

Decolonizing Métis Pedagogies in Post-Secondary Settings

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This article asks how post-secondary education and scholarship can facilitate critical and engaged reclamations of Métis knowledge through critical intellectual and experiential engagement. First, it explores dominant representations of Metis political and cultural experience in historical perspective, and considers these implications for Metis students and communities. This examination identifies a problem that we address by envisioning models of engaged pedagogy, based on insights from author bell hooks, which draw upon on a particular stream of thought in Michel Foucault's later work. It concludes with a discussion of the possibilities of decolonizing representations of Metis history and politics, through the exploration of relational land- and community-based pedagogies.

Over the past century, Métis' scholarship has largely been defined by non-Métis scholars to meet Canadian interests, in the process ascribing to Metis people a kind of Métis identity that both shapes and constrains them. When we look at how this identity is debated in post-secondary contexts, we are faced with a whole series of unique issues, the most notable being a convergence of a large number of Métis students with differing backgrounds and self-understandings on university campuses across Canada, reflected in differing levels of engagements with and expressions of their identity. Indigenous spaces on campus are sometimes unwelcoming to Métis students, leading some students to avoid these spaces altogether. Métis students are especially susceptible to being bombarded with uncontested negative or misleading portrayals of their people and their history. Without an Indigenous student support network that can provide critiques of the colonial narratives that are omnipresent in the university classroom, or that can assist in elaborating alternative ones, Métis students can be left to deal with these narratives on their own, in relative isolation. The critical question for us is how do we uproot these colonizing narratives through self-reflective scholarship? Our intention, then, is to critically deconstruct two colonial discourses, exemplified by the work of John Ralston Saul and Tom Flanagan, that lay claim to Metis experiences, and to use this deconstruction as an opening to theorize land- and community-based approaches to Metis scholarship and pedagogy in higher education. By critically analyzing the theoretical underpinnings of

these common discourses of Métis identity, we can better envision a pedagogy that is premised on Métis understandings of ourselves, and one that invites Métis students to articulate more accurate and relevant self-understandings. Decolonizing Métis pedagogy will point towards two goals: 1) a pedagogical consideration of methods for fostering the intellectual skills and orientations necessary to analyze critically the colonial narratives of Métis-ness that confront students; and 2) an exploration of Métis possibilities that are grounded in Métis experiences and relationships within and between communities.

*Métis as Unproblematic Canadians: Liberal and
Conservative Narratives of Métis-ness*

In this paper, we will analyze the theoretical assumptions that underpin two dominant narratives of Métis-ness that Métis students are most likely to encounter during their post-secondary education. The first is a liberal narrative found in John Ralston Saul's *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada* (2008). Saul argues that Canada is founded on Aboriginal and European political principles, and because of this mixture of cultures, he calls Canada a métis civilization. The second narrative has conservative origins that can be traced to the very beginnings of Métis studies—the idea that Métis are a simple people, easily manipulated by outside agitators—a narrative most successfully popularized by Tom Flanagan in his *Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet of the New World* (1979). In Flanagan's work, this outside agitator is Louis Riel, who is represented as being motivated not by a concern for justice and Métis rights, but by his own vanity, failed political career, as well as the outside influences of Roman Catholicism and Quebec nationalism. Both these narratives are embedded in an intellectual tradition of non-Métis scholars appropriating Métis history and Métis politics for their own purposes—to understand the impacts of the 'Riel Rebellions' on Canadian politics, without attempting to understand Métis history in and of itself. Saul and Flanagan are both attempting to assimilate Métis struggles for autonomy into a Canadian nation-building narrative. The result is that Métis history is taken out of the hands of Métis people, rebranded as a component of the national history of Canada, often with Louis Riel being appropriated as a Father of Confederation.

Despite the differences in Saul's and Flanagan's political ideologies, their works possess numerous similarities as to the development of their understandings of Métis-ness to suit their own purposes; specifically, their visions undermine Métis self-understandings of belonging to an Indigenous nation independent of the expanding Canadian state. Both writers envision a Métis culture and political tradition that is undifferentiated from the dominant Canadian polity, and both portray Métis people unproblematically (and in the absence of colonialism) and as incorporated into the Canadian federation. However, in order to represent Métis people in such

a way, they must define Métis-ness in a manner that is inconsistent with community-grounded Métis self-understandings found in various forms across the continent. To make their claims viable, they both must re-tell Métis history in a way that shows Canadian colonization of Métis communities as natural, inevitable, and unproblematic.

