qui enivrent les Sauvages, ou qui péchent contre la pureté avec les Sauvageffes; et de la défense que, conformément aux intentions de Monfieur le Gouverneur, nous renouvelons aux Missionnaires de faire de semblables mariages¹⁵.

Un deuxième facteur s'explique par la discrimination grandissante au XX^e siècle. Cette discrimination découlait essentiellement des conceptions raciales de l'époque. Comme il fut expliqué au chapitre 4, cette discrimination se trouva accentuée par la distance sociale entre Autochtones et non Autochtones créée par les politiques sur les Indiens du gouvernement fédéral.

La forme la plus extrême de clandestinité fut bien sûr la disparition de l'identité métisse dans certaines communautés ayant opté pour une identité «indienne», telle que définie par les termes de la loi fédérale, ou «blanche». C'est ainsi qu'un Métis du Saguenay explique la présence de nombreuses familles de souches métisses anciennes sur la réserve innue de Mashteuiatsh au Lac-Saint-Jean, tels que les Gill, les Nepton (ou les «Neptune»¹⁶), les Robertson, les Launière et les McKenzie. Ces familles seraient pour la plupart issues de l'immigration de clans abénaquis au début du XVIII^e siècle. Originaires de la Nouvelle-Angleterre

¹⁴ Les Britanniques reprirent l'essentiel de ces alliances dans le pays d'en haut, mais pas au Québec.

¹⁵ Cité dans Hébert (1984, p. 91).

et du Sud du Québec, ces familles abénaquises étaient déjà fortement métissées à leur arrivée au Saguenay (Maurault, 1866). Elles auraient accepté une place en réserve lors de leur création.

Les Métis font aussi référence à cette clandestinité pour expliquer pourquoi il y a eu si peu de communautés métisses avouées. Selon certains de nos répondants, cela ne veut cependant pas dire que ces communautés n'aient jamais existé et persisté. Ils affirment que les Métis savaient reconnaître leurs semblables et ce qui les distinguait des Blancs et des Indiens. Il y avait donc des communautés métisses vécues dans les faits. Un Métis nous apprendra d'ailleurs que certaines communautés jouissaient des services d'un «*medecine man*». Ce dernier opérait sous couvert de l'anonymat, sauf bien sûr des Métis eux-mêmes qui seuls détenaient le secret de son existence. C'est ce type d'activité «souterraine» et dissimulée aux regards extérieurs qui fait dire à plusieurs que «la nation métisse a toujours existé. Elle n'était tout simplement pas en évidence, en dormance depuis 300 ans!»¹⁷.

Les notes dissidentes: quelques bémols au concert historique métis.

Il existe bien sûr des différences de vue, ou du moins d'importantes nuances, au discours historique métis tel que nous venons de le décrire. L'histoire est souvent un «consensus» difficile à obtenir et à maintenir et la perspective historique métisse n'y fait pas exception. C'est ainsi que l'on a appris de la bouche d'un répondant — et non pas sans une certaine surprise — qu'il n'y aurait pas de culture métisse au Québec, c'est-à-dire rien qui ne distingue le Métis des autres Autochtones. Aux dires de cet individu, la réalité métisse serait donc relativement récente. Cette vision correspond d'ailleurs à la politique d'appartenance à l'AMIHRQ de Roberval. Cette association n'accepte pas de membres dont l'origine autochtone (faut-il comprendre «indienne») remonte à plus de trois générations. Autrement dit, elle refuse l'adhésion aux Métis de quatrième génération, soit ceux dont l'origine du statut d'Indien remonte à leurs arrières-arrières-grands-

¹⁶ Un nom abénaquis original (Philippe Charland, 2002, *ad verbatim*).

¹⁷ Dans la logique d'ensemble du discours historique métis, il y aurait davantage de chance pour que la nation métisse du Québec soit «née» il y a 300 ans. Son état de dormance serait plus récent, vieux d'environ un siècle ou un siècle et demi. Le témoignage de ce Métis n'en demeure pas moins clair: la clandestinité de l'identité métisse n'est pas une preuve de la disparition du peuple métis.

parents. Les raisons d'une telle politique demeurent obscures. Quoi qu'il en soit, cette politique suggère que l'identité métisse est un phénomène récent et temporaire¹⁸. Kermot A. Moore (1982), co-fondateur de l'AAQ en 1971, trace un portrait similaire de sa communauté métisse d'origine de Kipawa, en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Il fait remonter l'histoire de cette communauté à la fin du XIX^e siècle tout au plus¹⁹. D'autres Métis auto-déclarés comme Luc Lacroix restent ambigus quant à l'âge du fait métis au Québec. D'une part, il associe l'existence des Métis aux politiques autochtones et légales canadiennes, laissant supposer l'absence d'une identité strictement métisse avant le fin du XIX^e siècle (December 21, 2001). D'autre part, Lacroix fait remonter à des millénaires la tradition orale de son peuple qu'il a préalablement identifié comme «Métis». Il donne d'ailleurs une description détaillée de ce peuple et marque bien en quoi il est distinct. Si comme les autres peuples autochtones les Métis vivent en harmonie avec la nature, les plantes et les animaux et qu'ils vouent un grand respect pour leurs aînés,

... jamais on entendra un Métis renier qu'il a du sang de Blanc qui coule dans ses veines. Nous sommes fiers du peuple que nous sommes devenus. Nous acceptons notre métissage. Ce qui est important de comprendre, c'est que nous avons réussi à nous rendre à ce point dans l'histoire et par le fait même, nous avons créé un nouveau peuple qui symbolise l'acceptation d'autrui et la confiance qu'avaient nos ancêtres que nos deux cultures pourraient un jour s'amalgamer parfaitement et vivre comme frères! (*idem*).

Ce commentaire sur la tradition orale métisse se rapproche davantage du discours historique métis tel que mis en évidence dans les pages précédentes.

6.2 Les Métis au Québec, une perspective contemporaine.

Le discours historique qui vient d'être exposé se répercute grandement sur la manière dont les Métis se définissent aujourd'hui et sur la façon dont ils entrevoient leur relation à l'espace local, régional et provincial. Ce lien entre le discours historique des Métis et leur territorialité contemporaine se vérifie tant sur le plan individuel que sur le plan collectif.

¹⁸ Nous nous sommes toutefois informé auprès de l'Association quelle serait son approche si elle recevait une demande de membership d'une personne dont les deux parents sont reconnus Métis de «troisième génération» — faisant automatiquement de cette personne un Métis de «quatrième génération». On n'a jamais su confirmer si une telle demande serait mécaniquement refusée.

¹⁹ Bien que son exploration historique du fait autochtone remonte beaucoup plus loin dans le temps, celle de la réalité métisse qu'il dépeint concerne surtout le début du XX^e siècle.

6.2.1 Les voies/voix individuelles: des cheminements identitaires.

La clandestinité dans laquelle fut placée l'identité métisse au Québec n'est pas qu'une réalité historique aux yeux de la grande majorité des Métis avec lesquels nous nous sommes entretenu. Si la question des origines indiennes ne fut pas problématique pour certains, il faut croire que ce fut là une exception heureuse. La plupart de nos répondants ont décrit le mur de silence qu'ils ont dû briser pour remonter aux sources de leur identité autochtone et métisse. Débutant les recherches généalogiques²⁰ devant leur révéler les branches autochtones de leur arbre familial, ces Métis ont souvent rencontré des résistances de la part de leurs proches. Alors que certains de ces proches niaient simplement l'existence de sang indien dans la famille, d'autres rejetaient catégoriquement cette possibilité par un «*on n'est pas des Sauvages!*» bien appuyé: «Beaucoup de choses étaient cachées et il ne fallait surtout pas en discuter!» (Lacroix, December 21, 2001). Curieusement et malgré les résistances rencontrées, il semble que chacun de nos répondants ait eu sur sa route un aîné — un grand-parent, une grande-tante ou même un arrière grand-parent — pour tout révéler du secret familial. Comme l'un d'eux affirme, «les vieux racontaient lorsque demandés». À la lumière de ces quelques témoignages, cette clandestinité ne serait pas le signe de la disparition totale de l'identité métisse, car si l'origine autochtone et métisse de ces familles était un secret connu de quelques membres seulement, il se passait tout de même d'une génération à l'autre.

