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**“REAL” INDIANS AND OTHERS
MIXED-RACE URBAN NATIVE PEOPLE,
THE INDIAN ACT,
AND THE
REBUILDING OF INDIGENOUS NATIONS**

by

Bonita Lawrence

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto**

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Canada

***“Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Race Urban Native People, the
Indian Act, and the Rebuilding of Indigenous Nations***

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ABSTRACT

Native identity, for urban mixed-race Native people, is shaped on the one hand by colonial regulation under the *Indian Act*, and on the other by Native heritage and connections to the land. This research engages with how the identities of the participants of this study (as well as the author herself) have been defined and molded by their families' lived experiences of cultural genocide, how the participants have, in resistance, actively explored their Native heritage, and how hegemonic images and definitions of Indianness have influenced these processes.

The research is based on interviews with thirty individuals of mixed Native and non-Native heritage living in the Toronto region, on the subject of urban Native identity. The first part of the thesis engages with the methodological concerns which must be taken into consideration when Native peoples' identities are the subjects of academic investigation, the highly distinct circumstances which are raised by the regulation of Native identity in Canada under the *Indian Act*, and the images of Indianness which exist within the dominant culture, which every urban mixed-race Native person must contend with in forming

their own identity as a Native person. The second part of the thesis engages directly with the participants' family histories, their opinions about Native identity, and the roles which they are playing in creating and maintaining an urban Native community.

The common thread running through the narratives is the devastating affect which loss of community as a result of genocidal government policies has had on the participants' families. The research clearly demonstrates the extent to which government regulation of Native identity, through racist and sexist restrictions within the *Indian Act*, has contributed to the alienation of individuals from their communities and has fragmented Native peoples' identities, dividing them into categories such as "status Indians", "Metis", "Bill C-31 Indians", "reserve Indians" and urban Indians". In a preliminary manner, it explores the forms of nation-building which might enable Native people to overcome the divisive effects of a history of government regulation of identity.

***For my mother
Eveline Marie Anida Melanson Lawrence
September 1916 - February 1999
Who was the primary inspiration for this work,
and who lived just long enough to see me complete it.
Merci, ma mere.***

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PREFACE:

This thesis grew from a number of sources. On the one hand was an awareness, as I looked around me, that many individuals in the Toronto Native community were visibly mixed race. While everybody simply professed a Native identity, some of us, it seemed, purely on the basis of appearance, were “more Indian” than others. Occasionally, I would be aware of tensions that were manifested around appearance, between dark-skinned Native people who denied the Indianness of white-looking people, and light-skinned people who maintained silence about the subject of their visible difference. Focusing on this issue for my thesis seemed a way of actually addressing what lay behind the silence and tensions within the Toronto Native community about differences in appearance and what it signified. That this subject is close to my own heart, as an individual who has wrestled with her own ambiguity about her Native identity, only made this project all the more compelling to undertake.

From another direction, I had the desire to create academic work which reflected more accurately the *diversity* of the contemporary urban Aboriginal community in Toronto. There is very little academic work about Native people which focuses on urban contexts, despite the fact that approximately 45% of all Aboriginal people in Canada now live in cities¹. Moreover, most work on urban Aboriginal people focuses primarily on recent migrants to the city and their struggles to adjust to urban life. I wanted to paint another picture, showing an urban population which has grown up in cities, whose members are well-adapted to city life, and who have found new ways to express Aboriginal identities as urban people. I wanted to express the fact that a number of

¹ RCAP, 1996, Vol.4, Section 7: 520.

these individuals are mixed-race, and demonstrate the diversity of experiences of Native identity which develop from mixed-race perspectives.

In a sense, it was necessary to address issues of urbanity and diversity in Aboriginal experience first of all, in order to be able to even introduce the subject of being mixed-race. It is impossible to talk about being a mixed-race urban Native person without first challenging the stereotypes about Native identity which suggest that being Aboriginal and being urban and mixed-race are mutually exclusive categories.

From still another direction, this thesis grew from a need to see work on mixed-race identity which encompasses Aboriginal viewpoints. There is a growing body of work, much of it from the United States, which focuses specifically on the myriad issues which mixed-race people have to deal with in negotiating their identities. However, with the exception of one recent publication about Native American mixed-bloods², most of this work focuses on individuals of Black/white heritages, and all of it is based on two assumptions: first, that the concerns of “settlers of colour”, which inevitably leave out issues of sovereignty and relationship to land, sufficiently represent the possible range of issues which mixed-race individuals face; and second, that mixed-race identity can be adequately understood solely as an individual experience. In such a framework, any concerns about the relationship between individual and collective identity fall by the wayside. There is no venue for mixed-race people of Native heritage to explore how their identities are formed and negotiated in a context of ongoing cultural genocide. There is no way to understand how histories of genocide, and their heritage of silencing, have affected how mixed race individuals of

² Penn, William S. (ed). *As We are Now: Mixblood Essays on Race and Identity*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.

Native ancestry see themselves. None of the writings on mixed-race identity which I have encountered have offered me a way of dealing with the confusions and contradictions around my own identity which arose from the tremendous silencing in my family around Aboriginal identity. As a result, the strongest impetus for this project was my own need to explore urban mixed-race Native identity, to understand the issues which have arisen during the process of negotiating my own identity. Below, I will present my own situation.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I grew up in a family which identified, for the first few years of my life, as expatriate British. “We” (my father’s story) were one of a handful of working-class British families who settled on the south shore of Montreal at the end of World War II. In the tiny community I was born in, our family existed uneasily, nurtured on my father’s tales of the Royal family, and anticipating the day when “we” would be returning to England, from whence my father had so recently arrived. Silent in this version of who we were was my mother, who took no part in the life of this little English community—nor in the life of the equally tiny French-Canadian hamlet which the English immigrants had descended upon after the war. The extent to which my mother—dark, French-speaking, Catholic—was ostracized by the people around us, English *and* French, is something that was always there, so complete as to be almost a non-issue. That we, her children, were also for the most part rejected by those same people is something that I have only recently begun to understand. Mahogany-skinned uncles, and aunts with Native features but French accents had visited us throughout our childhood—but they were simply part of my mother’s family—the silenced side of our family identity. They did not fit with our “Britishness”, but no explanations were offered. In

any case, I was quite young when my mother left my father, and that chapter of our life as an (almost) British family came to an end.

Always told by my mother that “there’s Indian in us”, there was nevertheless no language to describe who we were, on the South Shore of Montreal in the early 1960’s. By the time I was seven, family survival outweighed all other considerations. The frugal security of the post-war white working-class existence we had enjoyed while my father was around had given way to an outright struggle for survival, food and shelter. We were a desperately poor single-parent family—six of us subsisting on the minimum-wage salaries of my mother and one sister, living in French communities as outsiders, and moving continuously in search of cheap accommodation. My mother lived in fear of having her children taken away from her. This imposed severe constraints on us, as she did not dare to appeal to social assistance, and always insisted that rent and bills had to be paid first, so that we would not appear to be in crisis, even if that left almost nothing for food. Her hard work paid off, in that she was able to maintain us as a family in the face of tremendous odds. But the price of this struggle for survival has been an absolute ruthlessness on her part about abandoning anything—including any identification with Native people—which might stand in the way of our survival as a family. The social stability which whiteness represents has been something which has been fought for, tooth and nail, in my family.

So even as we gave up on attempts to explain our family as “British”, in common sense ways my siblings and I were not taught to identify with the Native part of our heritage. Instead, the rising nationalist movement that gradually engulfed Quebec society weighed heavily on our sense of who we were, as we struggled to situate ourselves, a “French” mother and “English” children, on different sides of the widening linguistic divide around us. By the time I was a teenager,

Englishness and whiteness had become common-sense definitions of who my generation of our family was, even if a heritage of chaotic poverty still marked us and set us apart from the lower-middle-class white Anglo-Canadians around us. The wave of Native militancy which sprang up during the early 1970's passed over us untouched, except for my mother's occasional expressions of a sense of vindication. On a number of occasions in my young adulthood, during those intervals when I had spent any time outdoors and acquired a tan, I was (as I thought it at the time) 'mistaken' for Indian. Except for a brief interval travelling out west, I had little opportunity to socialize with Native people.

My young adulthood was marked by self-destructive behavior (drug and alcohol abuse) and abusive partners. I was almost thirty by the time I first attempted to take control of my life and began my healing process. When I entered university at the age of 31, I quickly realized how poor the fit was between who I was and the "real" Canadians (middle-class white and Anglo) who surrounded me. This precipitated intensive self-exploration, and an attempt to explain my obvious difference by looking through the lenses of gender and class. Being light-skinned and white-identified, however, I initially ignored race. This left me without the tools to understand how the struggle to attain the respectability which whiteness represents in this society had not only marked my experiences in university, but had already been a central issue in my family for a generation.

The events at Oka in 1990 made my mother begin to talk more openly about "the Indian in us." However, it was not until 1992, when I received a student grant and spent two months in the Cree community of Moose Factory, Ontario, that my mother finally began to talk about her family to me—over the phone, long-distance, in short anecdotal accounts of childhood experiences. For the first time, I began to struggle with a

new “in-between” feeling, which was no longer linguistic, or class-based, but racial. With the eyes of the white society, I had learned to see the Native people around me as “Other”. But with my mother’s stories in my ears—and with the numbers of Cree Metis women I met in Moose Factory who reminded me of her—I began to feel a confused sense of connection between myself and these “others”. This sensation left me feeling increasingly at sea, hemmed by negatives—for if I gradually began to realize that I was not white, there was certainly no way that I, with my years of light-skin privilege and my unexamined notions of who or what was “Indian”, could understand myself to be a Native person. The following year, I accompanied my mother back to the Maritimes, in search of the Mi’kmaw relatives she remembered from her childhood. We began an attempt to piece together our Mi’kmaq family history; a process which has in some ways created more questions than answers about who we are as Native people.³

Rob Nixon, speaking of the “culture of exile” in which individuals uprooted by forces of colonization live out their lives, describes how conditions of exile can create individuals who are a total metissage, who

³ The individuals my mother remembers—off-reserve Mi’kmaw people who visited Shediac every summer in the 1920’s—have now passed on. Inquiring at different local reserves, however, enabled us to trace them back to Lennox Island, P.E.I., which we assumed to be my grandmother’s community. However, recent genealogical research conducted by different family members has established that on both my grandmother’s and grandfather’s side, our ancestors—who mostly appear to have French names—have lived near Shediac, New Brunswick for at least three generations. My grandmother may have referred to members of the Labobe family who visited her regularly from Lennox Island as “family”; however, this could not have been her community, and so our efforts to search out family there have been in vain. The next step for our family is to begin to explore possible connections with nearby Buctouche reserve, and possible with Big Cove. We were also informed by Mi’kmaq elder Peter J. Barlow that a reserve once existed at Shediac. More historical research is needed, to bring family stories in line with official records and to trace on-reserve connections. Native identity in the Maritimes hinges on being able to trace your exact lineage among status Indians on specific reserves. Having off-reserve ancestors whose community affiliations are not well-established tends to invalidate one’s sense of their Native identity; an issue which my family continues to struggle with.

have travelled out of range of simple cultural allegiances and reclamations (Nixon, 1995:150). Returning with my mother to the village where she was born, almost eighty years earlier, the reverse process seemed true. My mother, a mixed-race person in a profoundly apartheid society, had lived for most of her life outside the Maritimes as an Acadian woman who was “part Indian.” Her life, full of struggle, narrow choices and forced adaptations, had not fundamentally changed her allegiances, or her sense of who she was. And yet, returning to the community of her childhood, now modernized beyond all recognition and caught up in a wave of rewriting its own history according to French nationalist overtones, it was obvious that “Acadianness” did not accurately describe her. Face to face with blond haired, blue eyed Acadians who were proud of their French heritage, my mother clearly did not fit. Meanwhile, as we traveled from one Mi’kmaq community to the next, looking for the individuals she remembered from childhood, it was also obvious that there was no longer any entry point for her back into the Mi’kmaq society that her mother had left behind. All of the people she remembered from her childhood were dead. If Mi’kmaq communities once acknowledged off-reserve and diasporic members, as they appeared to have done during my mother’s childhood, the closed world of contemporary reserve life could only see her as a stranger. We were welcomed, addressed in Mi’kmaq, fed, and in one community invited to share in preparations for the upcoming St. Anne’s feast. However, at the feast we were put at the table for “guests”, as strangers. For the week that we spent visiting different Mi’kmaq communities, my mother encountered the recurring shock of realizing that Native communities, the places where she least expected to feel at home, in some ways *felt* most familiar to her, and were the places where she was treated with the most kindness. At yet it was not a place she could claim as home. It was obvious that the ambivalent

space between Frenchness and Indianness which my mother's family had uneasily occupied in turn-of-the-century New Brunswick no longer exists in contemporary times, and in this respect, my mother, who yearned for "home", returned to the Maritimes to find there was no existing community where she really belonged.



Eveline Marie Anida Melanson, with her husband Thomas Lawrence, her mother, Cecile Arseneault and her father, Eloi Melanson, on her wedding day, in 1944

I am left with piecing together an Aboriginal heritage out of family history as my relatives remember it, weaving together bits of accounts from almost a century earlier, among profound silences. Central to this process has been re-interpretation—taking accounts from family members which continually position our Nativeness as marginal and refiguring them to understand our Native identity in contemporary terms.

My grandmother, Cecile Arseneault, the daughter of Crescence Gallant and Victor Arseneault, was, despite her French name, culturally Mi'kmaq; however, she married Eloi Melanson, an man of obvious Native

heritage but who was culturally Acadian. In the early years of her marriage, my grandmother maintained a strong Mi'kmaq presence in her home. The children of my mother's oldest siblings have talked about their fathers' memories of playing primarily with Mi'kmaw children. Native people were present and welcome, and even in my own childhood, I recall the visits from our Maine relatives who I now cannot identify, from their pictures, in any way other than as Indians. But by the time

my mother, the eleventh child, came along, a silence about Indianness had grown within her family. Socializing with Mi'kmaw relatives had become sporadic. By this point, my grandmother would visit her relatives in the tents where they made camp in the woods near the town, rather than having them visit her in her house. My mother was always brought along on visits with these relatives—indeed, my grandmother had no option but to bring her young children with her everywhere—but she did not tell her children much about them. She did not talk about the past at all. My mother recalls her mother talking to her relatives in a low voice, in words she could not understand; otherwise, she never heard her mother speak Mi'kmaq.

My grandmother, born in the 1870's, lived during the time when Mi'kmaw people were at their lowest; reduced to 1,500 from a pre-contact population of at least 200,000, starving and almost landless, they were at the point where most whites were predicting their extinction. I can only speculate about her reasons for her silence about being Mi'kmaq (she died when I was much too young to be concerned about issues of identity). Perhaps she was weary of the conflict that was involved in asserting an off-reserve Native identity in the hardening turn-of-the-century racial climate. Or perhaps my grandfather grew increasingly negative in his attitudes towards my grandmother's family (and his own heritage) as the years went by, and brought about the silence in our family. In any case, my grandmother never talked about her family. But my mother has spoken of teachings, different herbs her mother used, the habits of humour and resiliency, faith and independence which her mother taught her. It is clear to me that my grandmother passed strong values on to my mother. Without "the feathers". Without calling them "Native values". Despite the silence.

Identity, for my mother, was a complex issue. Around strangers, she would acknowledge that she was “part Indian” only reluctantly. She endured racist treatment from nuns at school as a child, being called “sauvagesse” by Acadian boys, and other forms of denigration throughout her life. But what kind of name described her? She was brown-skinned but blue-eyed; she grew up off-reserve, non-status and not speaking Mi’kmaq, with only periodic visits with Mi’kmaw relatives. There has been no tradition of “Metisness” in the Maritime provinces. You were Indian or white—or you simply had no name for yourself. My mother, like most of her brothers and sisters, grew up calling herself “Acadian”. They all left the Maritimes and married white. Most of her siblings settled in the United States, but my mother and one brother and sister stayed in Canada. And except for occasional self-deprecating comments about Indianness from aunts and cousins, my generation grew up as a white family.