While the liberal Saul and conservative Flanagan differ in many ways, their work represents two dominant narratives presented to Métis students in post-secondary settings. Further, their presence in Métis scholarship, amplified by their 'public intellectual' status, allows these narratives to remain a part of Métis' lives, which serve to denigrate and minimize a Métis sense of autonomy, resistance, and national status. It is our position that it is essential to address these narratives to decolonize Métis scholarship and pedagogy, and that these practices should be effective in deconstructing colonial misrepresentations of Métis, to develop self-affirming self-understandings. It is also our contention that working with Métis students to develop a critical sense of history and community is possible through academic as well as community-based learning. In the sections below, we will demonstrate our view of this process and how the two approaches are connected.

We take the works of Saul and Flanagan as both a challenge and an opportunity to offer a Métis understanding of the Métis relationship with Canada. We believe there is a need for Métis discourse on this matter—not as a counter-discourse, which would involve recentring and reifying a dominant discourse, but as a parallel process growing out of different theoretical, pedagogical, and political orientations. We envision a Métis assessment of the parameters of our own histories and relationships with Canada as well as with other Indigenous nations. The representations of Métis people in the dominant discourse are largely universalizing in character, as much now as in the past. These dominant narratives have serious implications for Métis self-understandings, as well as for the perceptions of the Métis community and its history by others. While encompassing both liberal and conservative political postures, Saul's and Flanagan's narratives decontextualize Métis experiences, whether by denying the resistance-laden history of the Métis people, as in the case of Saul's, or by attempting to delegitimize Métis leadership as in the case of Flanagan's. In the wake of such unhelpful outsider-narratives, Métis scholars need to take a leading role in challenging these narratives—in their scholarship, in their classrooms, and in their communities—to reassert control over representations of Métis people in Canadian intellectual and political culture.

The relationship of these narratives with decolonizing Metis pedagogies is crucial yet somewhat occulted: how are we to teach in a way that reflects the diversity of Metis experiences? This question offers an opening to think about how Metis people are and have been represented and perceived, the ways in which we as Metis represent ourselves, and the ways in

which we present our history and our culture in post-secondary classrooms. At the same time, it is important to stress that we as authors are not experts in pedagogy; rather, we are early-career scholars struggling to deal with these issues in our research and in our teaching. This paper began as a conversation between the authors and was put together from the fragments of many discussions about the lack of Metis pedagogical literature and the exploration of our own experiences in search of an answer to the question 'What is Metis pedagogy in post-secondary settings?' In this article, we are attempting to push against the constraints of the academy in two directions: on one axis, by surveying the possible contributions that Metis pedagogy might make and, on the other axis, by exploring ways of thinking and writing about our efforts and our experiences in a multi-vocal way. We embrace the tensions arising from our differences in approach and emphasis, by engaging in a dialogue both between us and within us. We represent, just between the two of us, a great diversity of experiences in the years since our respective families departed Red River, one heading west and one heading east, and for one, a single generation removed from living on the land and for the other, two generations removed. In that light, we offer the following analysis, manifestly as an opening to further dialogue and not as a final word on the matter. We are not seeking to define or demarcate a monolithic, uniform, or universal Metis identity or political project, or a pedagogy which supports such a project; instead, we seek to conceptualize a pedagogical space respecting the different contexts, different local conditions, different goals, and different capacities, both of Métis communities and of the scholars who work with them.

At the same time, we can only start from where we are, based on what we know. The processes of decolonization and the intellectual and community projects which comprise them are too important to wait, to defer to await more knowledge, more reading, more experience, and deeper connections with stronger communities to come. The work we do for ourselves, as we do for the world outside of us, wherever or whenever that is, is a commitment to our families and to our communities (both on-and off-campus, as there is much work to be done in both locations).