L'âge des répondants au moment de la révélation est toutefois très variable. Si certains peuvent se rappeler avoir été conscients de leur identité métisse depuis leur tendre enfance, plusieurs n'en feront la découverte que durant leur vie adulte, parfois même très tard. Il ne fut pas rare de s'entretenir avec des Métis s'identifiant depuis quelques années seulement. Nous avons même rencontré des Métis dont la révélation avait eu cours depuis un peu plus d'un an. Cette récente «exposition» à l'identité métisse n'enlève bien sûr rien à son authenticité et à la sincérité de ceux qui l'affichent. En revanche, elle pourrait témoigner de l'efficacité du nationalisme métis au Québec. Nous reviendrons sur ce point.

²⁰ Il est généralement nécessaire de faire la preuve de son ascendance autochtone quand vient le temps de se faire accepter comme Métis par une des organisations provinciales. Bien que cette preuve puisse être faite par un professionnel en généalogie, il est normal que l'individu récolte d'abord une information de base concernant ses parents et parfois même ses grands-parents.

Il semble que l'identification au groupe métis, ancienne ou récente, fut généralement précédée d'une sensibilité au monde autochtone. Pour plusieurs, cette sensibilité a trouvé sa source dans la pratique d'activités associées au monde autochtone, soit des activités exprimant généralement un lien ténu avec la nature. Un Métis du Témiscouata souligne à cet effet l'intime connaissance de ses grands-parents maternels de la forêt et des plantes médicinales, une connaissance transmise de génération en génération, soit l'expression d'un savoir vernaculaire (*traditional ecological knowledge*). Pour d'autres, la sensibilité à l'univers autochtone s'est traduite par une participation active à l'intérieur d'une Nation autochtone; l'un d'eux fut même à l'origine de la reconstruction d'une communauté autochtone et de sa reconnaissance officielle par l'Assemblée nationale à Québec. Pour la plupart des Métis, cependant, les sentiments autochtones étaient vécus de manière strictement personnelle, presque sous le couvert de l'anonymat. Cet anonymat était souvent forcé par l'absence d'un statut officiel et par la peur d'être accusé d'usurpation d'identité autochtone²¹.

Pour certains Métis, la révélation officielle fut aussi précédée par une expérience bien réelle de l'entre-deux. Un répondant de Roberval témoigne de la confusion qu'une telle dualité peut parfois entraîner pour l'enfant métis. Il n'est pas toujours évident pour le jeune de dénouer les fils entrecoupés de son identitaire alors qu'il est à la fois le «petit Sauvage» dans la famille de son père et «le petit Blanc» dans la famille de sa mère. Le problème peut même se compliquer davantage lorsque l'enfant entre à l'école pour y apprendre comment les Iroquois du XVII^e siècle se sont régalez des cœurs pieux des pères Lalement et Brébeuf. Il est alors difficile de retourner à la maison et de ne pas craindre cette mère qui rappelle trop les Iroquois «sanguinaires» de l'Histoire. Bien sûr, la médianité n'a pas toujours marqué les tragédies de la petite enfance. Comme le dit Michèle Rouleau, ex-présidente de l'Association des femmes autochtones du Québec, dans une entrevue pour la *Piste amérindienne*,

Mon enfance s'est passée entre ces deux mondes, sans trop en prendre conscience, car on ne se posait pas ces questions à l'époque. Moi et ma sœur savions que nous étions Métisses, mais sans trop porter attention. On le réalise à l'adolescence, en se rendant compte des

²¹ La reconnaissance des Métis comme peuple autochtone en 1982 et l'usage croissant du terme «Métis» au Québec et dans l'Est du pays sont venus changer la donne. Ce terme permet aujourd'hui de rendre compte d'une expérience identitaire vécue depuis de nombreuses années et parfois même depuis de nombreuses générations.

différences entre les deux mondes. Nous étions conscientes de nos origines, parce que, parfois, on se le faisait dire par les autres (Lemieux, July 9, 2001).

En bref, ces quelques exemples décrivent l'existence d'une identité métisse avant la lettre.

6.2.2 Les voies/voix collectives: la médianité, un carrefour identitaire.

S'il est évident que chaque expérience individuelle laisse une trace dans la collectivité dans laquelle elle s'inscrit et interagit, un groupe ethnique sera toujours un peu plus que la somme des individus le composant. Alors que nos entrevues ont révélé la diversité de l'expérience métisse, d'un autre côté, elles ont mis en évidence plusieurs similitudes qui permettent de dresser un tableau collectif du paysage identitaire et territorial des Métis au Québec. Au-delà d'une expérience personnelle de la vie, les Métis partagent de plus en plus le désir de se définir et de se bâtir un avenir qui leur soit commun. On peut certes déceler dans ce comportement les signes d'un nationalisme en émergence.

6.2.2.1 Un portrait de la présence matérielle métisse: la carte, les effectifs et l'organisation spatiale.

Le développement de programmes financés par les gouvernements fédéral et provincial à la fin des années 1960 a eu une incidence considérable sur la réalité socio-économique des Métis. Comme ce fut le cas pour les organisations politiques métisses dans les Prairies, la question de l'autonomie sociale et économique des Métis est devenue un *leitmotiv* pour l'AAQ, principal fournisseur de services à la population des Métis et des Indiens hors réserve (ou des Indiens non inscrit avant 1985) du Québec. L'Alliance a d'ailleurs dirigé et publié une étude mettant sur la sellette la médiocrité des conditions de vie et de logement de certains de ses membres, étude qui fut présentée au Gouvernement du Québec en 1975.

L'importance de la dimension matérielle de la réalité métisse s'affirme aussi à travers une carte (Figure 6.1) affichée sur le site Internet de l'Alliance²². Comme se fut le cas de plusieurs productions cartographiques métisses analysées au chapitre cinq, cette carte exagère passablement l'importance matérielle des Métis, bien que ce ne fut pas nécessairement là l'objectif visé par les auteurs de la carte. Premièrement, la carte met en évidence les divisions régionales de l'AAQ, lesquelles donnent l'impression que l'Alliance a un contrôle effectif et indiscutable sur le territoire et sur ses ressources et, du coup, qu'elle forme une entité territoriale indépendante du Québec. Cette impression est d'autant plus marquée que les divisions régionales de l'Alliance ne coïncident pas avec celles du Gouvernement du Québec. Deuxièmement, la carte tend à «homogénéiser» la distribution démographique des Métis et des Indiens hors réserve à l'ensemble de la représentation, gonflant ainsi visuellement les effectifs réels. Exception faite de l'extrême nord québécois, la carte présente une distribution démographique uniforme sur toute sa surface, laissant supposer que l'on retrouve le même nombre de Métis dans toutes les régions du Québec et que l'influence de l'Alliance est identique sur tout le territoire. Ce n'est évidemment pas le cas en réalité. Un coup d'œil rapide sur le dernier recensement canadien suffit pour constater que les regroupements métropolitains (Montréal, Québec et Hull-Ottawa) sont démographiquement plus importants²³. L'usage de points saillants, autant par leur taille que par leur couleur, et la mise en silence totale des municipalités québécoises et des réserves amérindiennes ajoutent d'ailleurs à cette accentuation cartographique des Métis et des Indiens hors réserve du Québec. S'il est vrai que le but premier de cette carte consiste surtout à représenter l'organisation de l'Alliance à l'échelle provinciale, il n'en demeure pas moins que l'image cartographique présente le fait métis comme dominant et homogène.

