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A river cuts through it: the Métis on the two banks of the Ottawa River

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The Métis of Canada were included as an Aboriginal people in the Constitution Act of 1982, but in the intervening decades we have observed a great disparity in the political and legal treatment of the various Métis communities by the federal and provincial governments. The Métis of the Ottawa River are a telling case, reflective of the disparities entrenched by the provincial border separating Ontario and Quebec. In chronicling the history of this particular Métis community, primarily through unpublished sources, we demonstrate that there is a shared Métis experience and identity in Canada, but that a contiguous community has been arbitrarily divided by a provincial boundary whereby the community is recognized on one side of the divide but not the other. [Keywords: Métis, Canada, Quebec, history, politics.]

Cette rivière qui divise au Canada: les Métis de part et d'autre de l'Outaouais. Depuis la reconnaissance constitutionnelle des Métis canadiens en tant que peuple autochtone, nous observons une grande disparité dans le traitement politique et juridique des différentes communautés de la part des gouvernements fédéral et provinciaux. Les Métis de la rivière des Outaouais sont un cas de figure intéressant, reflet de cette disparité ici liée aux effets d'une frontière interprovinciale porteuse de paradoxes. En explorant l'histoire de cette communauté métisse, principalement à l'aide de documents inédits, nous démontrons la grande similarité des expériences identitaires métisses au Canada, mais aussi l'arbitraire d'une reconnaissance politique contemporaine calquée sur une frontière interprovinciale qui, historiquement, n'avait aucune incidence sur les principaux intéressés. [Mots-clés: Métis, Canada, Québec, histoire, politique.]

Este río que divide en Canadá: el pueblo mestizo de un lado y otro del Outaouais. Desde el reconocimiento constitucional de los mestizos canadienses como pueblo indígena, se observa disparidad en el tratamiento político y jurídico de las comunidades por el gobierno federal y los gobiernos provinciales. Los mestizos del río Outaouais son un ejemplo de esta disparidad vinculada a los efectos de una frontera

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entre provincias que trae paradojas. Explorando la historia de esta comunidad mestiza, principalmente con la ayuda de documentos inéditos, demostramos la gran similitud de las experiencias identitarias mestizas en Canadá, así como la arbitrariedad del reconocimiento político contemporáneo modelado por una frontera interprovincial que, históricamente, no tenía ninguna repercusión sobre los principales interesados. [Palabras claves: Mestizos, Canada, Québec, historia, política.]

A few theoretical precautions

The Métis on both sides of the Ottawa River face several challenges regarding the recognition of their ancestral rights.¹ Despite the inclusion of the Métis among the Aboriginal peoples of Canada since 1982, the tangible recognition of their existence and their rights is still the subject of legal struggles. Historically, the acquisition of Métis rights in Canada has never been easy. In particular, it took the *Powley* judgment delivered by the Supreme Court in 2003 to finally recognize a Métis “community” with constitutionally protected rights in Canada; in this case, in Sault Ste. Marie in Ontario. And, even when the Métis prevail in court, the exercise of their ancestral rights is *ipso facto* limited by a restrictive territorial approach, modeled on the territory that the community would have historically occupied before the effective takeover of it by the state.

The Métis population of the Ottawa River, a waterway which marks the border between the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, is particularly affected by these limitations. In fact, unlike the Métis who live on the Ontario shores, those on the Quebec side of the river have not yet won a legal or political victory that legitimizes their existence. Provincial and federal authorities therefore refuse to recognize the existence of historical Métis communities on the Quebec side of this region. Paradoxical situations follow where the Ontario government recognizes Métis (officially, since 2017²) who come from communities that are historically located in Quebec, while the Government of Quebec continues to ignore the claims of these very same people in communities located on its territory, such as the Métis community of Maniwaki or the cross-border community along the Ottawa River.

A series of documents indicates, in our opinion, that despite the provincial political boundary that has divided them for a century and a half, the Métis of the Ottawa River constituted a regional historical Métis community straddling

1. The names of the three authors are presented here in alphabetical order. They all contributed equally to the production of this article.

2. Although the official recognition of a first historic Métis community in Ontario dates to 2003, with the *Powley* decision, a similar recognition of the communities bordering Quebec, those along the Ottawa River, came in 2017, following a political settlement rather than judicially, through the courts. This agreement explicitly recognizes the so-called “historical communities,” documented in concert with the various actors involved. See Ontario (2017).

the current border dividing Quebec and Ontario, encompassing the territory between Fort Coulonge to the south and the head of Lake Timiskaming to the north. An examination of relevant archival documents allows us to better define the contours of this still largely unknown regional Métis community by illustrating the similarities between this population and other small better-known groups in the country—groups which are located outside the Red River Region of Manitoba. Indeed, although the Métis of the Red River Region are the best known, as they numbered there in the thousands, there were also many other regional Métis communities with smaller numbers, comparable to that of the Ottawa River, in the 19th century. They often comprised a few dozen families (see Kennedy 2014; Macdougall 2010; McNab and Lischke 2007). Like the Métis of the Ottawa River, many of these marginalized communities have left little in the way of written records attesting to their self-identification as Métis. Historical contingencies can nevertheless explain this phenomenon and incite us to explore indirect evidence attesting to their historical identity (Rivard 2020; St-Onge and Podruchny 2012).

We understand that the material discussed in this article may involve individuals who, though they may share common ancestors, have different ethnic identities (even multiple), identities which now could be deemed as irreconcilable. The fracturing of ethnic identities, despite the sharing of common Indigenous ancestry, is a reality that has been frequently observed where indigenous peoples have been adversely affected by colonialism (Lawrence 2012, p. 125-129; Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019, p. 49-63). It is particularly evident among the Métis of Canada.³

Taking into account this reality, our theoretical framework is inspired by the ethnohistorical approach known as “upstreaming” (Palka 2008). In this case, we begin with the narratives given by groups and families who identify as Métis and currently claim this identity on both sides of the Ottawa River and Lake Timiskaming, which divide the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. Our theoretical approach thus fully respects the chosen identity of the people concerned, and their familial and cultural history is examined in this article.⁴

3. We know that Louis Riel, for example, identified himself as French-Canadian, Métis, Half-breed, and French-Canadian Métis. He was the leader of the important resistance of the Métis in 1870 and 1885. The Métis merchant Johnny Grant, for his part, identified himself over the course of his life as White, Métis, and Indian (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019, p. 23; Ens 2001, p. 174; Grant 2008, p. 39, 100). It should also be noted that the strategic concealing of Aboriginal identities was a phenomenon observed historically elsewhere (Evans et al. 2007, p. 205-209). Moreover, we observe the same phenomenon among the Métis of the greater Ottawa River Region (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019).

4. These are Métis families associated with the Métis Nation of Ontario and families living on both sides of the interprovincial border, thus frequenting both provincial jurisdictions.

We are well aware of the tensions that this article may provoke as the Métis identity is the subject of political and ideological struggles across Canada, including in certain academic circles actively campaigning for the sole recognition of the Western Métis or that of the Métis Nation to the exclusion of all “other Métis” from Canada (Andersen 2014; Gagnon 2019). We also take into serious consideration the concerns of some people who may today identify as Algonquin (Anishinaabe) or Quebecer, and who could interpret our research on the “Métis” of Western Quebec as a desire to deny the identity they have chosen to embrace. In response to these concerns, we state that it is important not to reify or impose an ethnic identity contrary to that which might be chosen by the various descendants of common ancestors whom our work examines. In this sense, we adopt an ethnohistorical approach inspired by the work of Frederick E. Hoxie (1997), who suggests that ethnohistory can produce a coherent historical narrative of a phenomenon while taking into account various co-interpretations which may seem *a priori* contradictory. Applied to our work, this theoretical framework allows us to take into consideration the possibility of competing co-interpretations tied to shared ancestral connections now held by various groups, without sacrificing the goal of producing a coherent narrative about the overarching historical processes. By taking these precautions, we wish to avoid the trap that we call “identity *genealogical determinism*”: that is to say, of imposing an ethnic identity on the descendants of an ancestor according to the identity that we attribute, rightly or wrongly, to the latter. In other words, the descendants of an ancestor whom we consider to be Métis can very well identify today as Algonquins, Métis, Canadians, or Quebecers (or even cumulatively hold more than one identity), and vice versa; this, as a result of diverging identity trajectories that must be studied respectfully. Moreover, these identities may have been adopted or transformed several generations prior.