At this moment and in this place, however, we share more solid backgrounds in institutional knowledges than in community knowledges—hence our drive to move off-campus, into communities, and onto the land. We must be alert to both the strengths and weaknesses of our backgrounds, our locations, and our starting points, and to constantly ask ourselves what we have to offer to communities (LaRocque, 2010, p. 13). At this point, our strength seems to lay in what we have learned of the way the state and its institutions operate vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples, and what we know about the constraints this imposes on individuals and communities. We also have the benefit of adapting a critical orientation as part of a project to identifying allies (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in the projects

of decolonization and congruent approaches taken in other struggles both “at home” and elsewhere (Hancock, 2012; LaRocque, 2010, p. 5; Adams, 1975, p. 180; Adams, 1995, pp. 11, 152)

A Fair Country, Unfair Representation

In engaging with non-Métis narratives about Métis lives, we turn first to John Ralston Saul’s national bestseller, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada*, which is written as a supposed counter-narrative to the dominant understandings of Canada. Saul’s central claim is that Canadian identity, and indeed Canadian political culture, is founded on a *métis* (or mixed white/Indian) relationship with Indigenous peoples. It is this longstanding *métis* relationship that supposedly differentiates Canada, as well as Canadians, from their European and American predecessors (Saul, 2008, p. 3). However, Saul argues, a Eurocentric discourse on Canadian identity has overshadowed what he sees as Canada’s *métis* roots. This discourse imagines a Canadian identity and political culture founded on European ideals, and according to Saul, is propagated by an elite who deny this *métis relationship*. This denial results in an attachment to an outdated theory of Canada as a monolithic identity, based solely on British and French traditions (pp. 117, 174). Saul presents instead a positive representation of Canada, a valourization, in fact, of what he sees as fundamental *métis* contributions to the Canadian project—a *métis nation*—yet it is this very starting point which is so problematic.

Saul’s definition of *métis* here is crucial. The use of the word *métis* is the *small-m* *métis* (see Brown and Peterson, 1985, p. 6), meaning that Canada, as a civilization, is a mix of European and *Aboriginal* cultures, suggesting that Canada is a “deeply Aboriginal” country in both its thinking and its culture (Saul, 2008, p. 3). He nonetheless uses the word *métis* ambiguously, and makes little effort to demarcate his notion of *Canada as métis* from the actual Métis Nation as a historical or contemporary fact. Applying this tactical ambiguity, he can then argue that Canadian “institutions and common sense as a civilization are more Aboriginal than European or African or Asian, even though we have created elaborate theatrical screens of language, reference and mythology to misrepresent ourselves to ourselves” (Saul, 2008, p. 3). He understands the relationship between Aboriginals and Canadians as a formative feature of the Canadian identity, asserting that “much of what we are is them” and “much of what we think of as our way, our values, our collective unconscious, is dependent on what we slowly absorbed living with them or near them over the centuries” (Saul, 2008, p. 5). Because of this long history, both of living beside Aboriginals and living with them through marriage and business partnerships, Saul is able to conclude that “the other,” the Aboriginal, has been internalized in the Canadian consciousness, which is therefore a *métis* consciousness (Saul, 2008, p. 5).

Saul claims that the egalitarian orientation of Canada—manifested in institutions like the universal healthcare system and official multiculturalism—is rooted in this métis identity, and this is what makes Canada fundamentally different from the US and Europe. Resting on supposed Aboriginal roots, which “represent the undercurrent of Canadian civilization” (Saul, 2008, p. 20), Saul argues that Canada is a distinctly “Aboriginal” country unlike any other in the world. While much of Saul’s argument appeals to ingrained Canadian narratives of multiculturalism and interculturalism, the level of intermarriage between white and Indigenous people is somewhat overstated outside of the environs of fur trade forts. Typically, there were three outcomes of fur-trade relationships, only one of which resulted in any kind of cultural or political hybridity. As Jennifer Brown notes, “Some [mixed-blood offspring] disappeared into Indian societies, and some into white. Most distinctive was a third population whose members ... found a semi-independent life with freemen and métis already settled in Indian country” (Brown, 1985, p. 198). At the crux of Saul’s argument lies a historical misconception—very few mixed-blood people were destined to become Métis, as most were absorbed into Indian or white families, in which little Indigenous and European knowledge was exchanged in a way that would facilitate the kind of inter-cultural dialogue that Saul reads into Canada. Furthermore, many of these children who were absorbed into the European cultural context faced colonial regulation of their thoughts and behaviour, which was specifically intended to Europeanize them (Van Kirk, 1985). As for those mixed-bloods who did remain in this in-between-space and developed their own culture, the Métis have always found their own political trajectory independent of these other two groups. Throughout the nineteenth century, in fact, the Métis developed their sense of self—as a new nation—in a context of opposition to Canadian expansion into the Métis homeland.