In the years since I began a search to learn about the Indianness that appears “everywhere and nowhere” throughout my mother’s family, I have engaged in the kind of struggle around identity which in one way or another appears to have haunted every displaced, urbanized and mixed-race person of Aboriginal heritage, a struggle wrapped up in the single question—is my family a Native family? With the encouragement of a number of individuals and elders in the Toronto Native community, I slowly began to move in Native circles as a person of Native heritage. At times this resolves easily into the category “Native person”. However, at other times the contradictions abound, and the ruptures which members of my family have experienced from their heritage appears insurmountable.

As I have become clearer about my own identity, it has been easier to understand the uneasy and paradoxical relationship which most of my

family still demonstrates to their Nativeness. Before her death, my mother, like her one remaining sibling, routinely distanced herself from her Native identity—acknowledging it only by deprecating it. On the one hand, she was not comfortable with being identified as Native. On the other hand, she also did not feel that she was a “real” Indian, since she did not grow up in a Native community and did not learn Mi’kmaq. There was, in fact, no name that really described her. Like her siblings, she had learned how to contain and minimize her Native identity, so it would not trouble anybody. She learned, in fact, how to make her Native identity seem meaningless, despite her dark skin. Our generation in my family now lives with the repercussions of having been brought up to consider our Native heritage, at very deep levels, to be meaningless. And yet, like a tough weed whose roots are pervasively anchored everywhere in the soil of this land and which therefore *cannot* be uprooted, our Native identity continues to manifest its presence in my family, even after a generation of silencing.

While I have gradually become more comfortable with the fact that Mi’kmaq culture *is* my heritage, regardless of whether I fit the dominant culture’s expectations about appearance or experience, I also feel that it is imperative that I not attempt to act as if my family’s experiences of assimilation do not exist. The privileges of *looking* white in a white supremacist society remain with a person, no matter how they choose to identify. Furthermore, the ambiguous and contradictory attitudes which many members of my family continue to maintain towards their Native identity cannot be denied. And yet my efforts to reintroduce aspects of Mi’kmaq heritage within my family are part of the struggle for survival which all Native people are engaged in, one way or another. What I have been searching for is a broader sense of a Native identity, which encompasses the experiences of my mother’s generation, and my own, as

people who are, in a sense, recent exiles from our Native heritage, but who do not yet really belong anywhere else. "The Indian is us" is not going anywhere, and the only option for my generation is either to continue with the denial in my family (so that by the next generation our Native identity will be virtually obliterated) or to embrace it. In this respect the urban Native community's insistence that one must choose between being "Native or not" is absolutely accurate. There is a choice to be made, between struggling to conform to whiteness in order to have access to its privileges, and acknowledging an identity which, as a legacy of marginality, alcoholism and loss, has had fearful resonance in my family.

It is out of these experiences of belonging and not-belonging, that I felt the need to seek out other mixed-race Aboriginal people, from all walks of urban Native life, to discuss issues of Native identity.

PROBLEMS OF LOCATION:

If the above account demonstrates anything, it is that for me to pretend to be able to write objectively and dispassionately about this subject would belie the pain involved in being open about experiences which have the potential to externalize me from community. It is impossible for me to sit back and theorize in the abstract about mixed-race Native identity without taking into account what it was actually like to interview thirty individuals of mixed-race Native heritage on the subject of their identities. For example, there were the occasions when I would arrive in an exhausted and vulnerable state for an interview with a participant who I had been introduced to through friends and did not know very well. I would find myself suddenly struggling with the worry that they might be so much "more Indian" than I was that my own identity claims might seem meaningless. On some occasions, the depth

and solidness of participants' connections to community as revealed through their stories *did* have this effect, and I would go home in a state of upheaval, convinced that my claims to a Native identity were so minimal as to be, in a sense, fraudulent. On other occasions, I worried that other participants might not be "Indian enough" to be valid subjects for the thesis, from a vantage point that felt comfortably (if shallowly) grounded in my own Mi'kmaq heritage. My own sense of entitlement to a Native identity thus fluctuated wildly throughout the interview process.

Other weaknesses of my own location had to be taken into consideration on a number of occasions as well. At times, for example, particularly when dealing with issues such as Indian status, I had to process my own emotions before I could attempt to present a balanced perspective, given my tendency, like that of many non-status people, to simply dismiss status as meaningless and divisive, and to wrestle occasionally with a touch of envy because of my own lack of a home community. More to the point, the fact that I have never lived on a reserve (or even spent extensive periods in reserve communities) has meant that my attempts to understand urban/reserve dynamics lack a certain experiential grounding. While I have made observations about "on reserve Indians" based on the comments which the participants of this study have made, as well as the writings of Native people who are situated in reserve settings, this lack of experiential grounding might result in statements which do not necessarily reflect the nuances of life as it is lived on many reserves (or in Metis villages). I apologize for any inaccuracies which might result.

The issue of my appearance, as a person who does not look particularly Native, came out at other times, when I encountered dark-skinned individuals who were angry at light-skinned privilege, and found myself reacting to and shrinking back from their anger, rather than

engaging with the experiences behind that anger. On a few occasions, when asking some individuals about their opinions about white-looking Native people, I encountered only veiled and polite responses—as if these individuals wished to protect me from knowing about their real feelings in the interests of maintaining a friendship. On a couple of occasions, I felt myself being complicit in the process—avoiding any deeper exploration of issues of appearance because I sensed that this might reveal a gulf between me and the other person which could not be bridged.

On some occasions, I walked away from interviews with a sense of enrichment and validation about the importance of reclaiming a mixed-race Native heritage which was heartening. At other times, however, the strain of listening intently to the stories of pain and devastation which some of the participants described left me emotionally drained and desolate. Throughout the long process of interviewing such a variety of individuals, it was impossible to avoid the fact that each person's story impacted on my understandings of my own identity. As a result, at times the project was an emotional and in some ways continuously destabilizing and risky experience for me.

As I learned from interviewing the thirty participants, many urban Native people (including many who look “pure Indian”) are mixed-race. A number of the participants have never left a Native identity behind, while others have successfully reintegrated themselves into a Native identity with little problem. A few of the participants continue to struggle with the sense that, despite their Native heritage, they are not Native people. However, they have still managed to become valuable members of the urban Native community, despite histories of silence and forced or “voluntary” assimilation within their families (can anything asserted with such pressure be considered to be entirely voluntary?). What became

glaringly obvious throughout the interview process was the extent to which white stereotypes about Native identity have shaped and constrained individuals' sense of who they are. One goal of this project, then, is to document some of the lived realities of urban mixed-race Aboriginal people, in all their complexity. The other is to explore the nuances of the contradictions which mixed-race Native people must negotiate—around racial identity, around legal status, around being urban, and in many cases, as the products of a profound silence about Indianness.

MAP OF THE THESIS:

Part One of this thesis groups together the theoretical issues which arise when attempting to understand the subject of urban mixed-race Native identity. The first chapter explores the methodological concerns which must be taken into consideration when Native peoples' identities are the subjects of investigation. The second and third chapters address the highly distinct circumstances which are raised by the regulation of Native identity in Canada under the *Indian Act*. The histories of specific sections of the Act are explored in these chapters, in order to understand the extent to which these laws have shaped how Native people understand who they are. The fourth chapter broadens the context of colonial regulation of Indigenous identity by briefly looking at American ways of controlling Indianness through blood quantum requirements, and explores an instance where this form of regulation has been adopted by a Canadian band. The fifth chapter looks at the tremendous body of images of Indianness which exist within the dominant culture, images which every urban mixed-race Native person must contend with in forming their own identity as a Native person.

Part Two of the thesis focuses on the interviews with the participants, and is divided into three sections. The first section is oral history—engaging with the participants’ family histories, and the historical processes which have shaped their experiences. A central feature of this section is an exploration of the issues which caused families to leave their Native communities behind, and the circumstances which they faced in coming to the city. These histories are explored in detail, in an effort to make sense of the tremendous silence about Native identity which has been a feature of much of urban Native family life in the past forty years. This silence has rendered Native heritage ambiguous for a number of the participants, as well as for the author. In a sense, this section is about how the participants have come to understand themselves to be Native people, flowing from their family histories.

The second section focuses on hegemonic images and definitions of Indianness, and how they affect the participants’ views of themselves and their identities. The issues raised in this section—whether one looks Indian; whether one is legally defined as Indian; and whether a person grew up on a reserve or in the city—are at the heart of many of the confusions which urban mixed-race Native people have had to negotiate around their identities. In this section, I attempt to understand how the images and definitions of Indianness created by the colonizer to control Native people have become so central to Native peoples’ own self-images.

The final section of the thesis is, in some respects, a snapshot of contemporary urban Native identities. In this section, I explore the roles which the participants have played in creating and maintaining an urban Native community, and what they see as important to maintaining a Native identity in urban contexts. Rather than denying or de-emphasizing the differences between urban and on-reserve Native people, I attempt to focus on these differences, as a first step in considering what

we have in common. The final chapter explores how urban Aboriginal people see their roles in the rebuilding of their nations.

Some of the life experiences which I learned about in this project are common to mixed-race people of all heritages. Many of these experiences, however, are unique to Aboriginal people—in particular, the manner in which our identities have been legally defined, or excluded from definition, under an apartheid code, the *Indian Act*, and the sheer intensity of the all-out campaign of genocide that our parents and grandparents survived. However, what is most urgent and pressing in the case of mixed-race Aboriginal people is the colonized present reality we live in. What does it mean to claim membership in an Indigenous nation when that nation lacks a land base or control over its destiny, and is, in fact, occupied by a colonizing nation-state called “Canada”? In such a context, mixed-race Native identity can never be solely either an individual or a neutral issue.

To a certain extent, this thesis represents half of a dialogue—of urban Native people exploring what their relationships might be to their nations of origin. As the participants’ stories will demonstrate, while some of our parents and grandparents may at times have attempted to deliberately cut the ties which bound them to their communities, most did so under duress. Their children have struggled with issues of internalized oppression and born the brunt of racism, or had their way eased along through light-skinned privilege. They have maintained their identities, or endured years of being alienated, living with truncated identities, and not knowing who they were. In contemporary urban society, they are building for a common future of Indigenous empowerment.

The other half of the dialogue, which hopefully this thesis can help to stimulate, are the stories which need to be told of how our home

communities remember us and see us now. There are probably very few First Nations people who see it as a priority to concern themselves with building links between on-reserve status “Indians” and the urban people who identify as members of Indigenous nations. There has been a long history in a number of regions of North America, that those who are mixed-race or Metis have been the weak links in the chain of resistance to colonization, if not at the vanguard of white encroachment on Native communities. And yet, as this thesis demonstrates, mixed race urban Native people, however we define ourselves or are defined by others, are now on the move, appropriating urban sites as Native spaces. It is my hope that we can build for a future where our different realities are seen as linked by our common histories, and where urban Aboriginal people—in all the complexity of our mixed-race identities—are seen not as a threat but as a benefit to the future of Indigenous nations.

The participants’ knowledge and experience, over the two years in which I was engaged in this study, have been invaluable for my own understanding of this subject. Since very little theoretical writing has been published about urban mixed-race Native identity—and none from Canadian contexts (which is highly distinct given the unique importance of the *Indian Act* in defining and constraining Native identity in Canada), the participants have been the experts in this undertaking, whose words I have been able to share in the writing of this work.

No discussion about the participants is possible without some reference to the violence, oppression, and sense of homelessness which marks most of their histories. For almost all of the individuals, their families had left their home communities either through state-organized force, or under pressure of violence. Experiences of alienation and loss resonated through most of the participants’ family histories, as did the

“choices” of many of the parents of the participants to be silent about their Native identity, in the interest of survival.

It is also impossible to speak of the participants without some recognition of the violence that continues to shape their present realities. In the time between the interview process and writing this thesis, the husband of one of the participants was murdered, while another was imprisoned. Others have wrestled with their own or other family members’ alcoholism, and their own issues around abuse throughout this process. Meanwhile, a number of the participants face the destabilization and devastation of urban Native life on a daily basis through their work in the community. And yet the participants’ lives also attest to the tremendous resiliency of Native people and Native cultures. Survival and regeneration, in a sense, are the common themes that bind the participants’ lives together. It is my hope that this work can do justice to the stories so kindly shared with me, and give them the kind of care and attention they deserve.

We’laliq! Um sed nogumak.

(Thank you. All my relations).

PART I
THEORIZING
URBAN MIXED-RACE
NATIVE IDENTITY

CHAPTER ONE

THE “TERRANULLISM¹” OF THEORY:

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN EXPLORING NATIVE

IDENTITY

It is true that “the American Indian Intellectual” is to many people a bizarre phrase, falling quaintly on the unaccustomed ears of those in the American mainstream. While there are images of Jewish intellectuals, European intellectuals, British scholars, African novelists, there is no image of an American Indian intellectual. There is only that primitive figure who crouches near the fire smoking a sacred pipe or, arms outstretched, calls for the gods to look down upon his pitiful being. Worse, the drunk, demoralized Chingachgook sitting alongside the road, a medallion with George Washington’s face imprinted on it hanging about his neck. Or the Red Power militant of the 1960s. It is as though the American Indian has no intellectual voice with which to enter into America’s important dialogues (Cook-Lynn, 1998:111-112).

INTRODUCTION:

This thesis on mixed-race urban Native identity sits uneasily within contemporary sociological discourse. On the one hand is the recent “cutting edge” work on identity, race and culture, for the most part post-structuralist, where Native people are virtually absent and where, in many cases, subjectivity and nationhood are blithely disposed of as fictions with little sense of the implications of such perspectives for those peoples whose lands remain occupied, whose collective existence remains unrecognized and whose identities are assumed to be eternally “vanishing”. On the other hand are the writings by formerly colonized so-

¹ This concept is taken from Lorraine Lecamp’s incisive exploration of how Aboriginal perspectives are excluded from contemporary Critical Theory in “Terra Nullius/Theoria Nullius—Empty Lands/Empty Theory: A Literature Review of Critical Theory from an Aboriginal Perspective”. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology and Equity Studies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1998.

called “Third World” peoples, which engage with the material conditions of ongoing global domination, and seek to rupture colonialist narratives and reconstitute the lives and histories of the nonwhite peoples of the world as subjects. For the most part, however, these works do not take seriously the ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples in the Americas for sovereignty and return of Indigenous lands. Meanwhile, always in the background is mainstream work by non-Natives *about* Native people, a discourse which, like Orientalism, fixes Native people into categories of racial “Otherness” and has been essential to the ongoing colonization project in the Americas.

This glaring omission of Indigenous subjectivity or presence in virtually every aspect of sociological theory is part of what Cree scholar Lorraine Lecamp has referred to as “Terranullism”—the habit on the part of radical theorists from all backgrounds to treat the Americas as originally empty lands, devoid of any valid Indigenous presence. In this process, Native peoples *at best* represent a historical experience of genocide, to be briefly mourned and then quickly dismissed. For the most part, sociological theory in the Americas is premised on a post-conquest set of assumptions that if Indigenous peoples exist at all, they have no choice but to join “larger” struggles—for democracy in Latin America, for racial justice for all settlers in North America, and to challenge American hegemony globally. The fundamental questions about land and sovereignty in the Americas have yet to be raised in any meaningful way within sociological discourse.

It is perhaps in response to this ignoring or distortion of Indigenous realities, as well as from the highly specific circumstances that Native peoples in North America face (when our homelands *are* “the West”, to speak of challenging Western hegemony takes on a whole different set of meanings), that the majority of Indigenous scholars have

shown little interest in entering into the contemporary sociological debates about modernity and the postmodern, about Marxism and feminism and post-coloniality—indeed, about globalization and neocolonialism. Instead, emergent Native theoretical voices have focused on Indigenous sovereignty, reclaiming the land, and turning to the voices of the Elders for theoretical grounding. Many of them work to ensure that Native approaches to knowledge acquisition are recognized as valid academic foundations, in the face of continuous and relentless processes of cultural genocide. My primary concern, in such a context, has been to find a theoretical framework which grounds the realities of the participants and addresses the concerns around identity which are most important within the Toronto Native community, and in a broader sense, to Native communities in general.