Mais qu'en est-il des effectifs métis au Québec? Quel est donc leur nombre et leur distribution spatiale dans les faits? La réponse à ces questions n'est pas évidente. Les «faits» concernant les Métis au Québec (comme partout ailleurs au pays faut-il s'empresser d'ajouter) dépendent largement de la manière de définir les Métis. Si on choisit le critère de l'auto-définition, on peut alors se référer au recensement canadien. Dans un tel cas, on apprend qu'il y a près de 16 000 personnes au Québec qui se sont identifiées «Métis» en 2001. Avec le critère de la reconnaissance (celle des organisations politiques) on arrive à une population métisse se

²² <http://aaqnaq.com/organization.htm>

²³ www12.statcan.ca/francais/census01/products/highlight/Aboriginal/Page.cfm?Lang=F&Geo=CMA&View=2a&Code=24&Table=1&StartRec=1&Sort=2&B1=Counts01&B2=Total

chiffrant entre 5 000 et 15 000 personnes²⁴. Enfin, si l'on s'arrête au critère de l'origine ancestrale (la preuve généalogique), on arrive à un tout autre résultat.

Des historiens démographes ont compté 16 mariages au XVII^e siècle entre indigènes et non-indigènes dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent. Ils en ont compté au total 125 entre indigènes et non-indigènes dans l'est du pays avant 1763. À partir de ces 125 unions là, on calcule qu'il y a environ 200 000 descendants [métis] (Commission permanente des institutions, Avril 17, 2003).

On le voit, avec autant d'écart entre les différentes approches, il est bien difficile de donner l'heure juste sur la présence matérielle métisse au Québec.

6.2.2.2 «Qui représentez-vous?»: la condition politique du fait métis.

La vie politique métisse au Québec fut marquée au début des années 1990 par un événement d'importance, soit l'entente de Charlottetown. Comme il fut mentionné dans le chapitre précédent, l'Entente reconnaissait les membres de la Nation métisse comme les seuls visés par l'article 35 de la Constitution, ébranlant du coup la reconnaissance des droits autochtones des autres Métis. C'est en réaction à cet événement que fut fondée, en 1992, la NMQ, une organisation reposant sur une structure gouvernementale autonome — indépendante du financement gouvernemental. Le premier geste concret de la NMQ fut sa participation active aux audiences publiques de la Commission royale (d'abord à Montréal en mai 1993 et ensuite à Ottawa en avril 1994), offrant des témoignages clefs qui ont d'ailleurs fait leurs marques dans le rapport final de la Commission²⁵.

Comme c'est le cas dans les Prairies, les Métis du Québec sont actifs sur la question de leur auto-définition. Cet exercice de définition est important, car il joue sur l'ampleur des effectifs métis et sur la nature de la représentativité des organisations politiques, deux conditions

²⁴ Estimations personnelles qui reposent sur les effectifs connus (et supposés) de la NMQ (500 à 1 000 membres), de la CMQ (environ 2 000 membres), de l'AMIHRQ (4 000 membres) et de l'AAQ (22 000 membres). Nous avons discriminé les Indiens non inscrits et hors réserve des deux dernières organisations et tenu compte des chevauchements possibles entre l'AAQ et les deux premières organisations (NMQ/CMQ). Notons au passage qu'il y a peu ou pas de chevauchements entre l'AAQ et l'AMIHRQ, et entre la NMQ et la CMQ.

²⁵ Le rapport final accorde en effet une place non négligeable aux «Other Métis», groupe incluant les Métis du Québec.

essentielles à une éventuelle reconnaissance politique des Métis au Québec. D'ailleurs, la première question posée par l'ancien ministre des Affaires autochtones du Québec, Rémi Trudel, lors de l'allocution de Pierre Montour devant la Commission permanente des institutions de juin 2003, fut justement relative au nombre de Métis représentés par la Corporation (Commission permanente des institutions, April 17, 2003).

En réponse, la CMQ lançait en novembre 2003 un appel à ses membres en vue de recueillir leurs impressions personnelles quant à cette définition (December 1, 2003). Le 29 novembre 2003, les membres de la CMQ se sont enfin arrêtés sur une définition dont les trois éléments clefs sont l'auto-identification, la reconnaissance du groupe et l'appartenance à une communauté historique (March 12, 2004). Cette définition est en tout point similaire à celle proposée par le jugement de la Cour suprême du Canada dans l'affaire *Powley*, rendu le 19 septembre 2003. De son côté, la NMQ a mis en place un code de citoyenneté pour régir les effectifs de la Nation sur le territoire québécois et pour procéder à l'énumération de ses membres — ou «citoyens» si l'on s'en tient à sa terminologie (September 28, 2001). L'organisation espère ainsi solidifier l'appartenance des Métis à cette nation distincte et s'assurer qu'aucun autre gouvernement que celui de la Nation puisse «par des législations, par négociations ou par tout autre moyen, s'ingérer, intervenir, empiéter sur le pouvoir souverain de la Nation Métis au Québec à se gouverner sur l'ensemble du territoire du Québec» (NMQ, March 14, 2000a). Ceci est un exemple éloquent de l'importance que la question de l'auto-définition prend dans la sphère politique métisse au Québec.

La correspondance entre la définition de la CMQ et les conditions imposées par la Cour suprême n'est pas fortuite. Elle montre combien la question des droits autochtones est incontournable dans la vie communautaire des Métis et en quoi elle est une source d'implication et de mobilisation politique. D'emblée, la position métisse est énoncée de manière on ne peut plus claire: les Métis, affirme la NMQ, n'ont jamais renoncé à leurs droits autochtones, à leur territoire ancestral et à leur culture distincte (*idem*). C'est en raison de ce combat pour le maintien de leurs droits territoriaux que certains Métis ont décidé de former la CMQ à l'automne 2001²⁶. Deux constatations sont au cœur de l'action de la Corporation. La première est que plusieurs Métis, pour ne pas dire la majorité, sont ignorants de leurs droits. La CMQ se donne

donc pour mission d'informer les Métis du Québec sur leurs droits et sur la manière de les exercer (CMQ, September 2, 2003). La deuxième constatation se base sur les propos de l'ex-juge en chef de la Cour suprême du Canada, Antonio Lamer, qui a invité les groupes autochtones à revendiquer au plus tôt leurs droits territoriaux, car une fois qu'un territoire est accordé à une nation, il l'est de manière exclusive (Commission permanente des institutions, April 17, 2003). En somme, la CMQ est mue par un sentiment d'urgence: les Métis du Québec doivent prendre conscience de leurs droits et se dépêcher de les revendiquer car ils pourraient bien les perdre à jamais.