This caution noted, the methodology regarding the study of the historical identification of the Métis of the Ottawa River remains, however, resolutely empirical and comparative. Indeed, despite the generational changes in ethnic self-identification, we believe that it is possible to identify the presence of historical Métis in different regions of Canada according to cultural characteristics and traits, and this is also true of the Ottawa River Region. Our empirical focus will, moreover, target the structuring role of kinship relations in the constitution of human societies, following a Lévi-Straussian tradition taken up today by many specialists of North American Indigenous communities (Hogue 2015; Macdougall 2010; St-Onge and Podruchny 2012; Wilson and Inkster 2018). In the case of the Métis of the region under study, archival evidence further suggests that unions between Métis families are not only influenced by marital, symbolic, or kinship taboos, but also shaped by shared experience such as racial discrimination affecting both their options of potential marriage partners due to their Indigenous ancestry and to their exclusion from official “Indianness” by the

colonial authorities. More precisely, our analysis allows us to better understand the effects of the patrilineal codification of official Indian identity, which lies at the heart of attempts by some Métis families to take control of the Timiskaming reserve in the 19th century. These political machinations illustrate the existence of a historical Métis community in this region of Quebec. Our research also allows us to question the territorial delimitations of the legal recognition of communities, which does not seem to correspond to the historical and cultural realities of the Métis of the cross-border Ottawa River.

In order to avoid any confusion around the terminology used in this article, it should be noted that our use of the term “Métis” refers to an ethnic framework, rather than a racial or a national structure. Its use in texts from past eras is often equivocal and may reflect different local realities. This is why we believe that all of the evidence must be considered in a holistic and integrated analysis to determine whether or not a sociologically distinct Métis group or community appears alongside a neighboring Native American group. In the same vein, in order not to reify individual identities, we will sometimes speak of Métis individuals living in a First Nation group, or vice versa, taking into account the individual comings and goings of members of a group crossing social boundaries. This avoids the ambiguity associated with the use of a multitude of terms tying the ethnonym “Métis” to the concept of being merely “mixed” (rather than being part of a distinct Métis culture). By “Métis culture,” we mean the syncretic cultural complex resulting from the occupational niche occupied in the fur trade (which featured traits such as multilingualism, Christian religion, use of log cabins, etc.⁵); and “Métis community,” the grouping of Métis families sharing the same historical experience linked to their ethnic designation, as well as a kinship network, and collectively differing in various ways from the local Native American population. For the purpose of this study, it is indeed important here to distinguish between different existing groups or cultures, rather than fixating on the assumed ethnicity of individuals who may well follow various identity paths during the course of their lives. These combined theoretical approaches and precautions will therefore help us to develop a historically coherent account, one which does not fall into the trap of identity essentialism against a background of genealogical determinism, but which remains empirically informed while examining the possible existence of a historical Métis community along the Ottawa River.

Furs, Anishinaabe, and Métis on the Ottawa River

Many studies have shown that the fur trade of the 18th and 19th centuries was the birthplace for the emergence of a Métis identity north of the Great Lakes

5. This question is examined in great detail by Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte (2019).

and in Western Canada (Devine 2004; Ens and Sawchuk 2016; St-Onge and Podruchny 2012). Fewer studies have explored a similar phenomenon in the Ottawa River Region (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019; Chrétien 1996, 2012; Malette and Marcotte 2017; Marcotte 2015, 2018). The fur trade on this river has, however, a rich history involving a Métis population, the result of unions between Euro-Canadian traders and Aboriginal women. The fur trade on the Ottawa River dates back to the French Regime in Canada (1534-1763), when this waterway became the gateway to fur-bearing lands, following the decline of the access route that had been used along the Saguenay River. By taking a Great Lakes route, the fur traders reached the so-called North-West, following a network of lakes and canoeable rivers. After the fall of New France, many adventurers continued to use the “Grand River” (the Ottawa) in search of business opportunities. A new network of trading posts thus emerged on the ruins of the old ones. It follows that the Ottawa Region remains, even after the British conquest, a “highway” for flotillas of canoes carrying goods, furs, and personnel linked to this trade economy. The Ottawa Region then becomes this “frontier” region, where the main issue for the fur trade companies is the tracking of so-called independent fur traders (or Freeman) on the ancestral territory of the Anishinaabe (or Algonquins). Despite its proximity to Montreal, the upper Ottawa River retained its fur trade patina, at least until the mid-19th century (Ouellet and Dionne 2000, p. 39-40).

The first references to the presence of a Métis community on the Ottawa River date back to the 18th century as recorded in the regional oral tradition of the 19th century (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019, p. 201; Mather 1880, p. 144). Certain sectors of the Ottawa River are particularly popular with the Métis, such as the Fort Coulonge region, for example, which was an important transit zone for canoe brigades, and a rendez-vous locale for fur trade company personnel (Marcotte 2018, p. 120-124). Opposite Fort Coulonge, the La Passe settlement was particularly renowned in the 1830s for its Métis population associated with the fur trade (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019, p. 79; Shirreff 1831, p. 265). This Métis presence is also manifested diffusely, outside of a more rigid territorial occupation that one could describe as a “village.” All along the Ottawa River, several observers report the presence of Métis, often grouped into small parties of independent and itinerant fur traders (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019, p. 62-63, 87, 89-90, 96; Marcotte 2018, p. 275-277).

Clearly, the long commercial route that constitutes the Ottawa River provides an overview of a historical Métis community with a regional and diasporic character. In the 1840s, the McKenzie family, for example, independently ran a fur trade network, active between the posts of Lac-des-Allumettes, Nipissing, and Mattawa in the south, and Timiskaming in the north (HBCA, E.41/10, f. 40; Marcotte 2018, p. 119, 172, 178, 188-189, 194, 225). Other families such as the McBrides or the Langevins, for their part, often traveled between the head

Fig. 1 – The Ottawa River and the locales mentioned in the text
(G. Marcotte)

of Lake Timiskaming, the Timiskaming trading post, and that of Mattawa, later in the century (BAnQ-RN 1885, January 24, May 23, July 14 and 19, August 27, October 14). This geographic mobility is largely dependent on the administration of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which regrouped the trading posts into districts, and where goods and furs were channeled between the associated posts. We also know that fur traders saw these communities as part of a larger Métis general population, one still associated with the fur trade.

In 1846, the Governor of the HBC in America, Sir George Simpson, confirmed this close connection of the Métis of Northeastern Ontario and Western Quebec and the fur trade in a letter sent to the company's depot in Lachine (near Montreal): "Orkneyemen or Southern Halfbreeds are better adapted for that part of the Country than Canadians" (HBCA, D.4/34, f. 98). In this letter, Governor Simpson refers to the competition in the fur trade in the region just west of Lake Timiskaming. He identifies the ethnic groups which he believes permit the most effective employees to be recruited to work for the HBC in this sector. He thus compares the "Southern Halfbreeds" to two other ethnic groups: the Orcadians (islanders of the Orkney Islands, in Europe), and the Canadians (French). In doing so, Simpson refers to the Métis of the Southern Department (Northeastern Ontario and Western Quebec), which can be contrasted here with the Métis of the Northern Department (also known as the North-West), both falling under the administration of the HBC (Marcotte 2017, p. 37-38). This mention of the "Southern Halfbreeds" as the employees favored by Governor Simpson is in addition to several other collective and distinctive descriptions that we have listed in a work on the Métis of the Gatineau River, a contiguous region (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019). Simpson's letter confirms, once again, that the Métis of this frontier region were then considered a distinct group

from Europeans and, strictly speaking, “Indians”; otherwise, the Governor of the HBC would naturally have used the latter term, which is quite common in his correspondence. In addition, the population mentioned by Simpson appears sufficiently large for it to be assigned a particular geographic referent (Southern), distinguishing it from other Métis populations, such as the Métis of the Prairies (or Red River Half-Breeds).