Identity is understood in this thesis to be neither neutral, passive, nor fixed. While identity is intrinsically an individual issue, it is also relational, juxtaposed with others' identities, with how they see themselves and see you (Steinhouse, 1998:1). In some respects, identity has been seen as something that a person *does*; in other respects, identity is seen as defining what a person *is*. Because identities are embedded in systems of power based on race, class, and gender, identity is a highly political issue, with ramifications for how contemporary and historical collective experience is understood. Identity, in a sense, is about ways of looking at people (Clifford, 1988:289), about how history is interpreted and negotiated, and about who has the authority to determine a group's identity or authenticity (Clifford, 1988:8)². For Native

² This is most apparent in land claims struggles, which are always argued as interpretations of history, and which therefore involve a contest over meaning, over whose terms will be recognized as meaningful. In the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en sovereignty case, for example, Elders spent a year addressing the court *on their own terms* about the history and nature of their societies which had governed the 22,000 square mile land base of their ancestral territory for many thousands of years. Their

people, individual identity is always being negotiated *in relation to* collective identity, and *in the face of* an external, colonizing society. Bodies of law defining and controlling Indianness have for years distorted and disrupted older Indigenous ways of identifying the self in relation not only to collective identity but to the land. This thesis engages with both processes—with how the participants in this project understand and negotiate their own identities in relation to community, and with how external definitions and controls on Indianness have impacted on these identities.

While identities are embedded in power relations which are always constituted along lines of race, class and gender, this work, in looking at mixed-race identity, has for the most part focused on race. In some respects, this is inevitable. As Maidu poet Janice Gould notes, we cannot understand mixed-race identity without focusing centrally on race:

...the voices of mixed-blood Asian, African American, Hispanic and Indian writers must be elicited, listened to, consulted, and considered in a global perspective. We will be prodded to challenge concepts of acculturation and assimilation, of race and ethnicity. We will be asked to examine in a more thorough, radical, and frightening way this legacy of racism. We may not even be able to consider issues of gender and class before we explore this troubling thing we call race (Gould, 1992:87).

At the same time, this work continuously inquires, albeit in a less detailed manner, how class and gender shapes different aspects of Native experience.

Particular attention is paid in this work to gender, although I take

exact and painstaking accounts were, however, dismissed as unreliable. Gitksan knowledge claims about their own identities were measured against racist colonial frames of reference (where the Americas are “empty lands” and where Native peoples are “primitive” and therefore incapable of developing solid and enduring institutions of governance) and found to be simply unbelievable. Only the evidence of anthropologists and historians, which followed European frameworks of academic discourse, was recognized as “real” evidence (Monet and Skanu’u, 1992:187-189).

very seriously the warning of Mohawk scholar Patricia Monture-Angus, that for Native women “feminism as an ideology remains colonial” (Monture-Angus, 1995:171).³ Monture-Angus has noted in particular that the concept of “patriarchy” alone is inadequate for explaining the many levels of violence which Native women face within their communities, and the apparent inability or unwillingness of band governments to make their circumstances a priority (Monture-Angus, 1995:172). I concur with Monture-Angus that we must look more deeply and in a more nuanced manner for an understanding of why certain communities have supported, for example, sexist provisions within the *Indian Act*, and that to simply regard this issue as one of sexism ignores how constant colonial incursions into Native spaces generate almost unimaginable levels of violence, which includes, but is not restricted to, sexist oppression.

On the other hand, I also agree with writers such as Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) and Janice Acoose (Cree Metis/Saulteaux), who explore how colonization has always been a gendered process, and how the Church in particular has very specifically attacked the status of Native women as a way of undermining the power of Native societies in general. This issue is central for this study, where I explore how gendered regulation of Native identity under the *Indian Act* has disrupted the viability of Native communities for over a century by forcibly removing tens of thousands of Native women and their descendents from their communities for marrying non-status or non-Native men. In

³ While the actual settler nature of much of the Canadian women’s movement often demonstrates the extent to which Canadian feminism is simply another aspect of the colonizing culture for Native women, the historical picture, where feminism has functioned as “handmaiden of colonialism” worldwide, also cannot be denied. As Sherene Razack notes, many contemporary feminists reinscribe this imperial relationship by positioning themselves as the modern, free and enlightened “saviours” of “backward” women in the South (Razack, 1998:5-7).

contemporary terms, it is precisely because of the colonial context framing self-determination struggles that gender so often becomes an extremely volatile issue, particularly as it has been (and continues to be manifested) in the struggles around Bill C-31. The determination by colonial governments in Canada and the United States to destroy the collective nature of Indigenous societies and the power of Native women has left a peculiar legacy where struggles over sovereignty almost inevitably involve tensions between collective and individual needs, often expressed as gendered struggles where the human rights of Native women are juxtaposed to the sovereignty rights of band governments. In these struggles, the same colonial government which promoted male dominance inevitably intervenes as the protector of the (individual) rights of Native women. Because contemporary ways of expressing white racial superiority rely on images of “the oppressed nonwhite woman” which are always juxtaposed to images of white Western egalitarianism towards women, the interventions of the Canadian government only reinforce contemporary notions of white superiority and Native savagery.

This thesis, exploring how mixed-race urban Native people negotiate their identities, has continuously run up against three issues which impact the lives of the participants almost on a daily basis—appearance, legal status, and urbanity. I have attempted, in this study, to tease out the implications of each of these issues for urban mixed-race Native people. However, because of the colonial regulation of Native identity in Canada (and indeed, across the Americas), these issues are of necessity interrelated. The reader should be prepared for an occasional sense of repetitiveness, as the diverse issues which different participants face nevertheless lead us back, again and again, to the same colonial narratives about Native identity which impact all Native people, albeit in different ways.

1.1 UNDERSTANDING MIXED-RACE URBAN NATIVE IDENTITY:

The participants of this study are all mixed-race, of Native and white heritages (two are tri-racial, with Black or Asian heritages as well); however, for the most part their primary self-identification is not simply as “mixed-race”, but as Native. Some participants claim more complex ties to Nativeness, referring to themselves as “mixed race Native”, while others reclaim derogatory terms lodged in a history of racism against Native people, such as “halfbreed”; none, however, claim to be *unaligned* in the sense of being “in the middle”. For the most part, their decision⁴ to adopt the Native aspect of their heritage as a primary identifier is a result of the relentlessly colonialist nature of Canadian society, where Native realities are distorted everywhere but in all-Native contexts. This apartheid situation, where no “middle ground” exists, creates a strong pressure on individuals of Native heritage to either disavow their Nativeness, as a buried and meaningless part of a white identity (for those mixed-race individuals who can), or to “come out” as Native and adopt Native perspectives on the world (regardless of appearance).

There is also the manner in which Native identity is intensely fragmented and objectified, where being legally an Indian is regulated by government-specified amounts of “Indian blood”—twenty-five per cent in the United States, and (in practice) fifty per cent in Canada⁵.

⁴ It should be noted that for about a third of the participants, there was no “decision” involved—either they grew up in Native communities and therefore had always identified as Indian regardless of their appearance, or they were so Native in appearance that they were not offered any choice about how to identify, regardless of their exposure to Native culture. It is the other participants, whose appearance is ambiguous or white-looking and who grew up outside Native culture, who can be said to have “chosen” their Native heritage.

⁵ As I will explore more closely in Chapter Two and Three, Canada instituted a blood quantum requirement of 25% which regulated Native identity in eastern Canada from mid-nineteenth century. When Canada expanded west, however, much more stringent controls on who was accepted as Indian were practiced (and later encoded in law), so that anybody deemed “halfbreed” in Western Canada was excluded from recognition as Indian. Other legislation in later versions of the *Indian Act*, such as the “double mother clause” (which will be explored in Chapter Thirteen), removed the status of anybody who

Commanche activist Paul Smith has commented on the way in which this objectification of Native identity has become part of common-sense racism:

I am sometimes asked “How much Indian are you?” or “Are you a fullblood?” from people who have never asked black people, lightskinned or otherwise “How much black are you?” or “Are you a fullblood black?” It rarely occurs to many non-Indians how weird it is to use these terms reserved exclusively for Indians (Smith, 1991/2:17)

Given the struggle against this kind of fragmentation which Native people already face, to voluntarily engage with further quantifying their identities as “mixed race people” has little attraction for Native people of mixed heritages.

Many Native people are troubled that the price of emphasizing a mixed-race identity is a further devaluing of Native identity. As Creek/Cherokee academic Craig Womack writes, the larger tribal picture can never be forgotten for Native people:

...I’m somewhat ambivalent about the whole notion of celebrating mixedblood identity...emphasizing a generic identity over tribal specificity. It’s not the issue of mixedblood identity that bothers me since, for better or worse or a combination of the two, this is a contemporary reality for many Indian people, including myself. What bothers me is making mixedblood identity the primary focus of one’s identification or one’s writing. I’m wondering if identifying as mixedblood, rather than as part of a tribal nation, diminishes sovereignty? Perhaps the two need not be mutually exclusive; maybe one can face the reality of a mixed existence while still asserting the primacy of nationalism, the latter not being exclusively defined by degree of blood but by an interplay of biological, cultural, and political factors. What might be called for is a view of identity in terms of the larger picture—the tribal

was less than “half Indian” at the age of twenty-one. Contemporary re-working of status requirements under Bill C-31 denies status to anybody who is less than “half Indian”. Although blood quantum levels do not actually correspond to these status requirements, because individuals who are less than “half Indian” cannot acquire status, in a sense, a person must be “50% Indian” to acquire status in Canada.

nation—rather than in terms of the [individual] fragmented mixedblood... (Womack, 1997:32).

For a mixed-race person to insist on the primacy of a “Native” identity, however, in some ways reinforces the notion that the boundaries between “white” and “Native” are rigid and absolute. Even to speak of being “mixed-race” is to perpetuate the notion that the world is made up of distinct biological racial groups. Because of the boundaried history that is encapsulated in the concept of “race”, writing about any form of mixed-race identity balances on the edge of the contradictory and racist meanings that are implicated in the notion of the existence of biological “races” (Lui, 1996:6-9). In any case, the *lives* of mixed-race Native people do not necessarily fit these neat boundaries, neither with respect to appearance nor in the sense of feeling at home, in the Native world or in non-Native settings. For this reason, in this study the struggles of the participants to negotiate sometimes highly-contradictory circumstances will be highlighted.

On the other hand, flying in the face of any preoccupation with being “mixed” are the feelings expressed by a number of participants about ancestral memory, about being the conduit through which the silenced voices of their families must now be heard. This speaks to a notion of an undivided Native identity existing in a “racially mixed” body. It is clear that identity, particularly in contexts where the effects of a legacy of genocide continue to unfold, is far more complex than any neat categories can suggest.

It is important to recognize the extent to which identity is dependent on social contexts. One cannot “be” a certain identity in the abstract. The existence of such an identity must be recognized by other individuals before it can be lived as real. Generally, for subordinated peoples, particularly for those whose own histories have been suppressed

or stolen from them, new ways of self-identifying develop through intense struggles to re-define the terms of one's existence. Stuart Hall has described how Caribbean Black people, while intensely stratified on the basis of colour, had no common identity as "Black people" until the explosion of decolonization and civil rights struggles of African peoples worldwide created a new "Black" identity for peoples of African descent (Hall, 1991:53-54). For some mixed-race Native people, it is clear that while the category "Native" itself is in many ways problematic⁶, a crucial issue in their ability to identify as Native people has been the expansion of the category of "Native" to include them. On the other hand, because of the extent to which the *Indian Act* has tied Nativeness to Indian status, whether an individual identifies as even *being* mixed-race is highly dependent on whether they are a status Indian, and if they come from a reserve. This was continuously manifested in the study, where those individuals who had grown up on-reserve or who had spent considerable time in their home communities throughout their lives, even if they were blond-haired and blue-eyed, did not conceive of themselves as being "mixed-race" Native but simply as being Indian. Between those who have been legally excluded from Indianness, for whom being mixed-race appears problematic, and those whose Indianness has been legally assured and who therefore do not see themselves as *being* mixed-race, the effect of legal categories of "Indianness" on mixed-race Native identity is central to this study.

In Eastern Canada, the opening up of the category of "Native" to include mixed-race people has come from a number of directions, both

⁶ When we look at the category "Native", it is obvious that from the start it has been an external label, meaningless to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas prior to colonization. As a common identity it was imposed on Indigenous peoples when settler governments in North America usurped the right to define who was an Indigenous person, reducing the members of hundreds extremely different nations and language groups to a common raced identity as "Indian".

internal and externally-imposed—including the growing numbers of mixed marriages in urban contexts, the re-figuring of categories of “Indianness” under Bill C-31, and a conscious attempt to reject colonial divisions among Native people. Probably a third of the participants would not have been considered Native *by* Native people twenty years ago—because of their appearance, because they grew up urban, or because they were brought up to not identify as Native. As a result, a number of the participants [as well as the author herself] did not consider themselves to *be* Native people until relatively recently; we were simply people who were “part Indian”, who had been brought up by parents who were pragmatic, or in denial, to consider our Native heritage as unimportant to an otherwise mainstream identity in the white world. Clearly, for our generation the tide is turning, and our Native identities are becoming something to be reclaimed and honoured. Being a mixed-race Native person in Eastern Canada, has therefore only recently begun to be a meaningful identity.

In Western Canada, however, an entirely different set of historical conditions existed in the 19th century, which enabled mixed-race Native people who had been created as a social group because of the fur trade to self-identify as a people struggling for recognition of political nationhood in the face of the ascendant Canadian settler state. As a result, in Western Canada the existence of mixed-race Native people—the Metis—has always been recognized. In the rest of Canada, however, mixed-race Native people as a category have not been recognized as even existing. Mixed-race individuals either stayed Indian or became white, depending on their appearance and the circumstances of their lives. In looking at the lives of mixed-race urban Native people in Toronto, we are therefore dealing with a relatively new phenomenon, even though racial mixing

between Natives and whites has been going on for a little over five hundred years in the Americas.

From this regional difference in how Native identity is understood comes an important qualifier for this study—that how Native lives are lived is highly context-dependent. The circumstances shaping urban Native identity in Toronto, which make it possible for light-skinned Native people, or those with a history of assimilation in their family to identify as Native may be very different from the circumstances faced by urban Native people in Halifax, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay or Vancouver. If one assumption can be made, it is that this study might be more relevant in Eastern Canada contexts, where colonization has gone on for several centuries and, in a sense, genocide has run its course for longer, than in Western Canada or the north, where the presence of Native people in the cities has not been virtually erased and cannot be denied, and where the violence of colonial relationships is therefore expressed more rawly on a daily basis.

In a similar manner, while colonization processes within Canada have worked in tandem with those within the United States, distinctly different settlement histories and colonization policies have led to certain divergences in how Native identity is conceptualized. The American preoccupation with measuring blood quantum to define “Indianness” has in Canada been obscured by the *Indian Act*’s status system, and its highly divisive manner of externalizing “halfbreeds” and creating patriarchal divisions within Native communities. Along with these differences in colonization history are contemporary differences in circumstances between Native peoples in Canada and Native Americans. Generally speaking, American Indians have a much larger land base but a much smaller population relative to the size of the settler population than Native people in Canada. They face a colonizing nation-state which

is immensely more powerful and whose underlying premise of Manifest Destiny now encompasses much of the globe. They also face a New Age movement the sheer size and predatory scale of which is difficult to comprehend in Canadian terms. Because of these and other differences, American Indian ways of conceptualizing mixed-race Native identity may be very different from those of Native people in Canada. Nevertheless, I have used American Indian theoretical work about Native identity as a baseline to understand Canadian contexts. The far greater numbers of published American Indian theoretical writings, which speak to a history of profound silencing of Native voices in Canada, as well as the greater access which American Indians have enjoyed to universities and publishing houses, has necessitated this approach. Despite regional and “national” differences, however, these theorists have provided my work with considerable richness by enabling me to root it in Indigenous theoretical writing, as in most cases the similarities in perspectives far outweigh the differences.

In a very real sense, this study is also about being *urban* Native people—not as recent emigrants to the cities who are struggling to adapt to an urban environment, but as those whose families have been urban for at least a generation. The implications of urbanity for Native identity in general, when cultural heritage is closely linked to a strong connection to the land, are considerable. The implications of urbanity for mixed-race Native people, in a context where acculturation is always assumed to mean assimilation⁷, and where considerable pressures to assimilate *have* had an impact on mixed-race Native families, are even more important to

⁷ Garrett distinguishes between “acculturated” Native people, who have maintained traditional American Indian values but have acquired the behaviours required for functioning in mainstream American culture, and those who have “assimilated”, who identify with mainstream American values, behaviours and expectations (Garrett, 1996:4).

consider. One question which I have struggled with is to understand how connections can be, and are being revitalized between urban Native people and reserve communities in the interests of rebuilding Indigenous nations.