Perhaps the most articulate expression of Métis nationhood, the *Declaration of the People of Rupert’s Land and the North West*, proclaimed by the Provisional Government of Rupert’s Land in 1869, recognizes the practice of Métis nationhood as both *interaction with and autonomy from* Canada. Most importantly, the *Declaration* asserts that the Canadian state has no authority over the Métis people or the Métis homeland, despite attempts to survey the territory in preparation for settlement:

... we refuse to recognize the authority of Canada, which pretends to have a right to coerce us and impose upon us a despotic form of government ... we continue and shall continue to oppose with all our strength the establishing of the Canadian authority in our country under the announced form. (1869)

The Métis relationship with Canada, as articulated so clearly by our ancestors, is premised on respecting the mutual independence of both Canadian and Métis political communities. Especially when Canada attempted to unilaterally integrate Metis into Confederation, our ancestors understood

themselves as being outside of the Canadian polity, and beyond its reach. It is only by muddying Métis history and Métis self-perceptions that Saul can transform the Métis people into the forerunners of a multicultural Canada. It is only through this historical misperception that Métis identity can be used to establish a Canadian political tradition thought to be firmly rooted in Indigenous culture. Such an assertion also pre-empts the positive construction of a Métis identity, grounded, in part, in a long history of anti-colonial resistance and numerous struggles against outside forces, such as Canada, that sought to define us for their own purposes.

It is clear that Saul's representation of the Métis is not grounded in the experiences of actual Métis people, nor does it need to be. This "métis civilization" is not intended to appeal to Métis people, but rather is meant for non-Indigenous Canadians—people who want to feel rooted in this place but, like Saul, would rather avoid coming to terms with the colonial realities of how Canada came to be Canada. It is therefore only at the expense of Métis independence, and an independent Métis identity grounded in Métis history and culture, that Canada can be imagined in any way as *métis* or as a post-colonial, post-racial state. These colonial narratives ground our concerns regarding the necessity of decolonizing representations of Métis history and communities, and the importance of this critical work for teaching Métis students.

Flanagan and the Outside Agitator Narrative

On the surface, the upbeat and positive narrative of Saul's "métis civilization" has little in common with Thomas Flanagan's *Louis 'David' Riel*, a degrading and inflammatory telling of Riel's life. However, it is our contention that the goal of both writers is the same—to minimize the perception of Métis independence from Canada and to develop a narrative that situates Métis unproblematically within the Canadian polity.

Flanagan's story is a form of *outside agitator* narrative, which requires two components in order to function. The first component is an otherwise placid people who, if left to their own devices, will either live amicably with their neighbours or assimilate into the new culture that will inevitably envelop them. The second component involves the presence of a charismatic outsider who, when inserted into the group, is able to rally these naïve people into rash and misguided action. Flanagan establishes a narrative in which Riel played this role and was capable of influencing a naïve and passive Métis community to violently rebel against a supposedly legitimate and established Canadian authority.

To begin, Flanagan establishes Riel's position as an outsider by stressing his origins in a sedentary Métis family who engaged in farming and petty commerce rather than living the more typical buffalo hunting life that Flanagan equates with being Métis (1979, p. 5). Riel is also classically educated in Quebec, one of only a few Métis children from Red River to receive

this type of training (Flanagan, 1979, p. 6). Aside from stressing these cultural differences, Flanagan also seems unnaturally fixated on Riel's blood quantum: "Seven-eighths white, he grew up in the settled portion of the métis community which was closest to white ways" (Flanagan, 1979, p. 184). Flanagan also seems to project a desire on the part of Riel to be white, with a Métis identity existing only as a kind of fallback plan: "he tried to become part of white society by marrying a white girl and pursuing a career as a lawyer. It was only when these intentions were impeded that he returned to the West" (Flanagan, 1979, p. 184). As an educated outsider among a largely illiterate and supposedly uneducated people, Riel's charisma, according to Flanagan, allowed him to wield great political and religious authority. Flanagan calls Riel's motivation for this agitation "frustrated ambition" (Flanagan, 1979, p. 186) because "all his political ambitions had led nowhere, Riel sought compensation in the religious realm, where greatness was still possible" (Flanagan, 1979, p. 48). Thus, "his religion developed in isolation, greatly encouraging his natural tendency to vanity" (Flanagan, 1979, p. 96). Riel, then, is portrayed as an educated and charismatic outsider, who was in a position to use his charisma to mobilize a passive Métis people to achieve his own personal ambition—a Church of the New World—for which he is the prophet.