Cette urgence d'agir a mis la Corporation sur la sellette depuis quelques mois. En mars 2003, elle a fait parvenir une lettre ouverte à la Cour suprême du Canada — tout juste avant que celle-ci ne se penche sur le cas *Powley* — l'enjoignant de considérer le peuple métis québécois dans son interprétation de la définition constitutionnelle des Métis au Canada. En juin de la même année, le directeur général de la Corporation partagea ses opinions sur la question des droits autochtones métis dans son allocution à l'Assemblée nationale inscrite dans le cadre des consultations publiques sur l'entente de principe avec les Innus: «Le peuple Métis», précise-t-il, «n'a pas été exterminé: ma présence à cette commission parlementaire et l'existence au Québec d'environ 200 000 autres personnes métissées le prouvent» (*idem*). Enfin et dernièrement, la Corporation prévoit déposer sous peu des actions en justice de plusieurs milliards de dollars «pour expropriation illégale du territoire métis en 1850» (CMQ, April 14, 2004).

On trouve un autre indice de l'activité politique métisse à travers l'organisation sociale et spatiale de la NMQ. Cette organisation a ceci de particulier qu'elle n'est pas incorporée et enregistrée, contrairement aux autres organisations métisses au Québec (comme l'AAQ ou la CMQ, par exemple), sous la Loi sur les compagnies. L'avantage de cette constitution (ou l'absence de constitution pour dire plus juste), c'est que la NMQ n'est pas assujettie à une structure organisationnelle imposée par la Loi; autrement dit, sa structure n'est pas arrêtée et reste ouverte en vue d'une formation originale, autonome et conforme aux opinions et aux besoins des Métis. Aux yeux de la NMQ, il appartient donc aux Métis eux-mêmes de définir la nature de leur nation et de leur gouvernement. Pour cela, bien sûr, il faut d'abord identifier les

²⁶ Malgré certains différends, la NMQ et la CMQ se rejoignent sur un point: les Métis forment au Québec un peuple autochtone distinct, reconnu par la Constitution et profitant du droit au territoire et à l'auto-détermination.

Métis et sonder leur opinion. C'est en somme ce que s'est donné pour mission la NMQ à travers une stratégie de recrutement de ses membres à deux volets. Le premier volet est classique et consiste à la formation de communautés à l'échelle régionale et locale²⁷. Chaque instance communautaire nouvellement créée est alors responsable du registre de ses effectifs, du recrutement des nouveaux citoyens et de la promotion de la Nation métisse dans une aire géographique particulière. Elle aura aussi, en temps venu, la responsabilité de consulter ses citoyens sur leurs opinions concernant la structure organisationnelle de la Nation. De cette façon, la NMQ met en place des assises territoriales effectives, une base militante et une structure hiérarchique inversée où la Nation est définie par ses constituantes communautaires. Évidemment, cette stratégie n'est pas à l'abri de toute influence extérieure. Le simple fait de faire correspondre les limites de la Nation aux frontières de la province et d'adopter les divisions régionales officielles du Québec est en soi un signe de l'influence des structures légales et territoriales de la société dominante. À cet égard, la carte (Figure 6.2) proposée sur le nouveau site Internet (en construction) de la NMQ est d'une éloquence exemplaire. Elle fut d'ailleurs empruntée au ministère des Ressources naturelles, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec²⁸.

C'est le deuxième volet de la stratégie de recrutement qui donne une couleur toute métisse à l'organisation de la Nation métisse au Québec. Ce volet repose sur la recomposition des clans familiaux émanant des anciennes familles souches métisses. Premièrement, cette méthode est avantageuse sur le plan pratique. Faisant usage des réseaux familiaux existants, ce type de recrutement s'avère plus facile et plus rapide que le précédent. En comparaison, les réseaux communautaires sont souvent inexistants à la base. En fait, parce qu'ils chevauchent souvent plusieurs régions géographiques, les réseaux familiaux peuvent parfois être instrumentaux à l'émergence de nouvelles communautés géographiques. Plus important toutefois est le fait que cette méthode de recrutement établit une distance face à la structure légale et territoriale du Québec et, dans un même mouvement, amorce un rapprochement symbolique avec les origines autochtones d'où émane pour l'essentiel cette conception clanique de l'organisation sociale²⁹. On peut trouver un parallèle historique avec les Métis de l'Ontario et du Manitoba. Selon Annette Chrétien (1996, p. 16), ethnomusicologue et Métisse, les communautés

²⁷ Le recrutement initial se fait en règle par la tenue d'assemblées générales. On met en place une communauté dès qu'il y a au moins dix citoyens impliqués.

²⁸ <http://www.mrn.gouv.qc.ca/regions/index.jsp>

historiques des Métis de l'Ontario correspondaient rarement à des communautés géographiques particulières. Elles étaient plutôt le résultat des systèmes de parenté et de l'occupation d'un rôle socio-économique particulier dans la traite des fourrures. Guy Lavallée parle aussi des systèmes de parenté comme la base de la vie communautaire historique des Métis de Saint-Laurent au Manitoba (1988, p. 155). En somme, la double stratégie de recrutement de la NMQ se situe à cheval entre l'adoption des structures québécoises et la promotion des traditions autochtones. À cet égard, la NMQ se veut sans nul doute une forme hybride d'organisation.

6.2.2.3 La médianité comme assise territoriale: la dimension symbolique de la territorialité métisse.

La spiritualité autochtone est possiblement l'élément symbolique le plus apparent chez les Métis du Québec. Cette spiritualité s'exprime d'ailleurs de diverses façons et à différents degrés. Il y a d'abord l'adoption de la philosophie autochtone (la Roue de la Médecine et les quatre points cardinaux³⁰) et la pratique de rituels et de cérémonies autochtones — la *Star lodge* et la cérémonie de la pleine lune pour ne nommer que ceux-là. Si certains se contentent d'assister à ces cérémonies, plusieurs autres y jouent un rôle particulier comme porteur de pipe, gardien de tambour (généralement la première étape chez un jeune) ou gardien de la suerie. Certains autres font la récolte du tabac ou de la sauge qui servent de dons ou d'entrées en matière dans la plupart des cérémonies. Les cérémonies prennent généralement place dans des lieux établis et spécifiques comme sur l'Île du Grand-Calumet³¹. La spiritualité se trouve aussi exprimée par le respect accordé à des objets spirituels tels que les pipes³² ou les capteurs de rêves. Enfin, la spiritualité peut aussi être vue comme une manière d'être Autochtone. Un individu du Témiscouata, pour qui les cérémonies autochtones ne veulent rien dire, a expliqué que pour lui la

²⁹ Il est utile de rappeler que la structure organisationnelle de la NMQ n'est pas encore arrêtée et qu'il est encore trop tôt pour dire si les clans familiaux seront ultimement représentés dans un éventuel gouvernement métis.

³⁰ Ceux-ci nous furent expliqués par des Métis du Bas-Saint-Laurent. L'«Est» représente le Soleil levant, l'endroit d'où vient l'humain, le symbole de la connaissance, de la sagesse, de la paix et de l'essence de la vie. Le «Sud» signifie la mère, la grand-mère, le feu de l'Amour et la croissance (naissance). L'«Ouest» concerne le cycle de toute vie en tout temps, le ciel, le pays de l'ours et la guérison. Enfin, le «Nord» est le pays des espèces blanches (bison, ours, lièvre, loup et hibou blanc), des grands vents, du froid, du repos, de la force et de l'endurance.

³¹ Il s'y serait d'ailleurs fait des cérémonies impraticables depuis 400 ans. Une autre aurait impliqué près de 300 personnes ainsi que «des vieilles pipes et des wampums sortis des coffres-forts des gouvernements».

³² On s'est même laissé dire à plusieurs reprises qu'un Métis québécois serait en possession d'une pipe ayant servi durant les négociations de la Grande Paix de 1701.

route 185 — une portion de la Transcanadienne — est un exemple de ce qui n'est pas métis. En plus d'être une coupure physique avec la nature, la route symbolise pour lui la vitesse et la perte de contact sensible d'avec ces rythmes naturels chers aux traditions autochtones.