In this respect, Toronto—and perhaps other very large cities such as Vancouver—may represent the extreme edge of urban Aboriginal existence in Canada. While people from more southern, urbanized reserves may end up going directly to cities such as Toronto or Vancouver, these very large cities are also often the final step in an intergenerational urbanization process which begins when individuals or families from more remote or northern communities leave or are forced off of their land or out of their communities, to relocate to the small white “border towns” adjacent to reserves. From there, individuals may go to the smaller cities; it is their children who typically end up in large urban centres such as Toronto. In this respects, a focus on the Toronto urban community may not accurately represent the circumstances of urban Native people in smaller cities and towns across Canada—although it may portray the direction they are heading in.

This study also focuses on the issue of diversity and hybridity *within* the urban Native community. In general, the opening up of the category of “Native” to include mixed-race people has not been accompanied by an expansion of the concept of “Nativity” to include more diverse identities than those officially recognized either by colonial governments *or* by Native people as being typically “Native”. The full range of complex experiences of Nativity which the participants bring to their mixed-race identities include having been off-reserve or non-status for generations, having multiple racial identities, having generations of cultural hybridity through French or Spanish intermarriage in their families, or coming from small eastern North

American nations whose populations to all intents and purposes look more like Black people or white people than Indians. However, these experiences of Nativeness have not been unproblematically accepted within the Toronto Native community as broadening a sense of what it means to be a Native person in Canada today. Instead, this diversity has often been seen as threatening to social cohesion, or disturbing because it ruptures common-sense notions of who Native people are. The insistence by most Native people that Nativeness must signify a relatively homogenous identity tends to silence individuals from being open about their actual lived experiences.⁸ This was a common thread in the lives of a number of the participants, many of whom have been told repeatedly that they should not talk about what separates them from other Native people—that to do so is simply spreading divisiveness. Other participants, meanwhile, police these borders themselves, and assert that discussing differences is tantamount to denying one’s Nativeness. It seems, then, that it is impossible to consider mixed-race Native identity without focusing on the broader issue of Native identity itself.

1.2 ISSUES IN THEORIZING NATIVE IDENTITY:

Contemporary Native identity exists in uneasy balance between concepts of generic “Nativeness” as a racial identity and of specific “tribal” identity as Indigenous *nationhood*. Janice Acoose has described how being classified by the Canadian government as a status Indian under the *Indian Act* represented a violation of the rights of her Cree/Metis and Saulteaux cultures to define her as Nehiowe or Nahkawe, which

⁸ Drew Hayden Taylor, for example, an Ojibway of Native-white heritage from Curve Lake, has written a number of humorous articles about the difficulties of being Indian but looking white (see in particular “Pretty Like a White Boy” in *Funny, You Don’t Look Like One: Observations from a Blue-Eyed Ojibway*). In conversation, Taylor has described how he is frequently abjured, by family and friends, to “forget about your problem with looking white. You cannot be half something, you either are or you aren’t. Make your choice.” He has also been accused of being “full of self-hate” for writing about his white appearance (From conversation with Taylor in August, 1997).

removed her, in commonsense ways, from any real sense of being part of the destiny of her own nation(s) and instead placed her as a powerless and racialized individual at the bottom of the hierarchy of Eurocanadian society (Acoose, 1995:23). For Indigenous people, to be defined as a race is synonymous with having our Nations dismembered. And yet, the reality is that Native people for centuries now have been classified by race, and subjected to colonization processes which reduced diverse nations to common experiences of subjugation (in particular, residential schooling which enforced a common alienation while teaching a common language). This has created a generic “Native” identity which co-exists with a more Indigenous cultural orientation in many individuals.⁹ Despite this, contemporary Native resistance to colonization rejects such “pan-Indian” identities which can, at best, only aspire for equality within a settler state framework, like other “visible minorities”. For Indigenous people, resisting colonial relations involves a refusal to accept Canada’s authority as a nation-state, and a focus on rebuilding the nations which the colonizer has sought to destroy.

The subject of nationhood and nationalism occupy broad fields within contemporary sociology. A considerable body of work has been devoted to deconstructing nationhood (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Jackson and Penrose, 1993; Anderson, 1991; Hall, 1991). This work is extremely valuable in post-colonial contexts, but it does not take Indigenous peoples’ perspectives into account. Other perspectives dismiss nationalism as inherently racist (Balibar, 1991), or juxtapose a narrow and partial nationalism to a broad and egalitarian “humanism”

⁹ Jace Weaver suggests that to speak of “Native” identity as a racial identity involves a form of deliberate essentialism in the face of the “six hundred different tribal traditions, eight language families and probably three distinct racial strains lumped together under the collective construct *Native American*” (Weaver, 1998:x), an essentialism which many Native people deliberately adopt in order to be able to speak collectively as Native people.

(Wallerstein, 1991). None of these writings enable Native people to envision any future that does not involve continuous engulfment by a colonial power. For this reason, this thesis will not engage directly with arguments which deconstruct nationhood, or extensively discuss the issues which arise within nationalist movements; instead it will simply rest on the assumption that Indigenous nations must rebuild as *nations*, and that the forms which are chosen by each nation will be unique.

Mohawk scholar Gerald Alfred has pointed out that studies of nationalism and political identity generally hinge on questions of primordialism (the nation consists of unbroken tradition and continuity) versus instrumentalism (the nation is based on a conscious manipulation of traditions and cultural inventions as part of the emergence of nationalist ideologies). He suggests that both approaches are part of an essentialist fallacy—that there is no simple answer to whether peoples or nations or cultures change or “stay the same,” as aspects of both inevitably occur (Alfred, 1995:188). These issues will be revisited further in this chapter, while expressing some of the concerns which Native theorists have posed about postcoloniality. In general, however, I concur with Alfred that nationhood is a valid expression of Indigenous identity, and that one can speak of the past of Indigenous nations without necessarily invoking a primordial essence, maintained unchanged into the present.

James Clifford has described the manner in which Indigenous peoples, in the face of violent colonial assault, find powerful, distinctive ways to live as tribal people in an invasive world. He suggests that in the interests of survival, peoples such as the Mashpee Wampanoag Nation in New England have for years been engaged in “reviving and inventing ways to live as Indians in the twentieth century” (Clifford, 1988:9). In this thesis, I explore the ways in which urban mixed-race Native people are

drawing on their pasts to create a viable future as urban Native people. In the process, their hybrid identities, rather than representing an automatic negation of, or diminishment of their “Nativity,” can be seen as providing rich resources for the rebuilding of their Indigenous nations.

On the whole, however, it is probably safe to say that the majority of Native people share a straightforward notion of Native identity, one which equates being “born Indian” with possessing a relatively homogeneous “Native” cultural identity.¹⁰ Thomas King has attempted to problematize this in a relatively superficial manner, noting that racial identity does not necessarily impart to the Native person a tribal understanding of the universe and access to a distinct culture (King, 1990:x). However, for over a century the apartheid nature of Canadian life and the rigid controls over Native life exerted through the *Indian Act* allowed for a fairly cohesive sense of Native identity as a highly distinct, and for the most part reserve-based phenomenon (albeit at the expense of the Native identities of Metis and other non-status, or urban-based Native people). The sheer scale of the conflict which developed in many Native communities over the passing of Bill C-31, which redefined Native identity to include the urban mixed-race children of Native women who had lost their status, demonstrates the extent to which Native people in general tend to fear any “opening up” of the boundaries of Nativeness. A history of colonial control, and the reality of ongoing genocide is at the root of this fear on the part of many Native people that to lose collective control over Native identity is to lose the last vestiges of Native

¹⁰ This notion of “Nativity” encompasses both the cultural identities and practices intrinsic to specific Indigenous nations (such as the ability to speak one’s language and live off the land in whatever way—be it trapping in the far north, hunting in the interior, fishing on the east and west coasts, or traditional agricultural practices in the south—and other sets of collective commonsense practices and experiences which are more intrinsic to lived experiences of reserve life and histories of oppression (such as residential schooling, poverty, and marginality).

distinctiveness, the last defense against the colonizing culture which some Native activists refer to as “the Predator”¹¹. In this resistance to externally-imposed change in definitions of Indianness, the role of the *Indian Act* in actually shaping Native identity over the past century has for the most part been disregarded.

A narrow but powerful sense of Native identity is also fuelled by the profound gap between the lived experiences of the majority of Native people—who continue to face the reality of brutal racism, poverty, violent death, and struggles with addictions—and the increasingly-exclusive enclaves of the universities where most theory on identity is produced. The contradictions between what Lakota writer Philip Deloria has referred to as “a self-focused world of playful cultural hybridity and a social world of struggle, hatred, winners, and losers (with Indians usually numbered among the losers)” (Philip Deloria, 1998:176) continue to resonate for Native people who attempt to explore more complex and nuanced notions of Native identity.

Universities, moreover, continue to be risky sites in which to explore Native identity. It is not only a matter of the “violence, curiosity, pity and desire” which James Clifford names as accompanying the Western intellectual’s gaze at those, such as Native people, who have been silenced in the bourgeois West (Clifford, 1988:5). The blurring and shifting of cultural boundaries which can occur in white-dominated contexts when Nativeness is theorized not as an authentic essence, but as something negotiated and continuously evolving, can have dangerous repercussions for Native people in terms of asserting Aboriginal rights. Clifford explores the example of the Wampanoag Indians of Mashpee who in 1977 were required to prove their identities as Native people in order to pursue their land claim:

¹¹ See Churchill, 1995, for one example of looking at colonialism from this perspective.

To establish a legal right to sue for lost lands these citizens of modern Massachusetts were asked to demonstrate continuous tribal existence since the seventeenth century. Life in Mashpee had changed dramatically, however, since the first contacts between English Pilgrims at Plymouth and the Massachusett-speaking peoples of the region. Were the plaintiffs of 1977 the “same” Indians? Were they something more than a collection of individuals with varying degrees of Native American ancestry? If they were different from their neighbours, how was their “tribal” difference manifested? During a long, well-publicized trial scores of Indians and whites testified about life in Mashpee. Professional historians, anthropologists and sociologists took the stand as expert witnesses. The bitter story of New England Indians was told in minute detail and vehemently debated. In the conflict of interpretations, concepts such as “tribe”, “culture”, “identity”, “assimilation”, “ethnicity”, “politics” and “community” were themselves on trial (Clifford, 1988:7-8).

In his account of this trial (which the residents of Mashpee lost) Clifford points out that a central issue which the Mashpee Indians faced was the white need for certainty about Indian difference. To be recognized as a group within the Wampanoag Nation, the Mashpee community had to be capable of demonstrating *authenticity* to whites in terms of their “primitiveness”.¹²

The experience of the Wampanoag people at Mashpee is not unique. Most Indigenous land claims within the Americas hinge on the requirement that Indigenous people prove their “primordality”. For

¹² Questions asked of the citizens of Mashpee who testified centred on how often they danced, how often they wore regalia, the degree of ancient cultural lore they were familiar with, and if their jewelry, if they wore any, was “authentic”. Indeed, the Mashpee Wampanoag were expected not only to demonstrate stereotypic Indian attributes, they were also expected to do dances, dress in regalia, sing songs and wear jewelry that had *originated* with the ancient Wampanoag people. Cultural borrowing from other Native peoples was viewed as evidence of “inauthenticity” and loss of culture. Throughout the trial, the main problem for the people of Mashpee was their absence of markers of stereotypical “Indianness”—particularly the fact that they no longer spoke the Massachusetts language, that many of them looked Black, or white, rather than Native, and that they spoke with broad New England accents. More subtle indications of cultural cohesion and maintenance of collective identity were invisible to white eyes who demanded the trappings of Indianness before they would recognize a group as Native. See Clifford, 1977:277-346.

example, in the Gitksan/Wet'suwet'en case, the plaintiffs were continuously presented as contemporary interlopers whose claims to Indigenous rights were invalid because they were not "the same" people as their ancestors were—because they held paying jobs, lived in houses, consumed pizza and other European foods, and in general lived contemporary lives (Monet and Skanu'u, 1992:141-169). In such contestations of identity (which are always on white terms), Native people who are revealed as transgressing the boundaries of so-called authenticity—in their appearance (if mixed-race), or in possessing any aspect of apparent modernity—are inevitably dismissed as fakes.

It is not only the white mainstream which holds such views about Native people, however. To an astounding degree, anti-racist activists appear to have accepted notions of Native identity that hinge on notions of "authenticity" in theorizing about mixed-race identity. As a result of this, in the United States, whole communities of mixed-race Native people who do not look Native are often dismissed as being "really" white or black.¹³ Demands for Native authenticity are written into government

¹³ The writings of G. Reginald Daniel are most revealing, in this respect. Daniel, in writing about the so-called "triracial isolate" communities scattered throughout the eastern United States, rejects Powhatan/Delaware historian Jack Forbes' exhaustive research into the origins of these communities as Native American. Although Daniel quotes Forbes in his work, and demonstrates some knowledge of the history of Native removal in the eastern United States and the struggles of Native peoples to maintain their communities in the face of centuries of genocide, he is openly dismissive of these communities' claims to "Indianness". Daniel writes: "Considering that documentary evidence is scanty, the exact origins of these groups and their names are unknown...In all probability, the communities evolved from frontier settlements that became magnets for runaway slaves, trappers, homesteaders, adventurers, deserters, outlaws, outcasts, and nonconformists of all racial backgrounds. The "internal miscegenation", fostered by self-imposed isolation, led to a generalized blending over time...Most triracial isolates, however, tend to deny African ancestry and hold on to aboriginal descent as a prized possession, despite the fact that they retain little or nothing of Native American culture, have no recollection of their tribal affiliations, and are culturally indistinguishable from local whites...By 1980, the Lumbees of North Carolina, the Nanticokes of Delaware, the Houma in western Louisiana, and the Poospatuck of Long, Island, New York, after a prolonged struggle, had succeeded in officially changing their earlier classification as mulattos to nontreaty Native Americans. This status excludes them from government benefits, but it places them squarely on the aboriginal side of the racial divide...African

policy in the United States for federal statistics and program administrative reporting.¹⁴ Finally, attacks on the authenticity of contemporary Indian existence continue to come from white environmentalists and anthropologists who disparage the modernity of contemporary Native existence and use their arguments to campaign for new restrictions on emergent Native rights.¹⁵ Given such high demands from all quarters for Native “primitive authenticity”, to engage openly in work which challenges essentialist views and risks blurring the boundaries between Native people and non-Natives appears dangerous.

And yet, ironically, it is precisely because of the embattled aspect of Native identity—how it is constantly being negotiated in a context of domination—that post-structuralist and postcolonial work which deconstructs “master narratives” can be useful for Native people. As James Clifford points out, the Western imagination has painted the world as populated by “endangered authenticities”, always juxtaposed to modernity, always “going crazy” in the face of the inescapable momentum of “progress” and change (Clifford, 1988:4-5). Such a viewpoint holds no future for Native people other than as quaint relics occupying an archaic

Americans accuse these communities of donning feathers in order to escape the stigma of being Black...”

¹⁴ Racial classification for four of the five recognized racial groups in the United States (Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and White) depends simply on the individual in question having origins in peoples from those categories. The fifth category, American Indian/Alaskan Native, requires not only a person to have origins in any of the original peoples of North America, *but to maintain cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition* (Root, 1996:412). For mixed-race people of Native heritage, Nativeness is constrained by legal definitions which no other racial group faces. This is in addition, of course, to the federal demand for 25% blood quantum before the individual can be legally recognized as an American Indian.