Flanagan takes care to represent the Métis of the Saskatchewan Valley as passive objects capable of being manipulated, thus denying the legitimacy of Métis political organization in the 1880s. While Flanagan is willing to admit that the Métis were facing many changes to their livelihood, he maintains that Métis grievances were largely *perceived* [italics added], and were not imminent threats to their existence (Flanagan, 1979, p. 182-183). These "perceived" grievances of the 1880s, without the agitation of Riel, would, he claims, have led the Metis to choose other goals and other ways of making their wishes known (Flanagan, 1979, p. 124). In Flanagan's narrative, then, the presence of Riel is an essential component of the "rebellion" of 1885. Otherwise, the grievances of the Métis would have been more limited and the individual titles to their lands that they sought would have been granted to them by the Canadian state.

This narrative, like Saul's, leaves us with only half the story. First, it is important to note that even Flanagan acknowledges that Riel was *asked by his people* in 1884 to help them organize to assert their rights—although this acknowledgement is minimized to a single paragraph (Flanagan, 1979, p. 119). Second, and more importantly, the Métis and the nearby white settlers had produced 84 petitions between 1878 and 1884 (Adams, 1975, p. 77) which had resulted in no tangible political response from Ottawa. George Woodcock has argued that the significant agitating factor lay not in Riel's leadership, but in "an almost unbelievable record of procrastination" by Sir John A. Macdonald who had a habit of "moving at [a] tortoise-like pace" with any "political situation he found embarrassing or

distasteful" (Woodcock, 1975, p. 130). Gabriel Dumont, likewise, recounts in his memoirs that the decision to take up arms was *made by a Métis assembly* in Batoche—without provocation from Riel or himself. Dumont asks the assembly:

'You speak of taking up arms. What arms do you have with which to battle the government? And how many are you?'

'Yes, we will take up arms if we must,' they cried more and more loudly. Riel neither spoke nor moved. [Then Dumont said:] 'Yes I know you all as if you were my own children. I know you well enough to know who will take up arms. It's fine to be resolute, but not too much. And so I ask again, how many of you will take up arms? Those who wish to fight, raise your hand.'

But instead of lifting a hand, here the whole assembly stood as if a single man. They shouted for joy and cried: 'If we must die for our country, we will die together!' (Dumont, 2006, p. 57)

This account, which involves both a passive and distant Riel and a cautious Dumont, demonstrates widespread Métis support for armed defense of their homeland. It also shows that Riel's presence was not necessarily the motivating factor in taking up arms. Rather, the unresponsive and impolitic behaviour of Ottawa was likely the instigating factor.

However, the narrative of a Métis process based on democratic decision making and determination to protect their lands from arbitrary seizures does not make for the unproblematic absorption in Canada that the *outside* white agitator narrative allows. Like Saul, Flanagan is attempting to minimize Métis resistance and Métis agency coalescing as opposition to an unwarranted and one-way integration into Canada. If, as these Métis accounts demonstrate, resistance was broad-based and reasonable and taken after alternatives such as petition and negotiation failed, Métis cannot be portrayed as the gullible and impressionable people that are susceptible to the charisma of an outsider, as Flanagan argues them to be. Rather, Métis understood themselves then, as we continue to understand ourselves today, as a politically engaged people with a long tradition of direct democratic decision making and as a people capable of conceiving of land rights that stem from both prior occupancy and an indigenous relationship to territory. George Goulet notes that the focus on Riel's role as agitator and his supposed insanity was a way of distracting from the legitimate claims of the Métis and cause for their defensive confrontation with the Canadian army (Goulet, 1999, p. 44).

The nineteenth-century narrative that describes Riel's role as an agitator has strong impacts in the present political situation. By imagining Riel as an agitator that represents Métis as a passive group, the denial of Métis nationhood as a viable vehicle for self-determination is not far off. Flanagan's narrative presents a Métis people who are objects to be acted upon and manipulated by (mostly) white men, not subjects capable of determining their own course in history. Seeing Métis as political subjects imbued with a coherent political logic is an uncomfortable discourse because it

involves recognizing that nineteenth-century claims may have been legitimate and calls attention to the very problematic origins of the Canadian federation on the prairies. By offloading these grievances to one man, a man portrayed as having questionable mental stability, Flanagan reproduces the dynamic that prevailed at the time of Riel's trial: debating Riel's sanity rather than the colonial policies that led to the confrontation in 1885.