Curieusement, les propos de ce dernier individu ouvrent la porte sur un autre élément symbolique important à la territorialité métisse, la médianité. En effet, alors que ce Métis condamne la 185 pour sa «vitesse», il avoue en même temps être un «fanatique d'Internet». Or s'il existe un phénomène qui représente le mieux ce que le philosophe français Paul Virilio (1995) a nommé «le temps de la vitesse de la lumière» — et qui prône ce que le philosophe considère comme la primauté des communications à distance sur le contact de proximité (ou sensible) — c'est bien Internet. Sans le vouloir et dans l'espace de quelques minutes, notre répondant s'est fait tour à tour défenseur des traditions autochtones et fervent de la modernité occidentale. Évidemment, une telle contradiction entre tradition/modernité n'a rien d'exclusif aux Métis et révèle tout simplement le degré de métissage auquel sont soumis tous les groupes autochtones (Le Gros, 2000). Ce qui diffère dans le cas des Métis, c'est qu'ils identifient ce métissage comme l'acte fondateur de leur identité et qu'ils considèrent la médianité comme la marque immuable de ce métissage. Ainsi, la médianité est le signe connectant l'identité métisse à son fondement originel.

Il existe plusieurs autres exemples de l'importance symbolique que prend la médianité dans le discours identitaire et territorial des Métis québécois. D'abord, on assiste à une multiplication des figures de style et des métaphores reliées à l'expression de cette médianité. Ainsi se fait-on dire que «les Métis sont des ponts entre deux cultures», qu'ils sont «ni l'un ni l'autre, un peu des deux» ou qu'ils sont «le produit matériel et spirituel de la rencontre de deux mondes... Culturellement et traditionnellement [ils se situent] au centre de la roue médicinale selon la philosophie qui nous est enseignée par les Anciens» (NMQ, March 14, 2000b). À ces expressions verbales correspondent aussi des gestes concrets et un symbolisme manifeste, comme cette veillée funèbre célébrée par deux cérémonies, l'une religieuse et l'autre avec chants et tambours autochtones. Sans être courante, une telle pratique n'en demeure pas moins un indice de l'intérêt croissant que les Métis du Québec ont à afficher publiquement, ce qui les distingue comme peuple autochtone.

Étant donné son importance dans le discours identitaire et territorial, il n'est pas étonnant que la médianité soit devenue le critère primordial définissant la réalité des Métis et qu'elle soit la source vitale de leur nationalisme. En fait, la médianité est aux Métis du Québec ce qu'est le *Métis Nation Homeland* pour les Métis des Prairies. Le discours de la médianité joue le même rôle que les cartes représentant le territoire ancestral métis au chapitre cinq. Les figures de style et les métaphores se chargent de transformer une réalité aussi complexe que la médianité en images simples, emblématiques et reconnaissables. On peut dire que chacune de ces images est un «*text-as-logo*» (Anderson, 1991, p. 175) qui présente la médianité comme un ciment collectif, comme le symbole de ce qui unit tous les Métis sur un territoire pré-déterminé, à savoir celui du Québec (Jenkins, 1997, p. 146). En d'autres termes, la médianité préside à l'inscription des Métis dans le passé, le présent et l'avenir du territoire québécois et en cela, elle s'impose comme leur «base territoriale». La cartographie métisse de cette base territoriale reste à faire³³.

6.3 Conclusion.

En dépit de la diversité des opinions partagées, on peut dire que le message principal qu'envoient aujourd'hui les Métis est simple et clair: ils forment au Québec une réalité historique et contemporaine incontournable et unique. Cette unicité ne repose pas tant sur des marqueurs spécifiques et originaux que sur une manière de réapproprier des marqueurs autochtones et non autochtones existants. Et c'est la *médianité*, la «condition d'entre-deux», qui opère une telle réappropriation et qui génère une appartenance identitaire et territoriale typiquement métisse. La médianité fait du Métis un être qui n'est pas tout à fait «Indien», ni complètement «Blanc», mais à cheval entre les deux. Elle est aussi derrière une conscience territoriale qui empiète simultanément sur les territoires «indiens» et «blancs». Pour les Métis du Québec, l'intermédianité n'est plus synonyme d'exclusion et de discrimination. Réfléchissant sur la place qu'ils occupent sur l'échiquier ethnique du Québec, les Métis ne se perçoivent plus comme vivant à la marge des sociétés québécoise et indiennes. Au contraire, la médianité est devenue un symbole de fierté, de mobilisation et d'affirmation.

³³ Une telle cartographie pourrait être centrée sur la représentation des «entre-deux» identitaires et territoriaux. En guise d'exemple, il serait possible, grâce aux données des recensements canadiens, de cartographier et de comparer la distribution et la densité relative des populations autochtones («Indiens», «Indiens non inscrits» et «Métis») et non autochtones et de mettre visuellement en évidence les chevauchements territoriaux à la base de l'existence métisse.

Malgré ce portrait favorable, l'avenir des Métis au Québec est loin d'être assuré. Leur reconnaissance officielle reste à obtenir. Bien qu'on assiste à une mobilisation accrue des forces politiques métisses du Québec et à une jurisprudence sensible aux droits métis du Canada (pensons à l'affaire Powley), l'affirmation du peuple métis québécois est une réalité encore toute récente qui n'a pas encore su imposer ses vues. À titre d'exemple, l'actuel ministre québécois aux Affaires autochtones, Benoît Pelletier³⁴, s'est empressé de «rappeler» en novembre 2003, à la suite de la décision de la Cour suprême du Canada dans l'affaire Powley, que les Métis ne forment pas au Québec, contrairement à ceux de Sault-Sainte-Marie, des communautés historiques (Bernier, 2003). En outre, la territorialité des Métis québécois ébranle les logiques de ségrégation socio-culturelle et spatiale ayant été au cœur de la question autochtone depuis la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle (Simard, 1990). Or, ces logiques prévalent toujours comme en fait foi le vaste programme de négociations territoriales que le Québec a pris près de vingt ans à mettre en place et qui définit les termes de sa relation au monde autochtone. Nul besoin de rappeler que les Métis sont exclus de ce programme et qu'en réécrivant l'Histoire, ils sont en voie, comme le traduisent si bien les propos de Daniel Pennac sis en exergue, de «foutre la pagaille dans la Géographie» québécoise. Il n'est pas sûr que cela jouera en faveur de leur reconnaissance officielle. Enfin, l'existence métisse, même contemporaine, fait toujours les frais d'une méconnaissance générale de la part de la société québécoise dans son ensemble et de la part des Premières Nations. On associe encore souvent la réalité métisse aux seules provinces des Prairies.

Quoi qu'il en soit, l'existence des Métis embrasse le Québec-Canada à même ses fondements. En se réclamant du métissage franco-indien historique et en faisant la promotion d'une autochtonité dont les assises reposent sur la logique des chevauchements identitaires et territoriaux, «les Métis jouent un rôle [...] dans le processus de guérison et de réconciliation entre les Premières Nations, les Québécois et les Canadiens» (NMQ, March 14, 2000b). Le Québec et le Canada peuvent-ils se permettre d'ignorer complètement la perspective métisse sans risquer de mettre en péril leurs efforts de rapprochement avec les nations autochtones?

³⁴ Membre insoupçonné d'une famille souche métisse!