A Métis community at Lake Timiskaming?

Governor Simpson’s mention of the “Southern Halfbreeds” raises the question of whether a historical Métis community did indeed exist in the more immediate region of Lake Timiskaming. A series of documents does seem to confirm the presence of such a community at the head of Lake Timiskaming, starting in the 1850s. This small Métis community was centered on the figure of an illustrious patriarch, Métis interpreter and clerk William Polson. Born in James Bay in the 18th century, Polson had a long career in the North West Company and the HBC, mainly at Abitibi (Mitchell 1977, p. 217). In 1837, the missionary Louis-Charles Lefebvre de Bellefeuille reported that the Polson family was to settle on a farm in Lower Canada (Bellefeuille 1840, p. 59). In the 1850s, Polson was still in the service of the HBC, and he was even persuaded to stay for a while, since taking possession of his farm could not be done without challenges and expenses (HBCA, D.5/28, f. 315). Not giving up on his initial farming project, however, Polson embraced a new opportunity with his son-in-law, Métis Angus McBride, also an interpreter. In 1857, we learn, “the man hitherto in charge (Angus McBride) has left the service and intends to join his Father in law PM [postmaster] Polson at the head of this lake [Timiskaming] on a farming speculation” (HBCA, B.134/c/75, f. 137).

It was around this figure that a group of related families tied to the fur trade gradually formed a community at the head of Lake Timiskaming. This locale then included the Timiskaming reserve. Created in 1853, at the head of the lake of the same name, and very close to the present-day Ontario border, this reserve was established following requests from Bishop Guigues, the Bishop of Bytown, as well as Algonquin delegations. It should be understood, however, that when old William Polson settled at Head of the Lake with his family in 1856, he was doing so with the intent of taking residence near the reserve and not as an Algonquin, but rather as a “settler” interested in farming and trading. It should be noted that the HBC was also very aware of the presence of this recent freemen community or settlement,⁶ which the company then wished to disperse or at least control, as it feared an association of independent fur traders:

6. The freemen were former employees of the fur trade companies who, once their contracts had expired, decided to reside in the “Indian Country” to pursue a life of hunting and trading as free agents, often accompanied by their Indigenous spouses and their children.

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Fig. 2 – Lake Timiskaming and the locales mentioned in the text in addition to contemporary localities to serve as points of reference (G. Marcotte)

Something should be done without delay in dispersing or securing the services of the Polson Family, and in my opinion securing them would be the better policy, in the course of a year or two they will be penniless and seeing starvation staring them in the face, it will be but natural that they should close any party's offer to save them from such an alternative. (HBCA, D.5/45, f. 299b)

In a letter dated December 28, 1857, Governor Simpson concurred and wrote:

[Polson and McBride] and other family connexions, have established themselves at the head of Temiscamingue Lake, as settlers. Their presence there may prove inconvenient: we shall therefore, endeavor to break up the party, by binding them over to the support of the Company's interests. (HBCA, D.4/54, f. 30)

A few days later, Simpson wrote to the officer posted at Timiskaming giving him similar instructions concerning what he named the "settlement of Polson, McBride and other retainers" (HBCA, D.4/54, f. 45). We are thus well and truly in the presence of a "settlement" or a community perceived as being independent of both the Indian reserve (incidentally considered uninhabited) and the trading post (located farther to the south). This community had the reputation of being constituted almost exclusively of individuals qualified as "settlers," Métis or Half-breeds, according to the sources.⁷ In fact, eight years

7. The small Métis community of Head of the Lake was formed at the outset by the Polson family, which included at least three adult children as well as Polson's son-in-law Angus McBride. For more information as to the Métis ethnicity of the Polsons and McBrides, see

later, in 1865, an agent of the HBC (Charles Stuart) further wrote on the topic of those people who live “in their own way,” when he described the outsiders residing around the lake:

No less than four Priests resides constantly at Temis[camingue] and are making a fine place of the point right opposite accross the strait. Kennedy is shantying in the bay above them, & Jolicoeur at Point la Barbs. The McConnells still at the old place below. There are two other parties in the lake but I do not know exactly where, besides several Settlers & two Taverns. Polson however is the only one above the Fort who, with his family, & their families, are living comfortably in their own way. The old man is holding out well. He is quite smart & lively – He Trades but deals entirely with the C°. Old Belleface is gone.⁸ (HBCA, E.41/14, f. 16b)

Note that the formulation “living comfortably in their own way” suggests the observation of a distinctive way of life that is attributed here to the community of Head of the Lake. It should also be noted that this community welcomed many other former members of the HBC in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, which had the effect of establishing a larger community of freemen and Métis families originating from different regions in the same locale. Among these newcomers were James King/Roy, James Ellison/Elson (the latter two natives of James Bay), William Chromalty (a native of Lake Superior), Michel Thompson, James Stanger (who was employed at Grand Lake Victoria), and Jean-Baptiste Aubichon, an old member of the HBC from Sorel who came to join his Métis daughters married to Polson’s sons and to James Ellison (BANQ-RN 1863-1885, f. 11; BANQ-RN 1885, January 24, July 19; Gougeon 1880, p. 230-231; HBCA [n.d.], Thompson; HBCA, B.82/a/3; B.135/g/38; Marcotte 2017, p. 56-60, 203-206). This singular demographic composition is significant because it not only illustrates the endogamic composition of a community that is woven together through unions between Métis families, but also highlights the diverse Indigenous origins of the Métis, showing that those families are not solely of local Algonquin origin.

A hypothesis has been raised that the Métis became more “visible” at the end of the 19th century due to a gradual disappearance of the Algonquins deemed to be “pure,” to the benefit of increasingly mixed-ancestry Algonquin individuals (Inksetter 2017, p. 386-387). A closer reading of the documentary sources,

Marcotte (2018, p. 276), Mitchell (1977, p. 189) as well as Ouellet, and Dionne (2000, p. 113-114).

8. Although the last sentence presented here (“Old Belleface ...”) refers to a Native American woman from the lake, it is apparent that Stuart’s comment on Polson’s settlement is related to the descriptions of the outsiders of the lake that include Polson. The use of the adverb “however” ties Polson’s settlement to the previous descriptions of the Catholic mission, logging yards, settlers, and taverns, making Polson an outsider at Lake Timiskaming, not a local Indian.

however, shows that such an interpretation is erroneous and problematic. It is erroneous because the emergence of the Métis settlement at the head of Lake Timiskaming was rather due to the significant arrival of Métis freemen in the area, a phenomenon that significantly changed the demographic and political composition of the local population. As we have mentioned, from a few related families in the 1850s and 1860s (Polsons and McBrides, mainly), the Métis community established at Head of the Lake grew with the arrival of several Métis families from the fur trade, coming in from diverse geographic and ethnic Indigenous backgrounds.⁹ This interpretation of the Métis as “mixed” Algonquins is also problematic because it risks erasing the cultural and political memory specific to these Métis. The identity of these Métis is indeed much clearer if we consider the type of ethnic heritage involved and the occupational niches linked to their experience of freemen (see Marcotte 2018). In short, the Métis of Timiskaming cannot be confused with or reduced to Algonquins who would be called “Métis” (or Halfbreeds) simply because they were of mixed heritage. Rather, the ethnocultural composition of the Lake Timiskaming community reinforces, by its similar characteristics, the theory of a mobile and diasporic transcontinental Métis identity, whose rhizomatic and diffuse cultural structure emerges mainly through the fur trade, including in the regions of Northeastern Ontario and Western Quebec (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019; Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Malette 2016; St-Onge and Podruchny 2012).