Reclaiming Metis History and Community through Pedagogical Practice

Given that Metis identity in popular scholarship is represented largely by non-Metis attempting to situate us unproblematically within the Canadian polity and political culture, we are left with the question: how can post-secondary education facilitate a critical reclamation of Metis community? To begin, a growing number of contemporary Metis scholars are re-conceptualizing Metis history and experiences in a way that challenges the dominant discourses described above. Chris Andersen has deconstructed the idea that Metis is a racial identity or one based in the mixing of races, and instead describes Metis collectively as constituting a "people" in the fullest sense of the word: a collectivity that is politically and culturally constituted, and has used these relationships to create "powerful normative orders," and a political and legal culture that binds a people together (Andersen, 2011, pp. 52-53). Similarly, Brenda Macdougall has conceived of a Metis collective identity based on "wahkootowin," a worldview "based on familial—especially inter-familial—connectedness" conveying "an idea about the virtues that an individual should personify as a family member" (Macdougall, 2010, p. 8). This emerging scholarship has succeeded in situating both Metis experience and Metis knowledge within a Metis worldview. The intense growth in Metis scholarship in the last three decades has been staggering and it is therefore impossible to address all of it here. The choices we have made in this brief survey of recent literature reflect our engagement with an emerging stream of thought which seeks to reconceptualize the relationships between Metis people, Metis communities, and between Metis and the Canadian state.

However, we are still left with the pedagogical challenge of how we uproot these older narratives about Métis people so as to replace them with self-understandings that are more thoroughly grounded in Métis experience. Given the lack of readily available Métis knowledge to provide Métis university students in the classroom (even with this staggering growth), it is not entirely surprising that these deeply problematic portrayals of who we are remain persistent in the classroom. There are at least two identifiable needs for decolonizing Métis pedagogy: (1) the elaboration of critical and engaged perspectives among Métis students; and (2) experiential educational opportunities which situate Métis students in Métis community life.

Engaging Pedagogy

The process of envisioning Metis pedagogies in post-secondary settings does not emerge in a vacuum; there are other groups and other communities that are undergoing similar processes. Along these lines, the African-American scholar bell hooks offers a model of *engaged pedagogy* that has strong resonances with the sort of project we are proposing. Linking it explicitly to the fostering of critical thought (hooks, 2010, p. 8), hooks writes that the practice of engaged pedagogy:

... is vital to any rethinking of education because it holds the promise of full participation on the part of students. Engaged pedagogy establishes a mutual relationship between teacher and students that nurtures the growth of both parties, creating an atmosphere of trust and commitment that is always present when genuine learning happens. (hooks, 2010, p. 22)

Reflecting on her own early experiences as a student in segregated schools, she identifies the role that the support she received for questioning knowledge plays in the process of decolonization (hooks, 1994, p. 2). In this way, school experiences and life experiences combine in important ways to shape our learning, both inside and beyond the university:

The vital link between critical thinking and practical wisdom is the insistence on the interdependent nature of theory and fact coupled with the awareness that knowledge cannot be separated from experience. And ultimately there is the awareness that knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know. (hooks, 2010, p. 185)

Combinations of classroom and community-based and land-based experiential learning, that reflect the mutual influence hooks identifies, can serve as the starting point for Métis educators and teachers-in-information for conceptualizing their own orientations to their families, their communities, and their students. However, it is important to ensure that our critical project goes beyond simply identifying problems to including positive acts of envisioning alternatives (hooks, 2003, p. xiv).

hooks's deployment of an explicitly critical orientation marks one connection with the later thought of Michel Foucault, an engagement which runs throughout her three books on pedagogy. Although she does not cite Foucault and rarely mentions him by name (e.g., hooks, 1994, p. 21), she repeatedly evokes his work through the use of distinctive phraseology from the standard English translations of his work. For example, she refers to the possibility of an "insurrection of subjugated knowledge" in a number of places elaborated (e.g., 2003, pp. 2, 4, 7; 2010, pp. 83, 174; cf. Foucault, 1977, p. 81) to describe the process of bringing critical thinking, motivated by engaged pedagogy, to fruition through the recovery and elaboration of forms and systems of knowledge "that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated" (Foucault, 1977, p. 82). More frequently, she characterizes critically engaged pedagogy as a "practice of freedom" (e.g., hooks, 1994, pp. 6, 29-30; 2003, pp. 43, 71, 81, 83, 107,