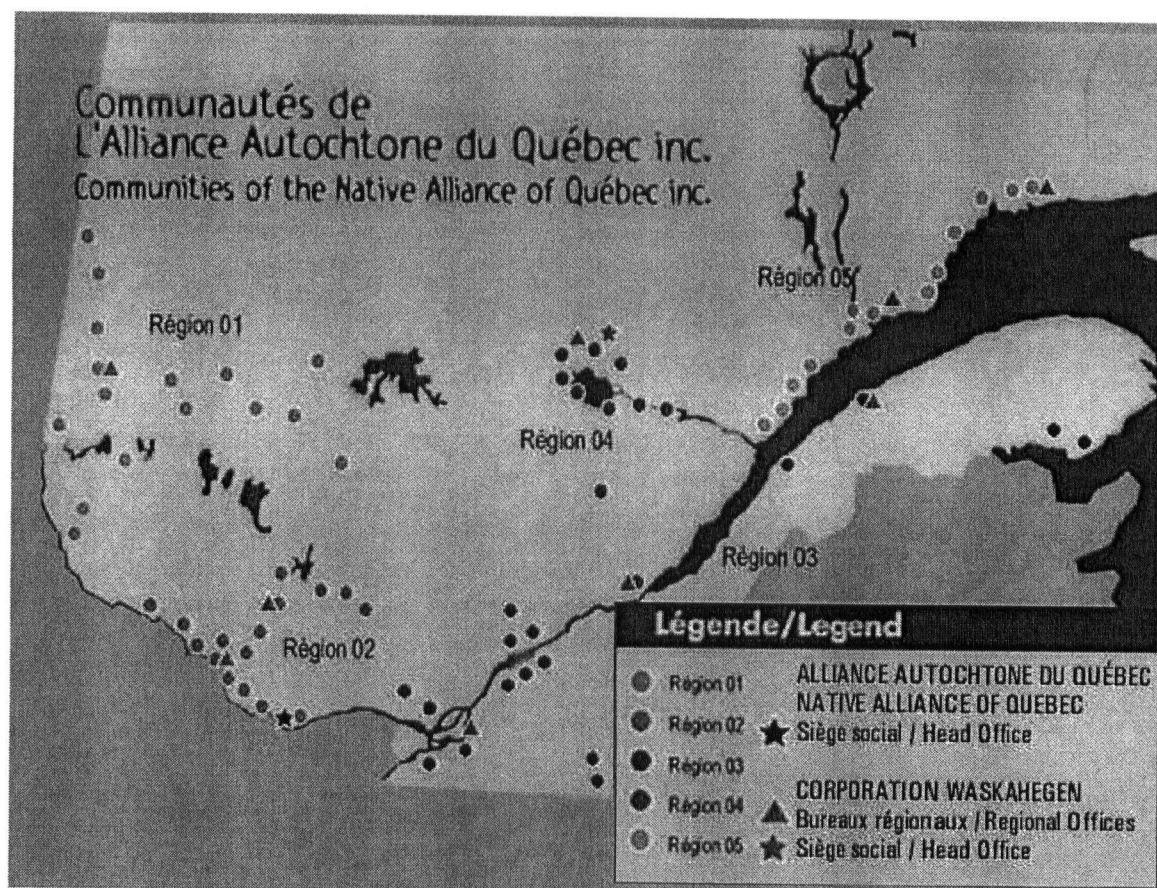


Figure 6.1 Alliance Autochtone du Québec, *Communautés de l'Alliance autochtone du Québec inc.*, February 17, 2004.

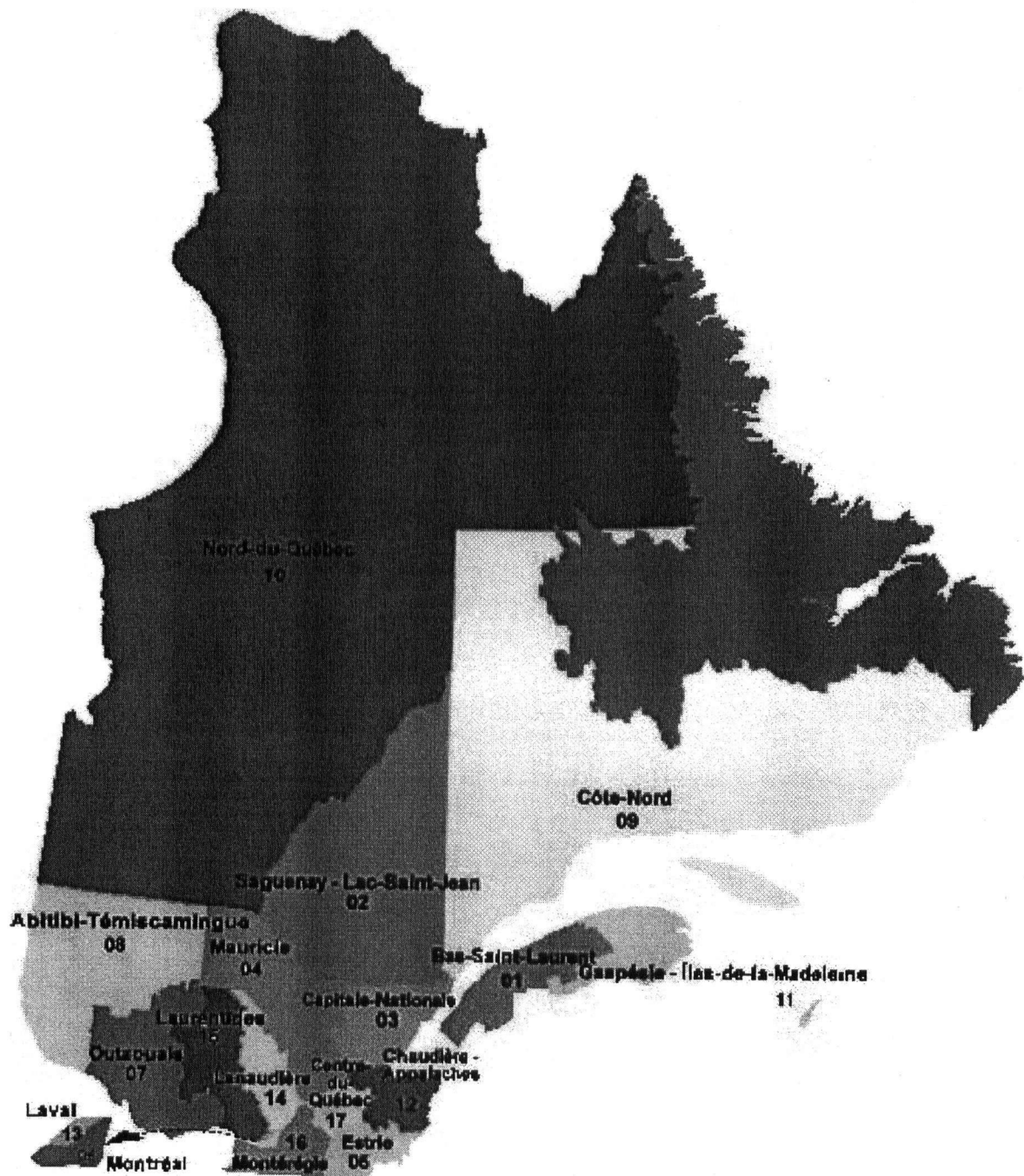


Figure 6.2 Nation Métis au Québec, *Carte géographique — communautés*, June 12, 2003.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Aboriginality & the Genealogy of the Future.

Le métissage, c'est quand le devenir et la direction où l'on va l'emportent sur l'origine, sur l'endroit d'où l'on vient.