Métis or simply Algonquins with mixed ancestry?

From the 1880s, many contemporary observers continued to record various remarks about the Métis community of the Ottawa River. The diversity of their occupations further supports their credibility. On this subject, we find observers associated with the fur trade, the Catholic missions, Indian Affairs, as well as the oral tradition of the Métis themselves. Note that the Algonquins also explicitly recognized the Métis group, a fact that will be discussed later.

Among the distinctive cultural practices associated with the Métis is the presence of a “lived” Christianity or a greater readiness to embrace Christianity among the Métis (Stone Circle Consulting, and Know History 2015, p. 43-44; Jones [n.d.], p. 75, 83, 88; Champagne, Beal, and Ghostkeeper 2005, p. 40, 42, 47; Pigeon 2017). The Métis have indeed the reputation of being rather

9. This point is essential to understanding the dynamics and competition between Métis and Algonquin within the Timiskaming reserve in the following decades. The full social integration of some Métis families into the reserve was not accomplished until the beginning of the 20th century. Although it is undeniable that some actors perceive a slow decline of the Algonquin population while observing at the same time the increasing presence of Métis groups, it would be wrong to suggest that the latter are only mixed Algonquins—especially when we know that many did not even have any Algonquin ancestry.

fervent Christians, as Louis Riel points out in his writings.¹⁰ It is possible to associate this trait with a principle of patrilineal transmission, the Métis child generally receiving the family name, religion, and often the occupational niche of the father, who was of predominantly French-Canadian or Scottish origin; missionaries passing through Mattawa in the mid-19th century have called a kinship structure founded on a Euro-Canadian father and an Aboriginal mother “custom” (Prud’Homme 1895, p. 160).

This particular religious devotion was noticed among the “Scottish Métis” of Head of the Lake by the priest Jean-Baptiste Proulx as early as the 1880s. We can suppose that it is with a good knowledge of what constitutes Métis culture and identity—as he had been a missionary in Manitoba during Louis Riel’s first armed resistance—that Proulx wrote these passages dealing with the Métis community of the Ottawa River (Dorion 1994). Proulx, who in 1881 accompanied Bishop Duhamel to the upper Ottawa River, wrote that “many families of Scottish Métis are gathered there; there is evening prayer in common, under the stars; all understand English; Mr. Robert begins his ministry by reciting the rosary” (Proulx 1885, p. 42; our translation). The vocabulary he uses in his descriptions of the Métis of Lake Timiskaming is indeed the same as that used in the North-West, where a Scottish Métis (or English Métis) community also rubbed shoulders with a French-Canadian Métis community (Taché 1869, p. 65). Although, in most of the territory once covered by the fur empires of North America, the French-Canadian Métis outnumbered the others, it seems that in Lake Timiskaming it was the Scottish Métis who dominated demographically, hence the more numerous specific mentions of them.

The missionary Proulx was not alone in perceiving a Métis community distinct from other groups on the Ottawa River.¹¹ The Missionary Priest Father

10. Louis Riel writes that the Métis “are Christians” (Riel 1985, p. 273). This is not to suggest that the “Indians” do not adopt the Christian religion themselves. It should be understood that we are talking about a distinctive (and not distinct) cultural practice that is not unique to the Métis. Our use of the term “distinctive” means that this cultural practice may be shared by other ethnic groups (e.g. French Canadians or Algonquins), but that finding Christian beliefs among the Métis as a predominant trait provides a sharper outline of the social and cultural ensemble under study.

11. Meanwhile, the same distinction between Métis and Algonquin groups was still emerging from the pen of a fur trader, Colin Rankin, himself well aware of social distinctions both in his region and in the commercial empire of the HBC in general. In 1888, Rankin was responsible for the district of Timiskaming, which is based in Mattawa, but which includes a geographic area extending north to Lake Abitibi. In his annual report submitted to the directors of the company, Rankin refers to the Métis Angus McBride in these terms, which show that he understands the Aboriginal population as being made up of Indians and Métis: “Angus McBride is an old Postmaster and settled at the head of the Lake [Timiskaming]. He has great influence with the Indians and half Breeds” (HBCA, B.312/e/2, f. 4b). If McBride had been influential in only one community formed by the Algonquin

Calixte Mourier also offers a wide variety of written descriptions detailing the ethnic composition of the region. In a mission journal for Lake Timiskaming, dated 1885, Father Mourier often referred to the “Métis of the Lake.” One of the most striking passages in his journal remains the “census of our Indian and Métis families” carried out on November 3. This census should be understood as relating to the establishment of Head of the Lake, where the fathers have just celebrated mass. The list interestingly follows the order given in its description. In other words, the list is carefully composed in the first part of exclusively Algonquin names, followed by exclusively European names, which suggests that Father Mourier classified the population into two distinct ethnic groups. The list begins with 18 heads of Algonquin families, accompanied by spouses and children. There follows a list of 21 heads of families with European names, also accompanied by spouses and children. We find, in this second listing, almost all the names already associated in our study with the freemen of the HBC: Stinger, Aubichon, Polson, Ellison, King, McBride, etc. (BAnQ-RN 1885, November 3).¹² It thus can be suggested that this categorization reflects the perception that there are at least two Indigenous communities at Head of the Lake: one Indian (Algonquin) and the other Métis. Moreover, in an “excursion” report offered to the new settlers of Lake Timiskaming, Father Mourier also evokes the collective character of the “Scottish Métis” of Head of the Lake. He describes the two main components of the agricultural establishment along two distinct ethnic categories, the Indians *and* the Métis: “About ten of the Indians gathered on this reserve and seven or eight Scottish Métis have built homes and cultivate the land. The latter especially have magnificent farms” (BAnQ-RN 1885, “Report of the Excursion,” f. 4; our translation).

We can here infer that, if all the farmers in the vicinity of the head of Lake Timiskaming had formed only one largely homogeneous ethnic group, differentiated only by their degree of mixed ancestry, Father Mourier would not have put in the effort to distinguish the Indians and the Métis, all the while stressing that the Métis are better at farming. This type of distinction observed between the Métis and the “Indians” is not anecdotal in his writings. In a second document on the mission of Timiskaming, Father Mourier again offers several comparative

band of Timiskaming, with some mixed members, Rankin would have had no need to distinguish between the two groups.

12. This classification is solely that of Father Mourier and does not necessarily reflect the way which the Algonquins and Métis identified themselves, as they may have acted outside genealogical criteria when it came to community acceptance. There are indeed Métis who will fit both politically and culturally into the Algonquin community, as we will see in the next section. But the fact remains that Father Mourier classifies, in a census, the inhabitants of Head of the Lake Timiskaming, numbering 184, into two very distinct categories, as much in the very description of the census (“Indian and Métis families”) as in the ordering of names on the list.

descriptions of the three main ethnic cohorts of the population living around the Timiskaming lake. In an entry dated December 31, 1885, he specifies that certain individuals will “start the year with the Indians and the Métis” at Head of the Lake (BAnQ-RN 1885, December 31; our translation). In doing so, he uses the same ethnic classifications when describing the inhabitants of Lake Timiskaming as he does (elsewhere in his text) for the population of the Red River Colony, Manitoba, namely Whites, Métis, and Indians (BAnQ-RN 1863-1895, f. 14). In the summer of 1881, Father Mourier described the passage of Bishop Duhamel on his way to Abitibi. On this occasion, he offers an extract from a travelogue, probably taken from another document written by a colleague:

At Head of the Lake [Timiskaming] some twenty families, Indians, Métis, and Settlers have raised their homes and started clearing land, which gives the place a little air of civilization. Mr. Angus McBride is one of the oldest residents of this place, which is a vast land of Colonization, which we will speak about at the right time. (BAnQ-RN 1863-1895, f. 40; our translation)