¹⁵ Vine Deloria’s review of *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies* by James Clifton succinctly explores how the apparent modernity of contemporary Native American life is used as a tool of disenfranchisement by those such as Clifton who are characterized by Deloria as being angry and disappointed at Indians for not living up to their childhood fantasies. He also notes that these attacks are often part of a struggle for turf, whereby academics are invested in maintaining an authoritative voice for themselves as “Indian experts” by demanding the authority to determine who is “authentically” Indian (Deloria (Vine), 1998).

pastoral backwater—or as “the Vanishing American”. While this has little to do with how Native people have conceptualized the world traditionally, it is impossible to deny that colonization has had a deep and lasting effect not only on our communities but on how we see ourselves, and the forms of resistance we engage with. As I will engage with in Chapter Two, Native identity in Canada has for generations been legally defined by the *Indian Act*, a body of legislation based on race, and on colonialist assumptions about Nativeness and civilization, which are deeply rooted in European modernity¹⁶. Because of this, it is important for Native people to critically question common-sense notions about “authentic” Nativeness, as well as ways of thinking about nationhood and tradition which suggest that they can emerge unscathed from centuries of colonization, and be immediately and easily accessible to us. At the same time, survival as Native peoples demands that we challenge the erasure of Indigenous nations by embracing our nationhood, and revitalizing our traditions. The way through this paradox, I believe, lies in engaging with the various concepts posed within post-structuralist and postcolonial thought, but picking and choosing only what is relevant for us. The global nature of colonialism, where colonies and ex-colonies, by the 1930’s covered 84.6 per cent of the land surface (Loomba, 1998:xiii) makes it impossible to generalize about experiences of colonization, where in some regions whole populations were obliterated and in others colonized people might live their whole lives without ever

¹⁶ David Goldberg defines modernity as the general period which emerged in the sixteenth century and consolidated with the Enlightenment in what has become known as “the West”, encompassing highly specific ways of seeing the world which, through Western global hegemony, have been spread world-wide. At the heart of modernity lies a concern with order—not with finding the intricate interrelationships which exist between all living things and the world we live in, but with imposing a rigid, static and hierarchical notion of order in counterdistinction to life. From this flows a commitment to notions of continuous progress—material, moral, physical and political improvement—and to the promotion and development of “civilization” which the West takes to be its own values universalized (Goldberg, 1993:3-4).

seeing a white person. Gayatri Spivak may warn us about “a nostalgia for lost origins”, and challenge the notion that Native cultures are easily recoverable after centuries of colonial rule (Spivak, 1996:204), but those who are actually engaged in cultural restoration often believe otherwise.

In this respect, I am particularly mindful of where I am located within my own nation, as somebody who is mixed-race, deterritorialized and alienated from my grandmother’s community of origin. As Ania Loomba points out, Westernized (or, in Native contexts, mixed-race heavily assimilated) scholars are always at risk of becoming “otherness machines, with the manufacture of alterity as our principal role”, while for those individuals grounded within their cultures, who are comfortable in their own languages and rooted in their societies, post-colonial concerns are in many senses irrelevant to the project of cultural revival (Loomba, 1998:246). And yet the critical issues raised by post-colonial scholars can be a valuable source of resistance in the “war of images” around Native identity which are being waged in the hearts of many urban Native people.

Mixed-blood Chippewa writer Gerald Vizenor, for example, continuously challenges the manner in which young Native people, particularly those who are urban and mixed-race, are driven to seek out “authentic” Indian identities which are actually modelled on dominant-culture creations. For Vizenor, mixed-blood urban Native peoples have to create *new* identities anchored in the old ways in urban contexts to ensure collective cultural survival. They have to resist the pull to try and “resolve” their urban mixed-blood identities back into what they see as an uncomplicated tribal identity, generally through a “generic” urban spirituality, and instead seek out what is real in their specific cultural contexts, to gain a deeper sense of themselves as members of their Indigenous nations, rather than as “Indians”. Vizenor goes as far as to

suggest that, in the context of the United States where the term “Indian” has been invested with such a powerful body of fantasy, that a form of resistance for urban Native people is to conceive of themselves as “post-Indian”. In Vizenor’s works, Anishinawbe identity cannot be pinned down, replicated or packaged for popular consumption; his deeply subversive and scathingly honest characterizations defy any “Indian” image imaginable. The highly adaptable, mobile and endlessly recreated-as-Anishinawbek characters in some ways appear emblematic of the contemporary postcolonial emphasis on hybridity and “new” identities. Closer inspection, however, reveals a solid core of Native cultural identity which cannot be absorbed into the dominant culture or extinguished; Vizenor’s characters may be hybridized but without a doubt they are fully Anishinawbek.

1.3 POSTCOLONIALITY AND NATIVE IDENTITY:

On the whole, Native academics have demonstrated an extreme scepticism about the value of the broad fields of study variously labelled postmodernism, post-structuralism or postcolonial theory for empowering Native people or understanding Native identity.¹⁷ Cherokee theologian Jace Weaver specifically rejects the postcolonial concern with issues of identity and subjectivity because of the way that it renders Native identity more complicated and nuanced. He prefers a relatively straightforward reading of Native identity, even if it involves displacing, presumably for good, the issues faced by the large numbers of urban

¹⁷ These terms are often treated as synonymous by theorists who reject them. I have found Ania Loomba’s distinctions between postcolonial and post-structuralist writing to be useful. According to Loomba, postcolonial theory encompasses a vast range of work focusing specifically on issues pertaining to colonialism, including contemporary critiques of neocolonialism, and colonial discourse analysis (which may or may not overlap with post-structuralism), while post-structuralism, like postmodernism in general, is primarily concerned with challenging “master narratives” of identity and knowledge formation, insisting on multiple histories and shifting, fragmented identities (Loomba, 1998:251).

Native people who are, in a sense, diasporic:

Putting aside for the moment the diasporic nature of much of modern Native existence, one must nevertheless admit there is something real, concrete and centered in Native existence and identity. Joseph Conrad can become a major figure of English letters and Leopold Sedar Senghor a member of the French Academy, but either one is Indian or one is not. And certain genuine consequences flow from those accidents of birth and culture (Weaver, 1998a:14).

This straightforward notion of Native identity can lead to conceptual trouble, in the manner in which it promotes the notion of absolute differences between “the red race” (as some refer to Native people) and white people. Race is essentialized as an objective bounded reality, which, in the context of colonization, promotes what Abdul JanMohamed has termed the “Manichean allegory” (JanMohamed, 1985:60). This term refers to the idea that an absolute dichotomy exists between white colonizers and Native colonized, with little attention paid to the actual as-lived-on-the-ground complexities of the colonization process, where colonizers exploit existing divisions in colonial societies and create new ones, winning over some segments of the society and externalizing (or exterminating) others. Adopting such a vision of absolute difference promotes a cultural nationalist vision of a pure and homogeneous generic “Native” culture. Such a vision, often expressed in rhetorical statements about “the Native way”, encourages communities to shut down on racial and sexual diversity, promotes patriarchal values, and obscures class differences, as well as encouraging those individuals who can to “remake themselves as full-blood essentialists” (Penn, 1997a:2).

Native theorists share with other critics of postcolonial theory the concern about its often depoliticized nature, and its apparent celebration of notions of diaspora, hybridity and fragmentation of identity while

neglecting to critically interrogate the forces of global capitalism which continue to tear at the fabric of the societies of colonized peoples. For Jace Weaver, and for Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, however, the postcolonial concern with identity and subjectivity is also problematic because of its emphasis on individual, rather than collective identity (Cook-Lynn, 1998:125). Cook-Lynn in particular relates this individualism, which she suggests is the standard mixed-blood's approach to identity, to the notion that tribal sovereignty is a lost cause, and that the global forces of American domination have won out (Cook-Lynn, 1998:128).

The issue of hybridity, with its notion of "new identities" created as a response to diasporic conditions, lies at the heart of much Native resistance to postcolonial theory. Jace Weaver sums it up as follows:

After more than five hundred years of ongoing colonialism, Native Americans wrestle with two different pulls of identity, one settled and the other diasporic. The settled is that of traditional lands and a continent that was once wholly theirs. The diasporic is that of new homes to which they were exiled by their conquerors, of urban existence far removed from even those territories, and a grim realization that their colonizers are here to stay (Weaver, 1998:14).

For Native people, any emphasis on diasporic identity which does not affirm the traditional identity is an invitation to despair, assimilation and inevitable vanishing *as peoples*. Developing new, hybridized identities has never been an adequate strategy for Indigenous survival in the Americas, as Indigenous peoples in Mexico, Central America, and South America can vouch for. While "mestizaje" has been widely touted as an anti-imperialist strategy¹⁸ by Latin Americans against American

¹⁸ For example, Carlos A. Fernandez, in comparing attitudes to miscegenation in Latin American and Anglo American countries, deliberately minimizes not only the genocidal policies which Spain unleashed in the "New World" but also the continuance of such policies of outright physical extermination in those Latin American countries with a remaining large indigenous population. By minimizing these historical and contemporary realities, and by pointing out how blurred the lines can be at times

domination, the manner in which the mestizo populations of all of the Latin American countries routinely deny their connections to their Indigenous roots and are often complicit in the exploitation and destruction of Indigenous communities suggests that hybridized identities for Indigenous people which are not explicitly Indigenous-identified are fatal for Indigenous survival. The other assumption which usually accompanies the emphasis on new, hybrid identities is the notion that “ethnic absolutism” is an increasingly untenable cultural strategy (Hall, 1996:250, quoted in Weaver, 1997:14). While it is seldom clarified what concepts such as “ethnic absolutism” actually mean, we must be clear that if a Native society which closes itself to outsiders in the interests of self-protection is seen in such a light, this concept flies in the face of the abilities of Indigenous communities to survive *as* Indigenous communities “in the belly of the beast”.

The post-colonial emphasis on hybridity originates in the notion that it was Europeans who first insisted on the binary opposition between whiteness and “Otherness”, even as they consistently violated this through miscegenation and through their insistence that “the Other” be civilized, converted to Christianity, or in other ways educated to be like the European. Anti-colonialists have historically appropriated this notion of a binary opposition between Europe and its Others, so that liberation for colonized peoples is premised on the rehabilitation of

between mixed-race Indians who live as Indians, those urban Indians who have attempted to assimilate, and the poorer members of the contemporary mestizo dominant culture, Fernandez succeeds in centering mestizo culture as a viable “future” for the Americas—a future where (he claims) “race” is no longer an issue (because there has been so much ‘racial mixing’ in Latin America). In doing this, Fernandez conveniently obscures the extent to which mestizo culture *depends* on the erasure of contemporary Indigenous people to enable them to cling to sentimentalized *symbols* of an indigenous heritage, to differentiate and elevate themselves from openly white supremacist Anglo-American culture. This nowhere enables Mestizo people to actually reconcile their hybrid cultures to their Indigenous roots. Instead, it is still premised on a viewpoint that the dominant mestizo culture must obliterate the Indigenous culture it sprang from, in order to survive (Fernandez, 1992).

cultural identities which European colonialists have done everything to destroy. Stuart Hall, however, suggests that colonized peoples cannot simply turn back to the idea of a collective pre-colonial culture and a past that is “waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity” (Hall, 1994:395, quoted in Loomba, 1998:182). Hall does not dismiss such turning back to the past as a romantic “nativism”; he instead asserts that the past continues to speak to us and through us, but that our relationship to the past is not simple—it is always “after the break”, like the relation of a child to its mother where the womb can never be a shared space again and the child must find its own way, but is rooted in the identity of the mother.

Such notions of hybridity, which challenge how “Indigenesness” must always be “pure Otherness”, may be useful in enabling urban mixed-race Native people to claim their identities as Indigenous people, even though they no longer live in Indigenous communities, and to engage in the rebirth of cultural institutions and the rebuilding of Indigenous nations even from identities which are not those of “full-blooded” traditionalists. It is a hybridity that does not involve turning its back on its Indigenous roots, but rather, embracing them, even from a position of relative marginality within Native culture.

While Native people may not choose to blindly “hop aboard the post-colonial bandwagon” (Weaver, 1998a:13), the fact remains that postcolonial writings carry a series of messages not only about identity, but about experiences with decolonization which may be extremely valuable for Native people to heed, given the accelerating pressures on Native communities to surrender title to whole territories, particularly in the north, and submit to other programs of forced change in the name of “self government”. The naked terror and brutality which characterized the ongoing colonization process for centuries across Canada has for the

most part given way to a process of hegemonic domination¹⁹, where the relentless dismembering of the remaining Indigenous land base, and a continuous assault on the identities of Native peoples is easily masked with the rhetoric of consensual negotiation.²⁰ Ania Loomba suggests that “postcoloniality” can be conceptually useful if it is approached with caution and qualifications, as a term which refers to a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome which is probably inescapable for all those whose worlds have been marked by colonization. She argues further that it should be seen as a descriptive and not an evaluative term (Loomba, 1998:18-19). Jace Weaver, however, asserts that until postcolonial writings take seriously both the collective character of Native traditional life, and the importance of specific lands to the cultural identities of different Native peoples, it will have little meaning for Native peoples (Weaver, 1998a:20-21).

Given the broad disparities which I have presented above, between the perspectives of Native theorists who are concerned first and foremost with the survival of Indigenous nations, and those of sociologists working in the area of race, identity and culture, I have been seeking a middle ground—a theoretical framework within sociology which can clarify the issues which mixed-race urban Native people face, while constantly

¹⁹ Ania Loomba describes the concept of hegemony as power achieved through a combination of coercion and consent. The term originated with Gramsci, who argued that the ruling classes achieve domination not by force or coercion alone, but also by creating subjects who ‘willingly’ submit to being ruled. Hegemony is achieved not only by direct manipulation or indoctrination, but by playing upon the common sense of people, upon what Raymond Williams calls their ‘lived system of meanings and values’ (Williams, 1977:110, quoted in Loomba, 1998:29).

²⁰ Recent theorists have suggested that in many colonial contexts, harsh coercion works in tandem with a “consent” that is part voluntary and part contrived. Colonial regimes try to gain the consent of certain groups, while excluding others from civil society. Social control is achieved in part through colonial rulers incorporating and transforming the ideas and practices of those who are being colonized (Loomba, 1998:31). This suggests that critical exploration of Native identity may be important to understanding how to resist the constantly shifting strategies of colonization which Canada continues to engage in.

attempting to evaluate the implications of this approach for Native people and Native sovereignty. Since I believe that the survival of mixed-race urban Native people as Native people depends on maintaining and re-establishing viable connections with land-based communities, I do not see that focusing on mixed-race urban Native identity necessarily signifies relinquishing First Nations sovereignty in favour of a post-colonial melange of new identities, as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has suggested (Cook-Lynn, 1998:124-131). What this study does suggest, however, is that what must be relinquished in looking at the histories of urban mixed-race Native people is the uncritical notion of First Nations communities as innocent of complicity with practices of domination and exclusion, despite their colonized condition. This in no way suggests that Indigenous sovereignty is not both viable and essential to Native survival—it merely cautions us to be careful about the paths we choose in achieving it. It also suggests that Indigenous sovereignty will not evolve simply by Native communities retrieving a past which is clear and easily accessible to them. Rather, it will involve the different nations recreating a future which is truer to their pasts than the colonial frameworks which have intervened. In this way of thinking, membership in Indigenous nations is something that can, and must, be strategized, clearly articulated, and in some ways reconceptualized.

1.4 ORGANIZING THE STUDY:

For this study, interviews were conducted, over the space of one year, with thirty individuals who identify as Native and who are active in some capacity or other within the Toronto Native community. The methodological concerns described above significantly influenced the organization of this study. For example, in seeking to interview mixed-race Native participants I was faced with the problem of how I would define “Native” for the purpose of the study. I decided to rely on an

individual's self-designation as being of Native heritage, coupled with their playing some role in the Toronto Native community, as a sufficient definition of Nativeness for this context. My desire to capture a sense of the broad range of experiences of Nativeness was at the root of this decision. In any case, to rely on other definitions of Nativeness—for example, Indian status, or blood quantum—was to use the same colonial logic of the Canadian or American governments.

In looking at who I accepted as Native, and the extent to which this reflects the actual composition of the Toronto Native community, it is important to consider the contested nature of Nativeness in urban settings such as Toronto (where those who are “certifiably Indian” share space with those who are regularly suspected of being white “wannabees”). The difficulty with attempting to discern who is of mixed-race Native heritage and who is a “wannabee” is that there are a number of urban people of actual Native heritage in Toronto who do not look very Native and who may know very little about their backgrounds—particularly adoptees whose Native parents were not listed on their birth registries, and children whose parents were silent about their identity, or minimized its importance. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the background of relative ambiguity about Native identity in which this study took shape, and accordingly, the care which I had to take in evaluating the identity claims of the participants—to be both respectful of individual circumstances and mindful of my responsibilities to the group as a whole.