— François Laplantine.¹

This thesis has argued that the *métissage* between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and the Métis geographies resulting therefrom, are fundamental to Canada. Without the “Métis,” Canada, if it existed at all, would be quite different. The chronological nature of this thesis reflects my intention to explore the changing patterns of Métis territoriality and to establish links between contemporary Canadian Métis groups and past Métis geographies. Such historical exploration has suggested links between distinct episodes of *métissage*. The role played by the *Canadien métissé* — born from the early French-Indian mixtures — in Métis ethnogenesis in the Northwest is clearly one example. However, “historic evolution” does not mean that each episode of *métissage* automatically built on the preceding to produce a specific way of thinking about *métissage* and of being Métis. As chapters 5 and 6 showed, contemporary Métis have various interpretations about what has made them historically distinct people in Canada.

These episodes of *métissage* offer a basis for comparison and help identify historic trends. In spite of temporal and regional differences, there are common elements in all of them. First, all of these *métissages* have imposed themselves as inescapable realities and, as a result, have forced contemporary Canadian authorities to make sense of them. Mental conceptions of *métissage* appeared from the first Euro-Indian intermingling during the French Regime. In order to impose their views upon North America, Europeans — first the French and then the British — had to conceptualise and rethink the nature of their relation with the “other,” the Indian. The making of a middle ground during the French Regime and the early British Regime is the best example (White, 1991). The emergence in the 19th century of the Métis nation in the *Nord-Ouest* also shook Euro-Canadian conceptions of themselves. The belief that cultural intermingling may result in an independent people was not part of early Canada’s understanding of *métissage*. The

¹ In Catherine Crépeau (2002). “Ethnopsychiatrie: Le métissage enrichit les cultures”, *L'Actualité médicale*, 23 (21); 17.

official recognition of Métis as Aboriginal people in 1982 marked another step in the country's mental image of *métissage*.

A second similarity — the fact that *métissage* always faced resistance in the form of *anti-métissage* — has also been consistent in Canadian history. *Anti-métissage* reminds us that the idea of *métissage* did not arise overnight and did not evolve straightforwardly to what it is today. The mental conception, *métissage*, was made of both advances and setbacks. While the *Canadien métissé* was taking part in the emergence of the Métis reality in the Northwest, *la bourgeoisie canadienne* denied that such people had ever existed in Québec and defended itself from “degeneration.” The rejection by both Ontario and Québec of Louis Riel's *République métisse* may be understood in the same way. These members of the Dominion could not accept a proposition that put societies they considered primitive on an even footing with civilised ones. The ideology of primitive people has been a recurrent ground for *anti-métissage*.

In-betweenness is the third common element that can be drawn from the Canadian experience of *métissage*. It is the fundamental constituent in the emergence and persistence of Métis territoriality. The maintenance of an antagonistic Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship has a great deal to do with the existence of the socio-cultural distance between these two ethnicities and the persistence of Métis people. Simply, the Métis have occupied the space left between two antagonistic ethnic categories, Indian and Euro-Canadian populations. This space had material dimensions. The Métis were so influential in the 19th century Northwest because they occupied a specific socio-economic niche left between Natives and traders (Ens, 2001). Such intermediacy in the Northwest also had political consequences. The Métis became the inescapable intermediaries in Native and Euro-Canadian interactions. The role played by Peter Erasmus, Louis Goulet and Norbert Welsh as interpreters reflected and confirmed the Métis intermediate political situation. These three interpreters also suggest the symbolic importance of in-betweenness for the Métis. They all took pride in their role as interpreters and were aware that their in-between condition made them essential in the Northwest. This shows that Métis distinctiveness relies less on the experience of *métissage* and in-betweenness — the Métis are not the only ones to deal with this reality — than on the fact they consider this experience to be central to who they are. As shown in chapters 5 and 6, this applies as well to contemporary Métis people.

A fourth similarity lies with the importance of maps in inscribing Métis geographies and territorialities, and, in so doing, in building mental conceptions of *métissage*. On the one hand, maps have reacted to the tensions between *métissage* and *anti-métissage* and are good indicators of the developments and resistances that lie behind ideas of *métissage*. The predominant mosaic image of the maps of the Québec territory after 1760 — where the townships, *seigneuries* and reserves are juxtaposed and thought of as ethnically exclusive — is an illustration. Maps were also important in “fixing” and “civilising” the mobile Métis on the 19th century Plains, and in presenting *métissage* as a step towards civilisation. On the other hand, maps have sometimes emphasised the importance of *métissage*. The representation of the Métis geography of *la Nouvelle-France* — outlined by the hybridity of maps — both reflected and shaped the French-Indian socio-cultural interaction at the margins of the French empire and the middle ground. As shown in chapter 5, maps are also central in giving concrete shape to the collective homeland of contemporary Prairie Métis and in feeding their collective consciousness.

Prairie and Québec Métis also offer a fertile field for comparison. I note two different, if complementary, tendencies common to both Métis peoples. First, and as noted above, Métis refer to past Métis geographies to make sense of their contemporary *vécu*. While the Prairie Métis outline the formation of their nation in the early 19th century, Québec Métis identify the importance of *les familles souches* in building the primary “*pays métis*” back into the 17th and 18th centuries. This way, both Métis peoples forge a historical discourse that gives them a primary role as founders of the country. Second, Métis issues question the Canadian conception of aboriginality. This conception is essentially static. Aboriginal peoples are classified and their “proper” activities and traditions are identified and enclosed in legal categories such as “Aboriginal rights” and “immemorial time.” “Indian,” “Inuit,” and even “Métis” are categories that do not take identity mobility and multiple identification into account.² On the contrary, Métis Aboriginal identity transcends these categories and reveals the failures and insufficiencies of Canadian legal and ethnic structures. It reminds us that Canadian and Aboriginal peoples are anything but fixed ethnic categories. In the same vein, the Métis’ unique Aboriginal identity also unsettles the widespread belief that Aboriginal traditions are unchangeable. If it were so, Aboriginal peoples would have ceased to exist many years ago when “civilisation” was brought

² It seems that Statistics Canada is more sensitive to the existence of identity mobility among Aboriginal peoples. Since 1996, it is possible for Aboriginal individuals to check more than one box when comes the time to identify their ancestry.

to them. In fact, traditions are re-actualised as societies evolve. As Evelyn Peters points out, “First Nations are attempting to participate in the global capitalist economy in order to preserve and enhance their cultural identities, values and languages, and to provide the economic base which will allow them, increasingly, to determine their own futures” (2000, p. 51). Although the Métis were not necessarily instrumental in the evolution of Aboriginal peoples, their existence reminds Canadians of the importance of *métissage* in the adaptation and the reinvention of Aboriginal traditions, and in the making of the socio-ethnic landscape of the country.