When Father Mourier continues the discussion in his own narrative account, his entry from January 29, 1882, makes a similar remark about the Métis of the lake present at the funeral service of Hilarion Massinakijik, the late leader of the Algonquins of Timiskaming:

His service having been solemnly sung at Head of the Lake by Father Mourier in the midst of all the Indians, all the Métis, all the Whites gathered for the mournful occasion, he had only one Libera sung at his burial, especially since there was hardly anyone here [at the lake mission, further south]. (BAnQ-RN 1863-1895, f. 55; our translation)

On January 7, 1884, Father Mourier offers a near-identical description, this time in connection with a Métis marriage: “Needless to say that all Whites, Métis, Indians, took part in the festivities and at the feast that day” (BAnQ-RN 1863-1895, f. 66; our translation). On August 3, 1884, Father Mourier once again distinguished the Métis from the other “Indians,” this time presenting the small communicants, “25 Métis and Indian children” (*ibid.*, f. 68; our translation). This clarification is reminiscent of another passage, in which two “little Métis children,” namely, David and Juliette Langevin, are sent to the Saint-Joseph orphanage, arranged by the clerics (*ibid.*, f. 63; our translation). On August 19, 1883, Father Mourier even used another collective type of formulation about the “people of Head of the Lake,” who can be deduced to be the Métis of Head of the Lake as they are distinguished from the “Whites” and “Indians” of the region: “Today, Sunday of the traditional procession, many people at mass. All the Whites of the neighborhood, the people of Head of the Lake and our Indians were present” (*ibid.*, f. 63; our translation).

It should be emphasized that Father Mourier often specifies who these Métis are by individual designation, including the Chromalty, Stinger, Thivierge,

Langevin, Lafricain, Taylor, etc., and all of these individuals were tied to the fur trade and a way of life that can be described as linked to Métis culture (BAnQ-RN 1863-1895, f. 45, 50, 55, 67, 68, 72).

Just before the turn of the 20th century, other observers continued to note this Métis presence at Head of the Lake. Oblate Father Joseph-Étienne Guinard, then on a trip to James Bay for his first mandate as a missionary among the Indigenous peoples, describes in his memoirs the population he met at Head of the Lake in 1892: “We arrived late at North-Timiskaming, Indian reserve. There were some fine Métis there: Paulsons, Kings, and an old, long-bearded patriarch Mr. MacBride. The next day, after mass, we start to climb the 15 rapids [...]” (AD 1944-1946, f. 4; our translation).

The fact that Father Guinard speaks of Métis families encountered on an “Indian reserve” might at first glance suggest that this is only the noting of a biological characteristic (i.e. Algonquins of mixed ancestry). However, at the end of his handwritten memoirs, he offers a detailed description of what he means by “Métis,” a population he observed throughout his long career as a missionary, including in Maniwaki. For him, the Métis form a “race,” meaning a “people” or an “ethnic group” (and not a biological marker), as the term was used at the time. Father Guinard therefore distinguishes the Métis from the “Indians” and the “Whites.” Even if he observes certain similarities between the Métis and the Indians, he goes to the trouble of comparing them to each other (Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019, p. 192; AD 1944-1946, f. 290-291).

Métis and Indianness: becoming “Indian” or “White”

It was not solely the employees of the HBC and the clerics who identified the Métis in the Lake Timiskaming region. The Algonquins themselves referred to the Métis in this area as a collective and as being distinctive. Unlike the comments of the missionaries, the identification of the Métis of Lake Timiskaming by the Algonquins is tied primarily to the identification policies surrounding the creation of reserves.

We know that the context of the creation of Indian reserves in the East coincided with the decline of the HBC fur trade empire. During the 1830s and 1840s, the great fur monopoly saw its southern borders progressively eroded by the arrival of settlers, loggers, and miners in increasing numbers. In the west of this commercial empire, it was the Oregon region that was overrun by American pioneers, while in the East, the Saguenay and Ottawa Rivers served as the colonizing gateway. In Lakes Huron and Superior, the decline also began as fisheries, mines, and agricultural enterprises were emerging at an accelerated rate (Giraud 1984, p. 896-897). Faced with the rapid development of many pioneer fronts and the need to acquire territories for various commercial enterprises,

government authorities created reserves to gather the “Indians.” According to the “Act to authorize the setting apart of Lands for the use of certain Indian Tribes in Lower Canada,” certain Algonquins of the interior of the lands, but especially the Algonquins and the Nipissings who used to spend the summer at Lake of Two Mountains, headed for the new Maniwaki reserve, fleeing the growing conflicts to the south (Frenette 1993). Further north, the Algonquins of Timiskaming saw, starting in the year 1853, a series of conflicts linked to the entry into the reserve of Métis families, within a process where exclusion and manipulation of identities were at the center of narratives.

It should be highlighted that the government did not offer the Métis of the eastern provinces the possibility of choosing between adhering to Indian treaties (thereby becoming fully “Indians”) or receiving scrips (certificates) reserved for Métis. A scrip was a promissory note for land or money which also extinguished Métis Indigenous title to the land, thus leading the holder to accept the status of “White,” or ordinary citizen. The Métis of the Ottawa River therefore did not have the same choices as the Métis of western Canada at the end of the 19th century (Ens and Sawchuk 2016; McNab 1985; Morris 1880, p. 69). Choosing to enter a reserve, with the prior consent of Indian families or not, was thus a strategy that certainly allowed Métis individuals and families to maintain legal indigeneity and often access to land by becoming “Indians” (Podruchny and Thistle 2016). This is probably the route that many Métis families took when entering the Timiskaming reserve, but this is not necessarily true for every Métis family we find in that region (or their descendants). Certain families in the Ottawa River Region did, in fact, choose to identify themselves openly as “Métis” (for example, the family of Patrick Riel¹³) or, alternatively, as “[French-]Canadian” or “Indian,” depending on what would be most advantageous under the given circumstances in the colonial context.

Several events illustrate the process of integrating certain Métis within the Timiskaming band. This process exemplifies various political strategies on the part of the Métis, following the manipulation of patrilineal kinship codes associated with their understanding of legal definitions of Indianness to enable the transition from a Métis identity to a legal “Indian” identity. In the case of Lake Timiskaming, it should be noted that it was the Métis Angus McBride (named above) who eventually became the Indian agent for this reserve, a government position that seemed unofficial around 1885, then was officialized

13. Patrick Riel (1876-1916) was a soldier of the Great War, originally from the Gatineau Valley in the Ottawa River Region, and he died on the European battlefields. Many people who came into contact with him, including Métis from western Canada, attested to the Métis identity of Patrick Riel. The latter also claimed kinship ties to the Métis leader Louis Riel. This fictitious (or symbolic) kin relationship between the two Riels is dealt with in the work of Malette and Marcotte (2019).

around 1887 or 1888 (Inksetter 2017, p. 443-444). The correspondence that McBride exchanged with Indian Affairs is useful in understanding how the Métis from the fur trade used various stratagems to secure recognition of their indigeneity. Of course, it needs to be stated that some Métis would gradually be socially integrated into the Algonquin bands, following cultural protocols relating to the latter. The case at hand, however, concerns Métis families who were apparently not fully incorporated in Algonquin bands at that time, but who nevertheless wanted to retain their legal indigeneity and/or privileged access to agricultural land reserved for Indians in the face of a government which now facilitated the colonization of the territory.