110, 120, 181; 2010, p. 17; cf. Foucault, 1997[1984]), a fundamentally ethical way of reshaping educators and students by exploring ways of thinking and of being that range far beyond the limited perspectives and possibilities offered by standard pedagogies. Most importantly for our discussion, she writes:

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (hooks, 1994, p. 12)

This emphasis on the classroom as a location where teachers and students each have the freedom to transcend boundaries echoes a statement Foucault makes in his essay “What is Enlightenment,” which is important to quote at length here:

Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. But...it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression.

This entails an obvious consequence: that criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying It will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And this critique ... will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think [I]t is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom. (Foucault, 1984, pp. 45-46)

The implications of conceptualizing and applying a pedagogy, located in the congruent critical projects outlined by Foucault and hooks, are not necessarily obvious but are nonetheless important. A critical pedagogy of this kind offers the promise of destabilizing imperial projects and practices by exposing the contingencies at the heart of representations and assertions presented as universal or timeless, such as Saul’s and Flanagan’s, at the heart of discourses about the essential nature of Canada. At the same time, such an orientation provides tools for teachers and students from Metis communities to assess, question, and critique the representations offered by dominant narratives. It provides a way to envision the possibility of alternative models, and a framework for assisting in their elaboration and deployment in specific settings.

In our view, efforts to construct decolonized Metis pedagogy are most fruitfully focused on process and orientation instead of on an attempt to create a single narrative that can be the basis of an indoctrinatory project,

the construction of a dominant Metis discourse as a simplistic counter to a dominant Canadian one. This ongoing colonial project, and the narratives and discourses which emerge from it, are something we each have to come to terms with, through a dialogue with each other—be they students, colleagues, or communities. Any effort to dictate or impose a uniform or unitary Metis perspective on historical questions or current issues misses the point and simply replicates the problems we have identified with the dominant Canadian narratives exemplified by Saul and by Flanagan. There is a potential problem of essentialism inherent in any attempt to discover or develop a universal understanding of Metis experiences, whether from inside or outside. What could be held up as a universal Metis experience or quality? Even a concept such as *diaspora* fails in this exercise when the descendants of the Metis who stayed in the vicinity of what had been the Red River Settlement after 1870 are taken into account. Rather, it is a Métis way of life such as that which Macdougall identifies as *wahkootowin* that defines us.

Envisioning Metis Pedagogy

The critical and engaged scholarly work necessary for a reorientation of Métis understandings is already underway, as exemplified in the recent publications of Chris Andersen (2008, 2011a, 2011b) and Brenda Macdougall (2010). The question now facing us as “pedagogical practitioners” is how to bring these perspectives into our classrooms and into our communities, both through our students and through our own engagements. These processes of envisioning and outlining Métis pedagogies represent an important point of articulation between communities, Métis teaching, and research conducted in and on behalf of post-secondary institutions. While we agree with Taiaiake Alfred’s contention that the university classroom is not the place to learn Indigenous culture (2004, p. 88), we are finding that it is a good place to learn how the dominant culture functions and where there are openings to act against it. It is also a good place to form alliances and to create communities of other kinds (hooks, 2003, p. xv). However, staying within the classroom has its drawbacks as well, and it is by venturing outside and into communities and into the bush that we can add the contexts of Métis life that are so difficult to communicate via scholarly writing and classroom experience. It is through the combination of direct experience and scholarly critique that we can begin to envision processes of decolonizing Métis pedagogies, and the knowledge to do this is found in the experience and knowledge passed down to us by our Elders and in response to the needs of our students and other members of our communities.