Indeed, there are also differences in the way Prairie and Québec Métis challenge Canadian reality and “truths.” Prairie Métis present difficulties for long-held conceptions of Canadian territorial integrity. Their land claims are in an advanced stage, although it is too early to say whether or not courts will rule in their favour. Canadians are challenged by the Prairie Métis land claims as they are not used to thinking that the Métis have any case for land. As I have said in chapter 4, Canadians generally consider they had dealt with the Métis land question before as they issued scrips to extinguish Métis Aboriginal title.³ Moreover, if Canadians are familiar with a material form of Indian land — the reserves — they have few similar landmarks, except for the Alberta Métis settlements, with which to make sense of Métis land. This is also complicated by the nature of the land claims, some of which involve large areas of land — the land claim of the Saskatchewan Métis covers nearly one third of the province — and some others include heavily populated regions such as Winnipeg.⁴ Despite the recent rise of Aboriginal rights awareness among Québec Métis, the question of their land base has not yet been raised in the province. However, the emphasis of the Québec Métis on “in-betweenness” challenges the simple classifications within which Canadian life has commonly been thought: French Canadian, English Canadian, and Indian. In a sense, even the Prairie Métis have become a “pure” ethnic category in Canada. As Prairie Métis have a substantial place in the historical narrative of the country, Canadians see in them not ambivalence or in-betweenness, but a clearly defined historic ethnic category. Prairie Métis have certainly accentuated this perception in narrowing their self-definition to the historic Métis Nation (or even to the historic *Rivière-Rouge* Métis). This is a definition with which most Canadian might agree, or with which they at least would be familiar. On the other hand, the Québec Métis appear to Canadians as a new reality that brings the

³ In turn, the Métis argue that the scrip system was a failure, they were dispossessed, and Ottawa has yet to come to terms with their claim.

possibility that questions bearing on aboriginality will never come to an end. How many of these “new Métis peoples” have yet to emerge and claim their distinctive Aboriginal identity?

But beyond these challenges, Métis territorialities also offer their share of constructive prospectives and unforeseen opportunities to Canada. Canadian experience of *métissage* and Métis peoples offers new perspectives on contemporary *métissages* that result from globalisation and transnational migrations. As a trendy idea, *métissage* is generally depicted as a new reality the outcomes of which remain uncertain. In defining themselves as the offsprings of historic episodes of *métissage* in Canada, the Métis question the novelty of contemporary *métissage* and present themselves as a tangible result of cultural mixture. They show that ambivalence and identity mobility do not necessarily provoke an ambiguous sense of identity. In fact, ambivalence may appear more obvious to external eyes than it is to those who experience in-between spaces. For example, in spite of his identity mobility and the ambivalence of his narrative, Louis Goulet never doubted his Métis identity. Contemporary Métis show the same confidence about themselves. This is not to suggest that contemporary *métissage* will or should create new Métis ethnicities (“Canadian-Chinese” for example). Rather, the point is that Canadians could better understand the socio-cultural effects of transnational migrations by recognising and exploring its past episodes of *métissage*.

Métis experience also provides a new way for Canadians to approach the past. Métis history reminds Canadians how significant *métissage* has been in the making of the country; it is not surprising that Prairie Métis occupy a recognisable place in the Canadian historical discourse. Even more important, there is a possibility to describe Métis history as a “success story,” in spite of the political and socio-economic obstacles they faced as a people. Métis history portrays a positive image of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in the country. It presents the Métis as the result of close relationships based on the interdependence between Euro-Canadians and Indians. This is at odds with the prevalent narratives of dispossession (Peters, 2000), primitive people, assimilation, and discrimination. Without proposing that Canadians should forget their past mistakes and mismanagement of Aboriginal issues, Métis history offers a rare occasion to recognise that relation between Indians and Euro-Canadians has been anything but a complete

⁴ Although the Manitoba Métis do not expect to have this land back, they do look for a fair compensation that would be worth billions of dollars.

failure. In this light, memory may represent something other than a historic burden, and may serve as a cornerstone of Canada's future (Létourneau, 2000, p. 22).

Viewed this way, I would argue that the idea of *métissage* and the Métis have a major role to play in the building of the Canadian future, and serve as a model for the way in which our society may approach questions bearing on aboriginality. The biggest challenge in contemporary Canada is to get Aboriginal peoples involved in the development of the country and to redefine "relationships between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal peoples" (Cairns, 2000, p. 80). As the Québec historian and editor Denis Vaugeois notes, the power of judges to rule on Aboriginal issues has greatly increased since the 1990s, and there has been a corresponding political abdication (1995, p. 11). And yet, the legal perspective has intrinsic limits. To conceive "aboriginality" strictly in legal terms is to overlook the fact that ethnicity is highly political — or "transactional" to use Jenkins' word; it relies as much on internal as external definition (1997, p. 53). The courts impose an external definition of aboriginality upon the peoples who are directly affected. As is shown in chapters 5 and 6, this is a concern that the Métis have raised; hence their eagerness to advance their own definition. The purpose of the courts is to define the nature of the collective rights of Aboriginal peoples as they are entrenched in the Constitution. It is not to discuss the place Aboriginal people should have in our society. It is crucial that Canadians initiate a reform of their political and social structures in order to make Aboriginal peoples feel they are heard and can contribute to the advancement of Canada. S. 35 of the Constitution should only be seen as a modest first step in this direction. The Canadian experience of *métissage* and in-betweenness proposes a political alternative to the courts and suggest a way to diminish the social distance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal by replacing this confrontational relationship within a socio-spatial logic made of identity and territory overlaps. This is a model that could allow the negotiation of a new social contract, the emergence of a refreshed aboriginality (Veilleux, 1982, p. 129) — one that is not firmly bounded forever — and the establishment of a new set of interdependencies, a new middle ground. Aboriginal peoples and Canadians already live on a common ground (or land) and must find a way to share it. One way to "share land" is to recognise everybody's right for a piece of the territorial cake. To do this is to follow the mosaic model and, as Nicholas van Shendel would argue (1994, p. 103), to choose a fragmented vision of the country. Another way to share land is to emphasise everybody's responsibility in preserving and developing the "common wealth." In other words, Canada can adopt the Métis model and get everybody involved in the management of a common space that

would be based on the recognition of the multiple ethnicities that comprise Canadian society and on "*la libre circulation des différences, de la traversée des frontières communautaires et du continuel chevauchement des cultures et des langues*" (*idem*).

Canadians are familiar with such an "in-between" model. Georges-Étienne Cartier's vision of Confederation was that it would respect English and French national differences, while creating a new political nationality based on fraternity (LaSelva, 1996, p. 39-42). However, there was no place in Cartier's perspective for Aboriginal people as equal partners in the development of his political nationality. "In his day," Harris says, "such a thought was out of the question" (2001, p. 203). Nonetheless, Cartier initiated the model that lies behind the dual Canadian legal system, which promotes both collective and individual rights (Laselva, 1996, p. 17).⁵ Although this model may sound paradoxical, it highlights the Canadian search for a legal middle ground. Many authors have also proposed political versions of such a middle ground by emphasising the importance of Aboriginal self-governance and land (Harris, 2001; Kimlicka, 1995; Laselva, 1996) or by attempting to redefine Canadian citizenship by adding *un petit plus* to reflect Aboriginal distinctiveness (Cairns, 2000). These propositions suggest that in-betweenness could be a source of inspiration, and could reveal itself as a cement of Canadian identity and territorial integrity (Morisset, 1983b). They are also similar to what Louis Riel proposed to do in the late 19th century. What the Métis leader and intellectual meant by "*Nous sommes Métis*" was not the melting of the two constituents of Métis identity, but their use for supporting a "supra-identity" that would allow "*la reconnaissance et l'amour filial*" of both constituents. Given its widespread recurrence in the historical geography of Canada, *métissage* between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is perhaps the meta-narrative of the country.

What such a meta-narrative proposes is a "genealogy of the future." In addition to its historical significance in Canada, *métissage* clears a path to the future of the country. When François Laplantine argues that *métissage* has more to do with fate than with origins, he portrays it as a cure for ethnic and genealogical absolutism and as a process of making and remaking ethnicity. To recognise the contribution of past Métis geographies and of the

⁵ This model has also generated the contemporary perspective of the "two founding nations," a perspective that allowed the "Indians" to object in arguing they were the "First Nations." Similarly, some Métis claim today that they are the only real "Native" people in Canada, for all others, including First Nations (about 10,000 years ago), have had once been "immigrants" in North America.

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