In fact, the Algonquin band of Timiskaming was caught up in events which can be described as a political takeover by certain families from the Métis freemen population of the Ottawa River Region. Archival evidence shows that these Métis manipulated the patrilineal code at the heart of the era's official recognition of Indianness, going against the will of several Algonquins, who went to complain to the colonial authorities. In doing so, the Algonquins explicitly recognized the presence and existence of a Métis community in the Lake Timiskaming region, which they deemed sufficiently distinct from themselves as they qualified themselves as "pure Algonquins," despite the presence of mixed ancestry in their own families. On the Métis side, Agent McBride's correspondence highlights patrilineal parentage. Beginning in the late 1880s, McBride routinely obstructed the band's election process, expressing his views in letters to Indian Affairs where he states the Métis would have made better chiefs for the band. Conversely, the Algonquins themselves at this time opposed the Métis having the right to vote in band elections, questioning their political participation (LAC 1884-1894, f. 16; Inksetter 2017, p. 445). Obviously, McBride sought to force the political integration of certain Métis into the band, many of them belonging to his own extended family. In order to justify to government authorities the merits of the Métis' right to vote, in 1890 he pointed out that the band was made up of three "classes" of people, but all "of the same blood": in that they all had some Indian "blood" but there were those with French blood, those with Scottish blood, and yet others with "pure Indian blood." Having stated this, Indian Agent McBride appeared in this letter to manipulate the concept of patrilineality in order to make the Métis eligible for Indian status in specifying that, among those of Scottish blood, only four are "pure half breeds," and those having French blood have it from their mother's side (BAC 1884-1894, f. 16-17). These formulations, far from being ambiguous or innocuous, reveal the primary attribute which *de facto* (but not immutably) separates Aboriginal identities: the substitution of an Aboriginal father by a Euro-Canadian father necessarily gives rise to "pure half breed" children, just like Algonquin paternal "blood" guarantees an equally "pure" Algonquin identity to a man's children, regardless of the origin of the mother.

McBride is quite familiar with these cultural codes, and fails to indicate in his letter where the Scottish Métis “Indian blood” comes from (except for “pure half breeds”). He just writes that these Métis have more Indian blood than white blood. The officials of Indian Affairs were not fooled, however, and reminded him in further correspondence that only individuals of Indian paternal lineage (not Métis) were eligible to live on the reserve (LAC 1892-1896, f. 16-17). In short, the Algonquins identified as “pure” knew the Métis and named them, as did Indian Affairs. Meanwhile, some Métis families wishing to maintain a legal status linked to their indigeneity could count on the Indian agent McBride to manipulate the facts, as he tried to demonstrate their eligibility for Indian status as members in good standing of the Timiskaming band. The following examples are a good demonstration.¹⁴ In examining the lists of electors for the Timiskaming band, as supplied by Agent McBride himself to Indian Affairs in the 1890s, it seems that these intervening years were quite significant for those Métis individuals wishing to fully embrace a political and legal Indian identity. An electors list from 1895 gives 26 names, 17 of which are European names associated with the fur trade (LAC 1894-1901, f. 5). Another list, this one from 1896, gives 21 names, 13 of which are also European names associated with the fur trade. We can extrapolate that the Métis thus became the majority among the voters who exercised their right to vote in electing a leader. The election of August 18, 1896, demonstrates how these Métis held the balance of power at that precise moment to elect the band leadership. Three candidates were vying for the post of chief: Tanis Stanger, John Wabi, and Jean Massinakijik. The results show that 77% of the voters with European names associated with the fur trade (10 men) voted for the Métis candidate (Stanger), while 75% of Algonquins (6 men) voted for one or the other of the Indian candidates (*ibid.*, f. 18). In other words, even if all the Algonquin voters (8) had voted as a bloc for a single Algonquin candidate, the 10 Métis who voted for the Métis candidate would still have won, ensuring that the latter would have been elected as chief. It is therefore not surprising to see, from that date, Métis chiefs and councilors elected in the Timiskaming band elections.

14. Leila Inksetter, in her book *Initiatives et adaptations algonquines au XIX^e siècle* (2017), has already mentioned that the criteria for disqualification from standing for the office of chief imposed on the Métis by the Algonquins were probably not structural, but rather incidental, targeting individuals without the political qualities required. She gives as examples the cases of Tanis Stanger and John Polson, elected as chiefs a few years later; although they were of mixed heritage, they were no doubt recognized as having the qualities required to be chiefs (*ibid.*, p. 448-449). As a result, Inksetter postulates that a distinct Métis community did not exist, with the Métis being more generally subsumed in the Algonquin community. However, as our discussion shows, the election of these chiefs involved a takeover of the reserve and its political system by the Métis, who then wished to become “Indians” by circumventing the conventions in place about official Indianness.

A case in point: the King family

The question that must be asked is how precisely the Métis did manage to exercise their right to vote within the band as several indicators suggest that the Algonquins did not want this right granted to them. The case of the Métis King family offers a plausible explanation. The Kings arrived at Lake Timiskaming in 1875 from James Bay. The father was of mixed origin, but defined himself primarily as “[French-]Canadian” (Marcotte 2017, p. 203), while the mother, Sophie Garton, was a Métis,¹⁵ also from James Bay (Reimer and Chartrand 2005, p. 59). In March 1896, a letter from Agent McBride to Indian Affairs stated that:

at a meeting held on the 3rd Inst by the Indians of the Temiscamingue Band, James King Sen^r and John King Sen^r both half breeds, were taken by the full consent of the Band to reside and farm on the Temiscamingue Indian Reserve, awaiting the approval of the Sup^t General of Indian Affairs. (BAC 1896-1900, f. 2)

The band’s authorization in this case was given to King’s two Métis sons solely for residency and cultivation of the land on the reserve, not for title as voting band members. In response to McBride, Indian Affairs official Hayter Reed wrote: “you will be good enough to see that they leave at once, as under the law none but Indians are entitled to reside upon an Indian reserve. Unless they come in the same category as those mentioned in your letter [...]” (LAC 1896-1900, f. 3).

While the precise letter Reed is referring to has yet to be located, it becomes clear from further correspondence from McBride that the only category of people of mixed ancestry who can enter the reserve is theoretically that with an Indian paternal line, which is not the case with the King brothers. These are “pure half breeds,” to use McBride’s expression, but not Indian via their father’s side. One would think that the Kings were then warned, but in the end, all the documentation shows that McBride deftly manipulated the codes of kinship structures to still successfully bring onto the reserve Métis families who wished to live there. He sought to do this against the expressed desires of the so-called “pure” Algonquins and his superiors at Indian Affairs. In fact, as early as 1895, before the band accepted the King brothers as residents and farmers (and not as political members of the band), they were already on a list of electors for the band (LAC 1894-1901, f. 5), a list that McBride was required to keep as one of his duties as Indian Agent. They also appeared on the electoral list in 1896 (*ibid.*, f. 14, 18). On August 20, 1900, James King Sr.

15. It is noteworthy that Sophie’s alleged brother, John Garton, was employed by the HBC at Fort Coulonge and Lake Abitibi for 21 years, before going to Red River, Manitoba. A few years after his arrival to the Red River, in 1875, he applied for scrip as a Métis. His application for scrip reveals that Garton is the son of a “White” and a “Half-breed” (BAC 1875; HBCA [n.d.], Garton).

was even elected councilor (*ibid.*, f. 33). However, a letter sent by McBride's successor as Indian Agent, Adam Burwash, shows how the former circumvented both Ottawa's orders and the will of many of the Algonquins on the reserve as regards the political participation of the Kings in band elections:

Several members of the Band say that they have no knowledge of a vote having ever been taken to admit James King Sr as a member. Have you any record of him having been admitted into the Band, also of John King Sr some think John King Sr may have been taken into the Band but are not positive, if these men are members, they lived for quite a while on the Reserve before they were members. I think one if not both date their admission into the Band from the time that Mr Inspector Chitty was here, two years ago last May. The majority of the Band claim that Mr Chitty told them that any person with any Indian blood in them was an Indian and was entitled to live on the reserve. This impression is causing some trouble. I am reminded of it very frequently. (BAC 1896-1900, f. 12)

The event which seems to have sealed the full membership of the King brothers in the band was the intercession of Inspector of Indian Affairs Chitty, whose public statement contradicts the very essence of the Indian Act. The response sent to Burwash confirms that, although the Kings were granted a restricted right to residence in 1896, they nevertheless became members of the band following a decision by Indian Affairs, since their names were accepted by the band as beneficiaries of interest (LAC 1896-1900, f. 13). The circle was closed at the turn of the 20th century when this Métis family became full members of the band, thanks to the manipulation of government regulations by various stakeholders with the acceptance of the Kings by a majority of the members of the band. The band, let us emphasize, from then on was demographically dominated by the Métis families of freemen who legally became "Indians."