Being a land-based Indigenous people (e.g., LaRocque 2010, p. 133), a considerable amount of Métis pedagogical knowledge can be learned from Métis knowledge-holders and Métis who grew up on the land. LaRocque (2010, p. 137) argues that this aspect of the project of decolonization is “not

just about living off the land; it is about a whole way of perceiving, practising, and connecting language, land, knowledge, skill, and spirituality, and human-nature relationships from our land-based cosmologies.” One of our fathers happens to have grown up in such a context, and he has imparted to us a kind of Métis pedagogy based on land-based practices:

There wasn’t any formal [teaching], but you and I have gone fishing, and you’ve learned how to put a minnow or worm on a hook, you’ve learned how to use a jig without bait on it. It’s just little tips like this that are passed on I learned a lot from my older brother, he seemed to absorb a lot and he passed it on to me. It wasn’t formal lessons, but when we did trapping later in life, my father was an absolute wizard in figuring out what the animals would do and how to best catch them. He didn’t take any joy in anything other than the fact that it was supporting his family I learned a lot about trapping just by walking the trap line with him. We’d stop and we talk about something, and he’d point out this and that, but that was about as much formal education as you got on the trap line. You absorbed it and you remember it. I still think to this day I could still catch a number of beaver just using the tricks that he taught me. (Interview, January 3, 2010)

While much can be learned from scholarly rigour, we must also acknowledge the limits of such academic labours. Much of the knowledges so integral to being Métis are experiential, land-based knowledges, and deep engagement with these knowledges is integral to decolonized Métis pedagogies. One key element in such Métis pedagogies is the redevelopment of a relationship with the land and a relationship with the animals that live on it (building on the perspective offered by Alfred and Corntassel, 2005, p. 613). One of the easiest ways to distort Métis identity is to remove it from the relationships that both created it and maintained it during years of colonial interference. What is lacking in the narratives of Saul and Flanagan is any kind of relational grounding, any family or community context in understanding Métis experiences of the sort that Macdougall (2010) provides and that Alfred and Corntassel advocate as being at the core of resurgent Indigenous understandings (2005, p. 609; cf. Corntassel & Gaudry). While many Métis students grew up in the supportive and nurturing atmosphere of Métis communities and lifeways, a disproportionate number of us have not. A critical part of developing Métis pedagogies that are well-rounded and consistent with Métis ways of life is the re-establishment of relationships with the land and with Métis communities. This does not mean simply going hunting and fishing, or gardening, or ranching, but rather an immersion in Métis worldviews that sustain these practices. This cultural immersion has a pedagogy of its own, a way of relating between knowledge-holder and learner that is based on respect, patience, and responsibility. This land-based Métis pedagogy described above *respects* the ability and individual attributes of the learner, while the knowledge holder must embody profound *patience* as the learner struggles. All of this is premised on the idea of responsibility—that learners are capable and responsible individuals who are tasked with contributing a social or material benefit back to the family or community.

In many ways, decolonization of Métis pedagogy as we envision it is a two-fold process. It enables critical perspectives, where Métis students will have the skills and the freedom to question and challenge the dominant narratives about our people and to envision relational alternatives, but it is also an experiential process that takes us off-campus, and for many Métis academics out of our comfort zone and onto the physical and intellectual territory of our ancestors. The challenge for Métis pedagogical practitioners is how we can incorporate community- and land-based Métis pedagogies into our educational strategies (Adams, 1975, p. 134). Some work has been done in this direction in other Indigenous contexts; for example, the mentorship opportunities offered by the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria, and the relational land-based pedagogies developed by the Dechinta Bush University, both within the realm of the critically engaged experiential education of the sort envisioned by hooks.

It is through such engagements that we can envision Métis pedagogies that are grounded in Métis relational and land-based worldviews and develop the faculties of engaged critique. Our ancestors had pedagogies of their own—listening to the teachings of our knowledge holders and of our community members, while being analytically engaged in the university classroom, allow us to move towards decolonizing Métis pedagogies.

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Notes

¹ It is not our intent to become involved in the Big-M/Small-m Métis debate; Chris Andersen has done a convincing job putting these questions to rest, at least for the time being. He argues that small-m *métis* identity configurations imply a racialized mixedness, which is incompatible with a Métis peoplehood grounded in an "historical and contemporary *political* self-consciousness" (2011b, p. 47). Instead, Métis at Red River were capable of developing "normative orders" and "intersocial norms" in a way that necessitates their status as a "people" (2011b, p. 53), not as a simple category of mixed-race people. He further argues elsewhere that, "We are not a soup kitchen for those disenfranchised by past and present Canadian Indian policy" (2011a, p. 165), but rather, we are a people, and a nation, with particular political relationships with other peoples. However, we highlight the diversity in personal histories and current experiences by using both French (Métis) and English (Metis) spellings in this paper.

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