Because of this, at the same time as I established relatively flexible criteria for Nativeness, I had my own, in a sense secondary, set of criteria—that the participants be able to satisfy my own admittedly subjective assessment, throughout the interview, that they *did* actually have Aboriginal people in their recent lineage. I saw this as crucial, in

that the validity of this study rests on whether or not the participants actually *are* of Native heritage.

“Relatively recent” Native heritage, to me, is less an issue of blood quantum than of family legacy of Nativeness, including knowledge of culture, and whether or not the individual grew up in a Native community. In the case of the participants who had grown up urban and alienated from Native heritage, however, particularly those who did not look to be of Native heritage, issues of “how much Native” came to the forefront. Most of the participants were so-called “halfbreeds”, with one white and one Native parent, while a few individuals came from families with two mixed-race parents whose lineage was too “mixed” to be categorized according to blood quantum. A handful of other participants had one Native grandparent, and in each instance, it was obvious that the grandparent’s Native identity had had some significant affect on their families. In two instances, I accepted participants who only knew of a proven one-eighth Native ancestry in their backgrounds, simply because they spoke of also having other, albeit less well-documented, Native heritage in their family, and, more importantly, were able to name ways in which this Native heritage had influenced or affected the life choices of one of their parents.

In the absence of pictures of family members, or some form of documentation of Native identity, it was important that the stories of the more “marginally Native” participants demonstrate some cohesion, that they “ring true”, and be as detailed as possible about their family life. With this in mind, after interviewing one participant I declined to include her within this study, although she represents one of the thirty persons interviewed. As a white-looking individual with only an extremely tenuous claim to a Native identity, based primarily on “ancestral memory”, I felt that her identity claims were not adequate for the

purpose of this study, and have therefore declined to include data from her interview in this thesis.

Because of my concern that mixed-race identity not be seen solely as an individual manner divorced from collective consideration, the interviews began with the request that participants talk about their communities of origin and, for those whose families were urban, the terms under which they had left their communities. In some cases, most of the interview consisted of family history. Considerable space was also made within the interview for discussions about Indigenous sovereignty, about how the participants saw their relationship to their community of origin, and about the role which community activism played within their lives.

In organizing the research, I began with the notion that mixed-race Native identity is rooted in experiences of urbanity, as it has been primarily in the cities that Native people meet and marry non-Natives and create mixed-race families. A starting point of inquiry then, was to understand why large numbers of Native people have left their communities, and to seek possible connections between their experiences. The decision to interview twenty to forty participants was based on the notion that a broad range of inquiry was necessary to acquire some sense of the dynamics that were at work in creating an urban Native identity.

The decision was made early in the study to focus primarily on individuals who are of Native-White ancestry. The reason for this was that these are the individuals for whom family life has been an arena where a kind of warfare on Native identity has been waged, and where light-skinned privilege, Eurocentric teaching, and pressures to assimilate have all made Native identity highly contradictory. My advisors also felt, and I concurred, that an in-depth study of those whose ancestry is not

only Native but African (for example) was not what I was trying to accomplish here, although such studies are desperately needed. The participants are not *exclusively* Native-White people—I interviewed two triracial woman, who had either African or Asian ancestry as well as white and Native heritages; however, the rest of the participants were biracial Native and white.

On the other hand, because many people in the Toronto Native community are from South or Central America as well as the United States, I chose to include as participants Native people from any part of the Americas. While most of the participants are from Native nations whose homelands are occupied by Canada at present, some are from territories occupied by the United States or different Latin American nations. In deliberately choosing to include individuals who were triracial or from Latin America, I was also interested in challenging the “closing down” against diversity which is sometimes evidenced in the Native community towards individuals whose non-Native identity is “different” from the Anglo-Canadian norm—such as Black or Latin American. The majority of participants, however, are the product of first-generation intermarriages between Native people and whites in English Canada.

For many of the participants, the fact that they are the product of one generation of intermarriage (usually combined with some degree of ancestral intermarriage during the fur trade, too far back in the family to significantly affect their contemporary identities as Native people) is often portrayed as an accidental “blip” on the screen of an otherwise Native identity, where the whiteness of one parent can simply be ignored and the person asserts herself as unproblematically “Indian”. For some of these individuals, particularly those who look unequivocally Native, this is an adequate and probably appropriate strategy, although this study will also highlight their descriptions of the actual dynamics of their lives

in mixed-race families. Trying to by-pass the fact of intermarriage is not, however, an adequate strategy for those who are the product of more than one generation of intermarriage, for whom the reality of cultural and racial hybridity cannot be ignored. The complex Native identities of mixed-race people who have learned to see themselves as “Latin American”, of those whose histories are inextricably both French *and* Indian, and of those whose non-white ancestors joined up with and intermarried with Native peoples while trying to escape from slavery or indentured labour or other forms of racial discrimination, such as Black Indians, or Asian/Aboriginal people, cannot easily be collapsed into a relatively narrow view of Native identity. Putting it another way, the participants who are proud to be both Aboriginal and Black, or Japanese and Aboriginal—as well as those for whom a “Latin American” or a hybridized “French/Indian” Metis identity have shaped their Indianness—all face some difficulty in reducing issues of their identity simply to whether they are Indian or not, even as they make decisions to “come out” as unequivocally Native. There is also the reality of large-scale contemporary intermarriage between African or Asian peoples and Native people, who will in increasing numbers be forming the urban Native communities of tomorrow. Mixed race Native identity in the future will increasingly be conceptualized in terms of cultural hybridity. While this study does not do adequate justice to the stories of Black Indians, or Asian-Aboriginal people, or Mestizos, or the Metis, it is undertaken with an awareness that these narratives are an integral part of the full range of mixed race identity which exists in the Americas. My interviews merely touch on these narratives, and they will only be taken up as they affect the people in this study—as they influence the urban Native community where the participants are situated.

The participants were all people with whom I was acquainted, or who were friends of other acquaintances or participants. This was also a deliberate choice on my part. For ethical reasons I wanted to interview people that I had some kind of relationship to; this would ensure that in writing about their lives I felt a personal obligation to present the stories in the sense that they had been told to me—not to make the participants' life stories simply “grist for an academic mill”. About a third of the participants were immediate acquaintances, colleagues and friends, located in different circles within the Native community. They included friends with whom I shared cultural activities, acquaintances with whom I had worked or sat on boards in various organizations in the urban community, or individuals I had known through school. The other individuals were solicited *by* friends; almost everybody knew somebody who was eager to talk about this subject. The decision was made to include men as well as women, to have some sense of gender dynamics around identity—however, no attempt was made to achieve a “representative” balance. That only eight of the participants were men is perhaps a reflection of the strong role that women play in my own life and in many of my friends' lives. The fact that participants chose participants out of an original pool of my own personal circle also reflects the age and education skew of the interview pool (which I will discuss below).

1.5 THE PARTICIPANTS:

Details of the participants' lives are as follows. Twenty-one of the participants are female, and eight are male²¹. Twelve are status Indians through their own lineage; however, seven others are non-status Native people who have some connection, parental or through their

²¹ In all detailing of statistics, I refer only to the twenty-nine individuals who were accepted as part of this study, excluding the one individual who was excluded from participating after I had interviewed her.

grandparents, to specific reserves (including one Metis woman whose grandmother had lost status for marrying a Metis man, but who had regained Native status through her marriage to a status Indian prior to 1985²²). Ten participants are from families which have never held Native status (including four whose Native nations are not from territories currently held by Canada). Two individuals grew up on reserves, and one grew up in a northern Metis community. Two other participants had regular intervals of staying on their reserves throughout their childhood, even though their mothers had lost status through marrying non-Natives. Two individuals had had very occasional visits to their reserves as children; the rest had grown up entirely urban-based.

The participants also varied with respect to their appearance. This is a highly subjective standard (one person's Indian is another person's *shoganosh*, and vice versa). As I saw it, six of the participants looked entirely white, with nothing visual to link them to Nativeness at all; a handful of others were very ambiguous in appearance (at times they could be said to be white-looking, while at other times they were noticed as "nonwhite"). Ten individuals looked distinctly "nonwhite"—some had Native features and light skin, or dark skin and "less Native" features, some merely looked "different" or "exotic". They were usually seen as non-white, but not necessarily as Native, by other people. And finally, eight individuals looked unequivocally Native, under any light and at any time (by my own subjective standard). Interestingly, the individuals' sense of their own appearance did not concur with how I saw them. A number of individuals saw themselves as darker or more Native looking

²² Prior to the passing of Bill C-31, women who married status Indian men gained Indian status. While this frequently resulted in numbers of white women gaining Indian status, it also provided a vehicle whereby non-status and Metis women could redress past injustices by gaining status through marriage. Since Bill C-31, however, it has been impossible for anybody to gain status through marrying a status Indian.

than I thought of them—others saw themselves as capable of passing for white in circumstances where I never would have thought this possible.

It is impossible to discuss the issue of appearance without referring to the strength of hegemonic standards of Indianness on how I initially saw some of the participants. When I first began to think about interviewing mixed-race Native people, I initially thought only of those individuals who looked white. Of these, only one was a status Indian—and I only considered him to be mixed-race because he looked very white. When dark-skinned non-status and Metis participants learned about the study and asked to be included, I began to look at being mixed-race—and being a status Indian—with different eyes. I realized that almost all of the status Indians that I know actually have one white parent, and that with closer scrutiny several did not actually look that Native. But I had never thought of most of them as *being* mixed-race because they were all status Indians who could claim a reserve as home. The role of Native status in securing an individual's racial identity as Native *despite* a mixed-race heritage, which I first noticed as working on me when I began to consider who I should ask for an interview, has in fact become a recurring issue in this study.

During the course of writing the dissertation, another preconception of mine around the issue of Native status began to surface, as well. In addressing the issue of loss of status, I continuously referenced those individuals whose families had once had status, but who had lost it because of gender discrimination in the *Indian Act*. As I began to read about the history of the *Indian Act*, however, the manner in which “halfbreeds” were deliberately excluded from Indianness began to take on a significance which could not be ignored. It has been impossible, since then, to see loss of status solely as affecting individuals whose families have some claim to Indian status; it has increasingly

begun to seem like “a Metis issue” as well, and in this respect, I have continuously included Metis issues around lack of status as part of the injustices created by the *Indian Act*.

The participants were for the most part in their early middle ages. The oldest participant was sixty-two, and the youngest twenty-four; however, only four other individuals were in their twenties (all in their late twenties). Thirteen people were in their thirties (evenly spaced—early, mid, and late thirties), while seven people were in their forties and three in their fifties. The average age of the participants was thirty-eight; the median age was thirty-five. Older subjects were chosen deliberately, in that it generally takes an individual a few years to understand and care about identity issues.

The individuals were far more highly educated than is perhaps the norm for Aboriginal people. While one-third of the individuals lacked extensive education (four of the them had not completed high school, one had graduated from high school, and four had the equivalent of college certificates), another one-third had undergraduate degrees (including a law degree), while fully a third of them had postgraduate degrees. The lowest level of education among the participants was one individual with a Grade Six education; at the other end of the scale were three individuals working on their Ph.D.'s. This was a result both of the selection process among highly educated people—where individuals refer to other individuals with education—and of the age level of the participants. A number of the individuals had gone back to school as adults; the higher than average age level might be another reason why the education level among the participants was so high.

1.6 INTERPRETING THE PARTICIPANTS' WORDS

At some point in the interview process, as diverse stories were told that hinged on common themes, the interviews became less about understanding the background dynamics of urban mixed-race identity, and more focused on the histories of families who had all, in one way or another, struggled against processes of cultural genocide. The constant repetition of histories of residential schooling, of being forced to leave communities because of racist and sexist laws or fear of violence, of silencing the self in the name of survival, or of profound alienation, began to tell a story all its own.

The issue of interpreting oral history—the participants' roles in knowledge production and the author's standpoint—become relevant here. While this study as a work of sociology is somewhat unique, in that it is largely a series of reflections on interviews held with my peers, individuals who in some cases were more thoughtful and articulate about Native identity than I was, the fact remains that I am playing a double role here—as an individual who is of mixed Native/white heritage herself, who interviewed individuals on the basis of friendship and/or a perception of common experience, who then proceeded to take on the role of evaluating these narratives through an academic lens, and producing a text. Two related issues arose. To what extent does my own framework of concerns, relative to my own circumstances, shape this work? And how do I interpret the participants words?

The first issue relates to social location. Within the world of mixed-race Native identity, my concerns centre around the fact that I do not look very Native, that my Native heritage has been devalued in my family for one generation already, and that as a result our knowledge of our ancestry is far from complete. Further concerns relate to the fact that I have never lived in Mi'kmaq territory, that I am non-status, and that as

far as I can tell I am only “one-quarter” Native. I am also a woman whose childhood and adulthood has involved poverty and considerable experiences of abuse, whose choices have been affected in a number of ways by sexism, whose sexuality has ranged from heterosexual to lesbian and back again, who is childless, and who for a decade now has been breathing the rarified air of academia. All of these things influence how I see mixed-race Native identity—my concern that Native circles be inclusive of racial and sexual “difference”, that gender and class dynamics not be “swept under the carpet”, that the relationship between Nateness and Native status be deconstructed, and that the survival of urban mixed-race Native people as Native people hinges on their ability to reintegrate their lives into the lives of their nations in ways that are beneficial both to urban and on-reserve people. Despite considerable effort on my part to be aware of and compensate for my own biases, the fact remains that a writer whose experiences of mixed-race Native identity were different than mine might perhaps tell a different story from the same data.

The second issue, concerning interpretations of stories, involves what knowledge I draw on to understand the participants words. This question arose most prominently around the issue of the silence that was a constant feature of the narratives. The participants spoke of silence from their parents and grandparents about the past. They described stories wrested reluctantly from aunties and uncles after years of silence. Finally, in some cases their own stories contained spaces of silence, and incidents described flatly, without detail.

In interpreting the details spoken so baldly to me, I have relied on my own knowledge of the events in question, which has come from a variety of sources, including my limited knowledge of my own family’s history. Published accounts of people’s stories have been useful—for

example, the recent book by Blair Stonechild²³ which for the first time documents, from Elders, the Cree version of the events surrounding the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. After reading this book, where Cree elders spoke of the hangings, persecution and policies of deliberate starvation that Cree communities endured in the wake of the 1885 rebellion, the comments by several participants that their Cree grandparents had suddenly moved to the United States in the late 1880's and spent several decades moving around Montana and North Dakota before venturing back to Saskatchewan or Alberta in the early years of the twentieth century became part of a larger context, and were interpreted as such. In a similar manner, when East Coast participants spoke of the decimation of their nations, my understanding was increased by stories I had been told by Mi'kmaq Elders, as well as through books by Mi'kmaq writers which document the bitter histories of east coast Native people.²⁴ The ongoing revelations and discussions about the pervasive effects of residential schooling, which are happening in Native settings everywhere across Canada also informed my sense of the "bigger picture" that the participants stories were part of—the multigenerational effects of residential schooling on Native families.

What remained however, to be interpreted or merely documented, were the silences. One area of relative silence bore amazing and unexpected fruit, when I began to add up the numbers of the participants who had mentioned, in passing, that their grandmothers had lost status for marrying Metis men, as well as the numbers of the participants whose mothers had lost status or who themselves had lost

²³ Stonechild, Blair and Bill Waiser. *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion*. Calgary: Fifth House Limited, 1997

²⁴ For example, *We Were Not the Savages: A Micmac Perspective on the Collision of European and Aboriginal Civilization*, by Daniel N. Paul (Halifax, Nimbus Publishing Ltd, 1993).

it, for marrying non-Natives. The apparently minor issue of a history of sexism in the *Indian Act* suddenly began to represent an immense rupture in the family histories of the participants, as I realized that out of the nineteen participants whose ancestors had held Native status, a total of thirteen had been alienated from their communities of origin by loss of status under Section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act*. With Bill C-31, twelve of the nineteen now have status; however, only six of these individuals will be able to pass their status on to their descendants in perpetuity. Recognizing the scale of loss which this represented led to an exploration of the relationship between the “bleeding off” of successive generations of Native women and their descendants from their communities of origin, and cultural genocide.