The continued rivalry between Métis and Algonquins

This political gamesmanship around the Timiskaming reserve did not go unnoticed by other observers in the region. Among these was the Oblate Father Jean-Marie Nédélec, who, in 1892, began a correspondence with Indian Affairs. In a series of heated exchanges, in which Agent McBride ended up, in turn, a participant in the missives being sent back and forth, the missionary father expressed his dissatisfaction with the difficulty encountered by Métis wishing to enter the reserve, when in his opinion they should all have been able to take up residence there. Well aware of the favoritism displayed by Agent McBride, and of the conflicts between Algonquins and Métis, Father Nédélec proposed to Indian Affairs a political system for the Timiskaming reserve. Within the band council, two seats should be reserved for Indians, two more seats for Métis, one seat for the Indian agent (appointed by Indian Affairs), and a last

seat reserved for a person chosen by the Indians to compensate for the one offered to the agent (LAC 1892-1896; Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019, p. 103). According to the model proposed by Nédélec, we understand that the Algonquins of Timiskaming could have preserved a better political balance in the face of the growing presence of the Métis, while putting an end to the practices associated with the nepotism of McBride, who did not favor the Métis during his mandate other than those of his own circle (*ibid.*, p. 104).

However, the conflict between Métis and Algonquins was far from being extinguished with either the death of Father Nédélec in 1896 or the end of Agent McBride's mandate around 1899. In his report submitted to Indian Affairs in 1903, the Indian Agent Adam Burwash describes the reserve population according to a continuing divide: "Tribe. – The majority of this band are Scotch half-breeds; the remainder belong to the Algonquin tribe" (Burwash 1904, p. 58). Although Burwash, like other Indian Agents, does not always specify these two ethnic components (or two "tribes") for the Timiskaming band, this mention is nonetheless very revealing. First, his description indicates that although some Métis legally became "Indians" at this time, the band remained (at the start of the 20th century) composed of two distinct ethnicities, namely the Scottish Métis and the Algonquins. Second, the precision of ethnic affiliation accorded to the Métis component is very specific: it is not just "mixed" Algonquins, but Scottish Métis; a distinct ethnic identity present over much of the former HBC continental business empire.

Moreover, this same distinction between the Métis and the Algonquins of Lake Timiskaming is reaffirmed in correspondence dating from 1906, in which there is a petition from a group of Algonquins complaining to the colonial authorities that disputes were occurring between them and the Métis, whom they accuse of selling reserve lands without their consent (LAC 1886-1916, May 22, 1906). Importantly, among these signatories we find two names of Métis individuals (that is, of "white" paternal line), in this case, James Hunter and Bazile Simpson, two sons of HBC employees. This suggests that the Algonquin community may then have included Métis who became Indianized to the point of taking a stand against the interests of other Métis whom the Algonquin written complaint here identifies collectively and distinctively, hence showing the cultural dimension of the processes leading to individuals assuming different identifications. This fact also demonstrates that the distinction between Métis and Algonquins persisted in 1906, in terms of both identity and community, if we understand that it is possible for Métis living on the reserve to be part of the Algonquin community or part of the Métis community. Once again, the very thesis that the Métis of Timiskaming are simply "mixed-race Algonquins" is further undermined. Indeed, the archival evidence we analyzed demonstrates the persistence of these identity and community categories (Algonquin and

Métis), whose integrity is preserved despite the presence of ethnic defectors on both sides.¹⁶

For the Métis who then opposed the Algonquins, the anathema of having only maternal “Indian blood”—which possibly led to the exclusion of official Indianness according to the rules in force—continued to hold sway. In a letter to Indian Affairs, dated June 5, 1906, we see how Angus Wabie accuses the Métis McBride (who is no longer the Indian Agent of the reserve) of being the instigator of the sale of land in their absence. Wabie takes great care to point out that McBride’s father was a Scotsman (LAC 1886-1916, June 5, 1906). As we can see, the patrilineal classification and codification of the Métis kinship structure is indeed at the heart of various political and legislative maneuvers to exclude them from official Indianness. Such attempts to exclude the Métis were not only initiated by the colonial authorities, but sometimes used by the Algonquins themselves. The same Angus Wabie, in a second letter referring to the fraudulent sale of land, explains to Indian Affairs how the political takeover of the reserve by the Métis was then part of a regrettable deviation from acceptable practice contrasting with the policies of the former Algonquin chiefs from the Massinakijik/Petrimou lineage: “At the death of Salomon Masenikijik, the halfbreeds were made chiefs on this Indian Reserve. There are still here members of the Pitanimou [Petrimou] family, they got weaker and overrun and the half breeds are strong now here” (BAC 1886-1916, July 4, 1906).

A Metis diaspora that continues to frequent the watercourses of the Ottawa

The entry into the reserve of several Métis families, and the subsequent political takeover of the Timiskaming reserve by them, as noted, between the years 1880 and 1900, should not, however, obfuscate the fact that the Métis diaspora has continued to make its presence felt all along the Ottawa River Region to the present. Not all Métis families descended from the freemen of the fur trade era were successful in integrating into Indian band reserves. Some may never have attempted to do so. One of the clear manifestations of the continuity of this Métis identity in the region is certainly the oral tradition presented in the account of the Métis elder Violet Lalonde of Maniwaki. Here, she presents the exile of Louis Riel in the Outaouais among his fellows and others in the Mattawa region (BAnQ-G 1980; Bouchard, Malette, and Marcotte 2019, chap. 6; Malette and Marcotte 2017).

16. We will also underscore that, on the list of electors mentioned above (BAC 1894-1901, f. 18), Bazile Simpson is one of the only three Métis electors who voted for an Algonquin leader candidate, thus suggesting his assimilation into the Algonquin community some 10 years earlier. As for James Hunter, he did not appear on the 1896 voters list.

A continued coexistence between two types of Aboriginal population in the Mattawa sector, Indians and Métis, is also noted in the work of Métis ethnomusicologist Annette Chrétien (1996). The senior musicians interviewed by Chrétien demonstrate a perception of this difference, this despite the possible overlaps in identity which are also present elsewhere among the Métis of western Canada (Lavallée 1988, p. 194-196). In the example given of an older song typically associated with the native neighborhood of Mattawa, *Squaw Valley Song*, the lyrics directly refer to the discrimination suffered by the native people of Mattawa, including the ban on alcohol consumption in place until 1969. This prohibition was applied to Indians, but also to Métis who physically resemble Indians (Chrétien 1996, p. 165, 200). The same song also evokes the local Métis families Lacelle and Green (ibid., p. 196, 200). So, we see here how the local Métis population expressed the memory of Indian, Métis, and non-Indigenous families, rather than just Indian and White.

This same distinction between Algonquins and Métis is also observed in contemporary fieldwork carried out by Bonita Lawrence (2012). The Mi'kmaq researcher asserts that, despite the winding identity paths that many families of Aboriginal descent may have known due to colonial policies in recent centuries, a distinction between Algonquins without Indian status and Métis still exists, particularly along the Ottawa River:

[At Mattawa] both Algonquins and Metis are very clear regarding what the differences are between Algonquins and Metis in a more northern context. Although both groups have been consigned to the "Indian" part of town, the older folks know who is Algonquin and who is Metis. It is also clear, however, that with acculturation, the youth are losing a sense of these distinctions due to pressures of assimilation. (Lawrence 2012, p. 128-129)

On the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, the manifestations of the continuity of a Métis identity were expressed in various ways, despite the continual dilemma posed to the Métis: to be or not to be "Indians," and the necessary exclusion of a Métis identity that may result from choosing the latter option. In the Lake Kipawa Region, for example, the founder of the Laurentian Alliance of Métis and Non-Status Indians, Kermot Moore, has often expressed his origins as being part of a "Half-breed" family and community, despite an attachment also to Anishinaabe "Indianness" (Moore 1984, p. 10). Occasionally, status Algonquins, but from families formerly associated with the Métis, may have expressed an attachment to the Métis people, for example, through the use of the Métis flag in "certain situational contexts" (Bégin 2010, p. 80). This same attachment remained, according to Élise Bégin, for many people who obtained Indian status late in the 1980s, which is reminiscent of other similar cases, as observed in Cross Lake, Manitoba (Gagnon 2019, p. 222). For other families, the continuity of Métis identity will take the form of associations composed of

individuals who consider themselves to be the direct heirs of the Métis communities of Timiskaming Region. They present themselves as the only “real” Métis in the region, while continuing to be dependent on a form of residual category of identity linked to Indian status (Tremblay 2009).

On the Ontario side of the river, the situation, although similar for much of the 20th century, gradually changed from 1994 onwards with the founding of the Métis Nation of Ontario, which would become one of the five provincial member associations of the Métis National Council, which currently benefit from federal and respective provincial recognition. Now associated with a Prairie Métis nationalist movement, a nationalism which has experienced a revival since 1983, the Métis of Timiskaming in Ontario define themselves today as part of a larger North American Métis diaspora:

Similar to the Red River Métis Community in Manitoba, intermarriage between trade personnel and local Algonquin people in Temiskaming gave rise to identifiable groups of Métis or “country-born” people. [...] Their family names included McKay, Louttit, Thompson, Taylor, McDonald, Petrant and Langevin. Many descendants of the Temiskaming Métis or country-born are now considered status Indians. Some of these First Nation’s descendants blended into the general population. [...] In Temiskaming, many chose to live as Métis and formed the Métis community in Temiskaming which still exists today. (Métis Nation of Ontario 2019)

Thus, depending on the contingencies specific to the two jurisdictions (Ontario and Quebec), contemporary Métis who have eluded (voluntarily or not) the process of integration into an Indian reserve currently experience different realities in terms of identity and politics. Those living on the Ontario side of the Ottawa River are now included as full members of Métis organizations recognized as Indigenous by both the federal and provincial governments and they therefore benefit from agreements regulating the practice of ancestral activities on the territory as well as agreements tied to the principle of self-governance. Most significantly, it should be flagged that the root ancestors of contemporary members of the Métis Nation of Ontario include among their ranks the Polsons, McBrides, and others¹⁷ discussed above. Hence—and this brings us back to our theoretical framework set out at the beginning of this article—the fact that there are two or more divergent pathways in the evolution of Indigenous identities over time from common ancestors does not necessarily invalidate any of the contemporary identities that descend from common ancestors. In this case, the existence of numerous contemporary Anishinaabe bearing the surnames Polson and McBride in no way invalidates the existence of contemporary Métis who have the same 19th-century Polsons and McBrides among their ancestors. Family

17. See the Roots Ancestors file documents tracing those conceived as being at the origin of the historic Métis communities of Mattawa/Ottawa River and Abitibi Inland (Métis Nation of Ontario 2020).

experiences linked to indigeneity or life on an Indian reserve have necessarily differed among the many descendants of these root families, while creating identity trajectories leading to divergent identities as exist in the present. This situation, far from being unique in Canada, is shared in many regions, such as western Ontario, for example. Here, too, the contemporary presence of Métis and Anishinaabe sharing several common ancestors does not invalidate the identity narrative of one or the other group (see Lytwyn 2012).

In a radically different way, many Métis on the Quebec side still live in a political jurisdiction denying any legitimacy to their Métis identity, and where identifying as non-status Indian remains the only way for many to try to achieve legal recognition. The political organization of the contemporary Métis of Lake Timiskaming still living in Quebec seems unfocused and underdeveloped, a symptom perhaps deriving from the continued delay in state recognition of a historical Métis community on the eastern bank of the Ottawa River. Yet, like Algonquin and non-Aboriginal families from the same region, cross-border Métis often live on either side of the interprovincial boundary; a border which in other respects has little impact on daily life, since everyone regularly transits from one province to another for work or various daily activities.

Conclusion

The political process observed in Timiskaming is reminiscent of the identity shifts of different Métis groups: for example, that of Sandy Bay (Manitoba) in 1886 (Barkwell 2016, p. 165-166), or of Sault Ste. Marie (Ontario) after 1850 (Jones 1998). In all of these places, Métis legally become “Indians,” although they still sometimes consider themselves Métis for a time, before their eventual assimilation into Indian bands or a return to Métis groups. With regard to the Timiskaming reserve, the history of political tribulations allows us to better understand how certain Métis managed to officially become “Indians” in order to avail themselves of advantages that had been denied them until then. We observe, at the same time, how the Algonquins reacted to these attempts by confirming the identification and the continuity of the Métis community in this region, thus adding to the multiple collective and distinctive descriptions already identifying the Métis along the Ottawa River. In this way, we demonstrate the historical and political existence of a community of Métis families who were once freemen with origins from different geographic regions and gathered mainly in Lake Timiskaming.

Our article further illustrates the mechanisms for recognizing official indigeneity through the application of discriminatory regulations that operate under a patrilineal code of Indian identity. In Quebec, as in the Prairies, the Métis experienced, at times, the rejection of the Indians now established on reserves, despite shared close family ties and a certain fraternity (Podruchny

and Thistle 2016, p. 64-65). However, not all the Métis families of the Ottawa River have become “Indian” by integrating into reserves. Several Métis families have continued to live on the fringes of official indigeneity in Quebec, as in Ontario, pursuing a diasporic existence, more and more exogamic with the passage of generations, not constrained to keep an Indian status to which they are not entitled. Several families thus retain the memory of their past within family histories, remembering their Métis heritage with even more pride since their constitutional recognition in 1982. Living scattered along the Ottawa River, several Métis families express and live a regional culture in places like Mattawa in Ontario, or Fort Coulonge in Quebec.

The archival sources that we have examined allow us to correct several persistent errors in the study of the Métis of Quebec. First, our analysis leads us to correct the presupposition that portrayal of Métis as “settlers” implies that they have indubitably become “White.” We argue that the use of such interpretive shortcuts is simply no longer acceptable. Likewise, the reduction of the Métis of Lake Timiskaming to being mere “mixed Algonquins” constitutes a historical misinterpretation. Even if we recognize an undeniable fluidity of identity between Métis, Euro-Canadian, and Native American identities along the Ottawa River, a fluidity of identity often exploited by Métis, evidence presented in this article makes it clear that each collectivity existed independently from one another. The assimilationist theses, or even those entirely denying the historical existence of the Métis in Quebec in any era, should therefore be reviewed in a much more careful way, and on a comparative basis with the Métis realities elsewhere in the country, which go far beyond the valley of the Red River in Manitoba (see Ens and Sawchuk 2016; Gagnon 2019; St-Onge and Podruchny 2012; Rivard 2020). Finally, an examination of our archival and historical sources points to the arbitrary, if not inequitable, nature of the distribution of government recognition that currently favors the Métis of Ontario, excluding those of the eastern bank of the Ottawa River and Lake Timiskaming in Quebec, despite the fact that both groups live in a common watershed, sharing a common culture and history. We hope that our analysis will thus promote a process of reconciliation between actors now aware that it is no longer possible to avoid the inclusion of the Métis among the Indigenous peoples of Quebec, at least from an ethnological, comparative, and historical point of view. *

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