Other silences remain, however. How do we interpret the almost deafening silence about the past which participant after participant described from parents and grandparents? In this silence we can read many things. There are those who are silent because they carry the burden of unimaginable trauma, as children who essentially grew up in the prison environment of the residential schools. There are those Native women who gradually were rendered silent by the lifetimes of social isolation they faced, having had to leave their communities forever when they married white men, and finding themselves surrounded, in their homes and neighbourhoods, by racism and sexism and massive cultural incomprehension. There are those who were taught to maintain silence about Indianness as children, as a strategy for survival in hostile environments—the muting effects of a legacy of racial terror. We can interpret some of the silence as a process of learning to associate Nativeness with poverty, degradation and shame. All this can be conjectured from the silences of our parents and grandparents. But can we also see the silences where our parents refused to conform to

assimilation pressures, the messages of affirmation of Indianness which in some contexts were confirmed by silence? Can we read our parents' resistance in their silence? Because it is equally obvious, through the multiple and sometimes devious roads that led the participants almost inexorably to reclaim a Native identity, that silence about Nativeness was not all that our parents passed down to us. I urge the reader to look for the silences in the participants' statements, to conjecture about what is not said as well as what is.

1.7 ON ANONYMITY:

In this thesis, many of the participants shared extremely intimate details of family and personal history, in the expectation that their words would be anonymous. For this reason, I have decided to introduce initial anecdotes of family history through the use of pseudonyms—to personalize the anecdotes—but to make all other comments by the participants anonymous. In a similar manner, because certain individuals are from nations where hardly any other members live in Toronto, in some instances I have declined to name the participant's indigenous nation, or home reserve, or where they went to school, so as not to inadvertently identify them. I ask that readers respect the need to maintain the privacy of the participants, and accept the masking of certain identities, and that all quotations will be anonymous.

1.8 ON DEFINITIONS OF NATIVENESS:

Throughout this thesis, I will be using the terms "Indian", "Native", "Indigenous", and "Aboriginal" in a fairly interchangeable manner, which reflects the diversity of terms which Native people who live in Canada use to refer to themselves. In a similar manner, the terms "halfbreed", "mixed-race", and "mixed blood" are used interchangeably to refer to individuals who define themselves as being of mixed Native and non-Native heritage. When participants use the term, I use the term "Metis"

to refer to individuals who are mixed-race. I have also used the term “Metis” (sometimes further defined as “Western Metis”) to refer to those individuals who are mixed-race or non-status from Western Canada and who claim the specific heritage of Metisness which is unique to Western Canada. While some Metis people argue that only those who are Metis from a specific tradition in Western Canada can use the label “Metis” (as opposed to “metis”), I have allowed the currently diverse uses of the term to be reflected in this text. Finally, in certain contexts I use the term “Indian”, “status Indian” or “Treaty Indian” to differentiate those Native people who have Indian status from those who do not. Generally speaking, when the term “Indian” refers only to status Indians, it will be reflected in the text.

CHAPTER TWO: **GENDER AND THE REGULATION OF** **NATIVE IDENTITY**

**E-ma-moniyaskwekasoyahk
We act like white women,
our brothers, sons said.
Moyias made white squaws out of us.
They laugh at our tea gatherings.
Said our moyias rich and stingy,
we no longer needed their offerings.**

**Though we loved those men we slept with,
those our fathers traded us to
for buckets of moose milk, scrip,
we wept into ashes we scrubbed
into their wood floors.
Our white husbands lay beside those
white women they yearned for.
We hoarded the medicines,
beaded our stories into quilts,
stitched thick sinew. Our children
would never know the bitter
cold of white hands,
never know the slapping sting
of our brothers' words.**

**When that five dollars came,
one for each Indian,
we the Squaw brides
stood along the sidelines,
no longer the Mothers of this land.
- Louise Bernice Halfe¹**

INTRODUCTION:

This study of urban mixed-race Native people engages closely with how the *Indian Act* has shaped contemporary Native identity. As a result, in this chapter I will provide an overview of some aspects of the *Indian Act*. In this work, government categories of Indianness are seen as a discourse,

¹ Halfe, Louise Bernice. *Blue Marrow*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1998, 59-60.

in something of the sense that Foucault used the term.² The *Indian Act* in this respect is much more than a body of laws which for over a century has controlled every aspect of status Indian life. It provides a conceptual framework which has organised contemporary First Nations life in ways that now are so familiar as to almost seem “natural”, and which govern ways of thinking about Native identity. To date, there has been remarkably little scholarship on the *Indian Act* which is not pragmatic and action-oriented, or from a legalistic perspective. Few individuals appear to have engaged with the depth of the problem that the *Indian Act* represents—its overarching nature as a discourse of classification, regulation and control which has indelibly ordered how Native people think of things “Indian”. To treat the *Indian Act* merely as a set of policies to be repealed, or even as a genocidal scheme which we can simply choose not to believe in, belies how a classificatory system produces ways of thinking—a grammar—that embeds itself in every attempt to change it. The practices dictated by the *Indian Act*—in particular the manner in which Native women have for over a century lost status if they marry white men, and how “halfbreeds” (now called “Metis”) have been externalized from Indianness—continue to be reproduced as “natural”, and in some cases are projected backwards as part of “tradition”. The differences between Metis and status Indians created by this system of classification have now been normalised as “cultural” (and in a sense have become cultural differences).³ Indeed, even our notions of what is meant by the terms “status Indian” (or “treaty Indian”),⁴ “non-status Indian”, “Inuit”,

² Ania Loomba describes Foucault’s notion of discourse as a way of seeing life which is produced and reproduced by various rules, systems and procedures—forming an entire conceptual territory on which knowledge is formed and produced (Loomba, 1998:38).

³ This is not to suggest that distinct Metis identities did not arise separately from this process of government classification. The next chapter will explore some aspect of Metis history, and look more closely at how the *Indian Act* regulates Metis identity.

⁴ The term “treaty Indian”, commonly used in Western Canada, refers to status Indians who have signed treaties with the federal government. In the context of the prairies,

and “Metis” as entirely distinct and separate categories of Nativeness have been informed and organized by the *Indian Act*. Inevitably, struggles for self-determination which follow the logic of such classifications will end up reproducing its categories—and exclusions—in new contexts.

To speak of how pervasively the *Indian Act* has permeated the ways in which Native peoples think of themselves is not to deny Native people the agency to move beyond its logic. It does, however, suggest that we should think carefully about the various categories of Native identity which have been legally defined under Canadian law, such as “status Indian”, and “Metis”, and consider the possibility of choosing new paths which might create common goals, rather than the separate roads which each group at present has had to take towards empowerment. Understanding how the *Indian Act* has shaped Native identity may be useful for Native people, in attempting to step away from its framework and revive the identities and ways of living which preceded it. In this chapter I will explore some aspects of the history of the *Indian Act*, focusing on one of the crucial ways in which it has shaped Native identity—through its history of gender discrimination. In the next chapter, I will explore the manner in which the *Indian Act*, and the numbered treaties which followed it, separated and externalized “halfbreeds” from Indianness. Other divisions created by the *Indian Act*—such as the hiving off of “Inuit” from “Indian” in ways that suggests that some intrinsic difference exists between the Inuit and all other Indigenous peoples in Canada—will not be dealt with here.

A broader understanding of how legal mechanisms regulating Indianness have been developed by colonial governments can best be

where all of the land is covered by treaties, the terms “treaty Indian” and “status Indian” are virtually synonymous. In the rest of Canada, however, particularly in regions such as British Columbia, Quebec and the Maritimes, where almost no treaties were signed, the term “status Indian” is generally used.

reached by looking at the larger North America picture—how Canada and the United States chose different mechanisms for regulating Native identity, and the different concepts of “Indianness” which flow from these legal categories. For this reason, Chapter Four contains an overview of the American system of defining Indianness—through blood quantum and federal recognition. This chapter also explores the problems faced by one Native community in Canada, Kahnawake, which has rejected the *Indian Act* system of determining membership by Native status in favour of a system of membership based on blood quantum and restrictions on intermarriage instead.

2.1 HISTORY OF THE INDIAN ACT:

The *Indian Act* has controlled Native identity by creating a legal category, that of the “status Indian”, which is the only category of Native person to whom the historic nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and the Native peoples is recognised to fully apply. With this legal category set into place, until recently the only individuals who could consider themselves Indian were those who could prove they were related, through the male line, to individuals who were already status Indians.

The roots of the *Indian Act* go back to the early days of colonial encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples. The competing colonial claims for territory and trade rights which both Britain and France maintained in North America resulted in a protracted war between these powers which was waged all over Native territory, with devastating results for the nations who were inevitably drawn into the conflict. When Britain was proclaimed as victor in 1763, it laid claim to most of eastern North America in a context where it lacked any real ability to actually wrest the land from the Native nations who occupied it, or to in any way control how the Nations of these regions would choose to act. The British government therefore seized the opportunity to consolidate its imperial

position by structuring formal, constitutional relations with the Native nations on the territories it claimed for itself. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 recognised Aboriginal title to all unceded lands and acknowledged a nation-to-nation relationship with the Indigenous Nations. Under this policy, the agency charged with conducting relations with the Native nations, the British Imperial Indian Department, was a foreign office in every sense. Departmental agents could not command—they could use only the diplomatic tools of cajolery, coercion (where possible) and bribery (Milloy, 1983:56). The nation-to-nation relationship was maintained even after the War of 1812, when the establishment of an amicable relationship with the American government made military alliances with Native nations in a defence of the territory no longer necessary. However, after 1830, when the white population in southern Ontario had multiplied by a factor of ten within twenty years, the Imperial government added a policy of Indian “civilisation” to that of conciliation. Nevertheless, the civilisation policy, at that point, simply amounted to offering foreign aid in the form of developmental assistance through training in European skills (Milloy, 1983:56). Native bands still exercised exclusive control over their population, land, and finances throughout the interval when the British government was responsible for Indian Affairs, from 1763 until 1860.

In 1850, however, one of the earliest actions of the newly-unified Province of Canada was to pass *An Act for the better protection of the Lands and Property of Indians in Lower Canada* and *An Act for the protection of the Indians in Upper Canada from imposition, and the property occupied or enjoyed by them from trespassing and injury*. This legislation, designed to reinforce the rights of settlers to the entire land by restricting Indians to specific territories within it, had one feature of extremely long-term significance with respect to Native identity. The Act pertaining to lower Canada for the first time defined who was to be considered “Indian”—as

anybody resident in Canada East who was reputed to have Indian blood and to be living with a band, anyone married to such a person, anyone residing with Indians either of whose parents was Indian, and anyone adopted as a child by Indians and still living with them (Miller, 1989:109-110). The truly significant feature of this legislation was that a European settler government, an agency which had no legislative authority over Indigenous nations, arrogated to itself the authority to define who was or was not a member of an Indigenous nation—designated in generic terms as “Indian”. The fact that the government of the colony did this suggests that it was anxious to assert its independence from Britain and actualise its nation-building capacity. Canada pushed this assumption of authority further, in 1857, when it passed the *Gradual Civilisation Act*, which made provision for the conversion of reserve lands into alienated plots in the hands of men who would cease to be Indian upon enfranchisement. The colony was adopting a policy of paternalistic control⁵ and gradual removal of Native people from the path of white settlement, a policy which was greatly aided when the British Crown transferred control over “Indians” to its Canadian colony in 1860. The “nation to nation” relationship was to all intents and purposed abandoned by Canada at that point.

⁵ An example of this being the 1859 statute which forbade the sale of alcohol to Indians in Canada east; with Confederation this was extended to Indians in Western Canada. This law remained on the books until the *Indian Act* of 1951; however, it was still enforced as a matter of policy in most drinking establishments until 1970, when a case was fought all the way to the Supreme Court to give Indians the right to drink in public (Dickason, 1992:251, 331)

2.1.1 Enfranchisement:

To whom it may concern. " _____"- formerly a member of the _____ Band of Indians, was duly enfranchised by order in council (date). "From the day of the aforesaid order in council, the provisions of the Indian Act, and of any other act or law making any distinctions between the legal rights, privileges, disabilities and liabilities of Indians and those of his majesty's other subjects cease to apply to her, as she now possesses and enjoys all the legal powers, rights, and privileges of his majesty's other subjects, and is no longer deemed to be an Indian within the meaning of any laws relating to Indians."

Participant's Enfranchisement Card Issued by the Department of Immigration in 1938

Enfranchisement, the removal of Native status from an individual, thereby creating a Canadian citizen of Aboriginal heritage who has relinquished his collective ties to his Native community and any claims to Aboriginal rights, has been the central part of the Canadian government's assimilation policy since the passing of the *Gradual Civilisation Act*. Initially, a Native person had to be schooled, debt-free, and "of good moral character" before they could be enfranchised—at which point they would receive twenty hectares of land, freehold tenure. This last provision, that individual Native people would be provided with land, bypassed the Royal Proclamation, by asserting that colonial governments could parcel out reserve land to individuals (Miller, 1989:110-11). This policy was a tremendous failure—between 1857 and 1920, only two hundred and fifty individuals enfranchised voluntarily. At that point, the *Indian Act* was amended, first to enable off-reserve Indians to enfranchise without a property requirement—at which point almost five hundred individuals enfranchised within two years (Dickason, 1992:327)—and then to enable Indian Affairs bureaucrats to compulsorily enfranchise any individual who they thought fit for enfranchisement over the age of twenty-one, with two

years' notice. This act was repealed in 1922, but reintroduced in 1933. Through this legislation, Native people could be enfranchised for acquiring an education, for serving in the armed forces, or for leaving their reserves for any length of time to obtain employment. The legislation was openly aimed at elimination of Indigenous peoples as a legal and social fact. The deputy minister of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, wrote in 1920:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem...After one hundred years of being in close contact with civilisation it is enervating to the individual or to a band to continue in that state of tutelage, when he or they are able to take their positions as British citizens or Canadian citizens, to support themselves and stand alone. That has been the whole purpose of Indian education and advancement since the earliest times...Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department (Scott, quoted in Miller, 1989: 207).

On a daily basis, enfranchisement provided formidable opportunities for Indian agents to control resistance in Native communities, by pushing for the enfranchisement (and therefore the removal from their communities) of anybody empowered by education or a secure income. War veterans were also often enfranchised, thereby removing many of the men who had experienced relative social equality overseas, as well as men who were accustomed to fighting, from reserve communities. Wives and children were enfranchised automatically along with their husbands, but no provision for land was made for wives. Husbands could leave their land to their children, but not to their wives.

On the whole, though, despite the efforts made by the government to use enfranchisement as a tool of assimilation, the numbers of individuals enfranchised, with a few exceptions in certain years, stayed extremely low until the *Indian Act* was revised in 1951. In that year, compulsory enfranchisement for Indian men was stopped; however, the same act introduced changes which forced compulsory enfranchisement on Native

women who married out, thereby completely severing the connection between these women and their reserve communities. For thirty-five years afterwards, the numbers of forced enfranchisements soared, as Native women who lost their status under Section 12(1)(b) were enfranchised, until the law was changed in 1985. This inequitable treatment of Native women is but one example of the patriarchal relations which have been built into the *Indian Act*; this will be explored in the next section.

2.2 GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE INDIAN ACT AND THE CREATION OF THE “NON-STATUS INDIAN”:

In 1869, the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* was passed, which stipulated that any Native woman who married a non-Native would lose her Indian status, and any right to band membership. It was this statute which for the first time created the legal categories of “status Indian” and “non-status Indian”. Prior to this, Canada had kept to a fairly general and non-restrictive definition of who was an Indian (Miller, 1989:114). Such a loose definition, however, could not allow for the kind of control that could make a person born Native (and her offspring) legally white. In order to do this, “Indianness” had to be legally codified, to make it a category which could be granted or withheld, according to the needs of the settler society. As a result, until 1985, the *Indian Act* removed the Native status of all Native women who married individuals without Native status (including American Indians), and forced them to leave their communities.⁶

⁶ Prior to 1951, some recognition at least was given to the needs of Native women who were deserted or widowed. Native women who lost their status were no longer legally Indian, and no longer formal band members, but they were not considered to have the full rights which enfranchised women had. These women were often issued informal identity cards, known as “red tickets”, which identified them as entitled to shares in treaty monies, and recognized on an informal basis their band membership, to the extent that some of them were even able to live on the reserve. However, the 1951 enfranchisement provisions compulsorily enfranchised all women who married non-status or non-Native men. This meant that they not only lost band membership, reserve residency, or any property they might have held on reserve, but also access to any treaty monies or band assets, a process referred to by Mr. Justice Laskin as “statutory banishment”. The 1951 *Indian Act* amendments thus actually increased discrimination

Loss of status was only one of many statutes which lowered the power of Native women in their societies relative to men. The *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* of 1869 also denied women the right to vote in band council elections—this was not changed until 1951. Furthermore, with this Act, women who married Native men from other bands lost their membership in their home communities, as did their children; they became members of their husbands' band, often in complete contradiction to community custom. This Act allowed for reserves to be subdivided into lots, and location tickets were allotted to men and women. Women lost their allocations if they married non-Natives; until 1884 they could not even inherit any portion of their husband's lot after his death. After 1884, widows were allowed to inherit one-third of their husband's lot—if a widow was living with her husband at his time of death and was determined by the Indian Agent to be “of good moral character” (RCAP, Vol.4, Sect. 2.3: 28-29). In 1876, the *Indian Act* prevented Native women from voting in any decisions about surrender of reserve lands. The many ways in which Native women were rendered marginal in their communities made it more difficult for Native women to challenge the tremendous disempowerment which loss of status represented.

To understand the peculiar manner in which the *Indian Act* was structured to deal with intermarriage—by making Native women “white” and white women “Native”—it is important to explore the extent to which regulation of Indianness rested on colonial anxieties about white identity and who would control settler societies. As Ann Stoler has noted, the European settlements which developed on other peoples' lands have generally been obsessed with ways of maintaining colonial control, and of rigidly asserting differences between “Europeans” and “Natives” to

against Native women, despite the trend towards greater egalitarianism in the rest of Canadian society (RCAP, Vol. 1, Sect. 9: 301-302).

maintain white social solidarity and cohesion (Stoler, 1991:53). Colonial societies have had to *invent* themselves as new groupings of individuals with no organic link to one another, in settings which are often radically different than their places of origin. They have had to invent the social institutions which will then define them as a society—and which have to be capable of rationalising or justifying their existence on other people’s lands, and the brutality through which their presence is maintained. The very existence of settler societies is therefore predicated on maintaining racial apartheid, on emphasising racial difference, white superiority and “Native” inferiority.

This flies in the face of the actual origins of most white settlements—which in North America frequently began with displaced and often marginal white men, whose success with trade or conquest, and often their very survival, depended on their ability to insinuate themselves into Indigenous societies through intermarriage. The early days of many European colonial settlements in the Americas have involved some form of negotiated alliances with local Indigenous communities, often cemented through marriage, and reliance on Native women for survival—which means that the boundaries between who should be considered “European” and who should be considered “Native” (and by what means) have not always been clear. This was particularly the case in Eastern Canada where early French policy, particularly in the Maritimes, hinged on the notion of creating “one French race” in North America through the marriage of French men with Native women. While “frankifying” Native women may have been the goal of the French regime at the time, actual practices suggest that Acadian colonists, marginal men within Europe with relatively few loyalties to Empire, tended to adapt to Native realities, as being much more suitable than European ways of living in the new land. In 1753 one French missionary predicted that within 50 years the

Acadian colonists would be indistinguishable from Mi'kmaq and Maliseet communities (Dickason, 1985:21-26). Perhaps in response to this apparent cultural ambiguity on the part of many Acadian colonists, which troubled colonial authorities, "racial" categories began to be hardened by legislation throughout French Canada, particularly in Quebec.⁷

By the mid-nineteenth century, the numerous Metis communities⁸ in the Great Lakes area made it difficult for Anglo settlers to maintain clear boundaries between colonizers and colonized. Social control was predicated on legally identifying who was "white", who was "Indian", and which children were legitimate progeny; citizens rather than subjugated "Natives" (Stoler, 1991:53). Clearly, if the mixed-race offspring of white men who married Native women were to inherit property, they had to be legally classified as white. Creating the legal category of "status Indian" enabled the settler society to create the fiction of a Native person who was by law no longer Native, whose offspring could be considered white. Because of the racist patriarchal framework governing white identities, European women who married Native men were considered to have stepped outside the social boundaries of whiteness. They became, officially, status Indians.

The cultural implications of this social engineering process for Native people, where the majority of the 25,000 Indians who lost status and were forced to leave their communities between 1876 and 1885 (Holmes, 1987:8), did so because of gender discrimination in the *Indian*

⁷ A number of European French families attempted to challenge the inheritance of Quebec fortunes by Native wives and children, and some were successful. Meanwhile, in 1735, an edict was passed which required the consent of the governor or commanding officer for all mixed marriages in New France to be considered legal, while another edict restricted the rights of Native women to inherit their French husband's property (Dickason, 1985:28).

⁸ Recent research has documented the presence of Metis communities at no fewer than 53 locations in the Great Lakes region of Canada between 1763 and 1830 (RCAP, Vol. 1, Sect. 6.2: 150).

Act, are extremely significant.⁹ Taking into account the fact that for every individual who lost status and had to leave her community, all of her descendants also lost status and for the most part were permanently alienated from Native culture, the scale of cultural genocide caused by gender discrimination becomes massive. Indeed, when Bill C-31 was passed in 1985, there were only 350,000 status Indians left in Canada. Because Bill C-31 allowed individuals who had lost status and their children to regain it, approximately 100,000 individuals had regained their status by 1995 (Switzer, 1997:2). But the damage caused, demographically and culturally, by the loss of status of so many Native women for a century prior to 1985, whose grandchildren and great-grandchildren are now no longer recognized—and in many cases no longer identify—as Indian, remain incalculable.

2.2.1 Social Control under the Indian Act:

In 1876, the multiple statutes which had been created to define and control Indigenous peoples were codified into a body of laws known as the *Indian Act*. Almost immediately, a series of modifications were introduced to the Act which differentiated between “Indians” and “halfbreeds”. This aspect of the *Indian Act* will be taken up in the next chapter. In 1880, the Department of Indian Affairs was formally established, and the Act was revised on a number of occasions to enable the department to control band governance in different ways. As a result of the 1885 rebellion, the *Indian Act* codified extremely harsh measures to suppress resistance in Native communities.¹⁰ The after-effects of this repression were manifested

⁹ These figures include both those individuals who were enfranchised and those who lost their status because of gender discrimination in the *Indian Act*. However, the numbers of individuals who lost status due to enfranchisement only reached significant levels for a few years during the 1920’s and 1930’s, and the policy was ended for everybody but women marrying non-Natives in 1951. By comparison, for over a century the majority of individuals who lost status were Indian women who married out.

¹⁰ All plains bands were classified as “loyal” or “disloyal” (in a context where almost unanimously the Native bands had struggled to remain neutral during the rebellion,

for years, in that it took a number of decades before plains communities were able to begin to assert their own agendas for empowerment.

The *Indian Act* was revised ten times between 1910 and 1930, primarily in an effort to curb mounting political resistance by Native communities—for example, amendments in 1910 prohibited Native people from using band funds for land claim actions without the approval of the government, while in 1927, Native people were prohibited from raising funds for political organizations. After World War II, however, widespread Native protest led to a major revision of the Act in 1951, which removed many of the more repressive measures for Native communities, but actually increased its repressiveness for Native women. The *Indian Act* still maintains some form of control over most aspects of Native life, which has warranted its definition as a “total institution” (Dickason, 1992:286).

The 1969 *White Paper*, which proposed to end the separate status of Native peoples within Canada, marked a turning point in Native politics as

despite incipient starvation, hoping to mount a widespread movement for renegotiation of treaties rather than take up arms). In addition to the hangings of eight Cree men, and the lengthy jail terms served by approximately 50 other individuals, there was widespread persecution of band members labelled “disloyal”—including withholding of monies and rations, confiscation of horses, and in some cases the breaking up of bands and their forced integration into other bands. It was on this basis that many Cree people, in particular, fled to the United States (Stonechild and Waiser, 1997:254-263). An additional series of repressive measures were introduced to all plains bands. For example, only band members were allowed on reserves after dark, and an informal system of passes was instituted, whereby Indians were not allowed off their reserves without written authorisation from the Indian Agent. The pass system was still utilised in some regions until after World War I, although Native resistance and police reluctance to enforce the pass laws hindered the Department of Indian Affairs’ efforts at maintaining the system. Indian Agents were given powers to enforce anti-vagrancy laws. Cultural institutions such as the potlatch on the West Coast, and the Sun Dance on the plains, were banned, although truncated versions of these ceremonies continued to be practised, despite repression, in the decades afterwards (Miller, 1989:191-195). The wearing of ceremonial regalia was gradually prohibited, until any kind of dancing involving regalia could only be done with prior written permission (Dickason, 1992:326). And finally, residential schooling was introduced, to separate children from their culture (Miller, 1989:196-198). The Act also continuously weakened Native control over reserve lands, as in 1879 when the Act provided the Department with the authority to lease reserve lands without band consent, and the 1898 statute which allowed Native people to be forcibly removed from any reserves adjacent to or partly within towns of 8,000 inhabitants or more. Meanwhile, the Department continued to sell off reserve lands near municipalities (Dickason, 1992:323).

Native bands rallied to resist this attempt by the federal government to simply legislate away its historical relationship with Native peoples (Miller:1989:225-234). Protecting status Indian rights has been a central concern of status Indian organizations since then. As the Royal Commission Report indicates, since 1969 the *Indian Act* has become the repository of the struggle between Native people and colonial governments for control of Indian peoples' destiny within Canada. The profound ambivalence with which many Native people view the *Indian Act* is due to the fact that the very existence of a body of laws, however racist and colonial, which govern Indianness has served in some ways to protect the unique constitutional status that status Indians, at least, are entitled to. To relinquish this unique status without having first renegotiated solid new terms for the relationship between the colonizing society and the Indigenous nations is to risk obliteration as separate peoples (RCAP, Vol.1, Sect. 9.1: 256-259). Unfortunately, the government's efforts to do away with the *Indian Act*, and the resulting resistance on the part of status Indians to having any changes made to the Act has increasingly led to divisions among Native people, as inequalities created by the *Indian Act* between Native people are resisted by those who are marginalized by them, and embraced by those who are privileged by them.

2.2.2 Redefining Indianness under Bill C-31

Until 1985, section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act* discriminated against Indian women by stripping them and their descendants of their Indian status if they married a man without Indian status. Under Section 12(2), "illegitimate" children of status women could also lose status if the alleged father was known to not be a status Indian and if the child's status as an Indian was "protested". Section 12(1)(a)(iv), known as the "double mother" clause, removed status from children when they reached the age of 21 if their mother and paternal grandmother did not have status before

marriage (Holmes, 1987:4). The “double mother” clause in particular maintained an unofficial blood quantum of 50% among status Indians, as the children of a “half Indian” who married a non-Native lost their status for being only “a quarter Indian”, regardless of their gender.

Given the accelerating gender discrimination in the *Indian Act* created by the modifications of 1951, Mohawk women in the 1960’s created an organization known as *Indian Rights for Indian Women*, which attempted to address the disempowerment of Native women, particularly with respect to the issue of loss of status. In doing this, they faced phenomenal levels of resistance *within* their communities.¹¹ In 1971, Jeannette Corbiere Lavell and Yvonne Bedard, two Indian women who had lost status through their marriages, challenged the discriminatory sections of the *Indian Act* in the Canadian courts.¹² The Supreme Court, however, ruled that the *Indian Act* did not discriminate against Indian women who married non-Indian men. The federal government then took the position that it could not alter any of the membership sections of the *Indian Act* until the entire Act was revised, thus feeding status Indian fears created by the *White Paper*. Because of this position, the *Indian Act* was exempt from the application of the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1977 (Holmes, 1987:5). In 1980, an interim policy was created which allowed Indian bands to request suspension of Sections 12(1)(b) and 12(1)(a)(iv). The fact that 53% of all bands requested suspension of the “double mother” clause

¹¹ When Mary Two-Axe Earley and sixty other Native women from Kahnawake (then known as the Caughnawaga band) chose to focus international attention on their plight by bringing their organization *Indian Rights for Indian Women* to the International Women’s Year conference in Mexico city in 1975, they were all served with eviction notices in their absence by the band council, which they then had to fight in the courts (Jamieson, 1979:170).

¹² The divisions on the basis of gender created by the *Indian Act* are reflected in the different Native organizations created to represent status and non-status Indians, and the opposite stands the organizations took on this issue. The Native Council of Canada, representing non-status Indians, intervened on behalf of the two women; however, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations), representing status Indians, intervened against them.

(which affects adult Native men and women) while only 19% chose to suspend Section 12(1)(b) (which affects only Native women and their descendants) suggests that Indian bands in general did not regard the rights of Indian women and children as important (Holmes, 1987:6).

The Maliseet community of Tobique was the next focus of struggle, as Native women who had been thrown out of their homes because of gender restrictions in the *Indian Act* found themselves campaigning to have the Act changed. Again, the women faced a protracted—and sometimes violent—resistance from men and women in their communities who supported the privileging of Indian men over Indian women.¹³ Finally, Sandra Lovelace, from the Tobique community, took her case to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. In 1981, she won the case, and Canada was found to be in violation of the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights. The government at this point stated its intention to amend the discriminatory sections of the *Indian Act*. After significant consultation and proposed changes, *Bill C-31, An Act to Amend the Indian Act*, was passed in 1985.

Bill C-31 separated Indian status and band membership, created new divisions among Indians with respect to who can pass their status on to their children, and made it impossible for non-status women to regain

¹³ Women at Tobique began their struggle over the issue of homelessness—the manner in which Indian men controlled housing on the reserve, and the resulting numbers of women and children who were being thrown out of their homes by their husbands due to marital breakdown, and had nowhere else to live on the reserve. A number of other women faced the difficulty of having lost status through marrying non-Natives, only to have their marriages break down and to find themselves and their children homeless—and not welcome on the reserve. When a group of these women and children occupied the band office in order to have a roof over their heads and draw attention to their plight, they were threatened with arrest by the band administration, physically beaten up in the streets, and had to endure numerous threats against their families from other community members. They were, however, offered protection by the American Indian Movement (which they declined, for fear the situation would escalate). They were ultimately supported by non-Native women in the feminist movement who began to take up the cause of non-status women. It was at this juncture that the struggle turned into the issue of changing the *Indian Act* (Silman, 1987:119-172).

status through marriage. As a result of the bill, approximately 100,000 Native women and their children have received Native status¹⁴. However, the ability of the reinstated women to pass their status on to their children is limited to one generation, known as the second-generation cut-off. In certain respects, Bill C-31 continues the “bleeding off” of individuals from legal recognition as Indians by extending new status restrictions to men as well: while nobody now loses status for marrying non-Natives, all Native people now face certain restrictions on their ability to pass status on to their children. Since the majority of non-status Indians and Metis people (estimated at about 600,000 people in the mid-1980’s) were not made eligible for registration under the new *Indian Act*, the legal divisions between status Indians and other Native people have been maintained (Holmes, 1987:13). Furthermore, since most of the women who lost status will not be able to pass the status down further than their mixed-race children, restoration of status to one generation of women who lost it has simply deferred Native families’ experiences of gender discrimination for a generation, as the grandchildren of these women will once again lose status (further gender discrimination has, however, been stopped). Finally, the central issue for many women who had lost their status—their desire to return to their home communities—was bypassed by the bill, by the manner in which it changed band membership criteria to enable bands to develop their own membership codes, often in ways which ended up excluding the very women who had regained their status but who still as a result were not able to go home. In this respect, Bill C-31 has managed to bring the *Indian Act* into compliance with international human rights standards, while maintaining divisions among Native people along the

¹⁴ Eighty-six thousand individuals were registered as status Indians under Bill C-31 from 1985 to 1992 (current estimates of the total number of individuals reinstated range between 100,000 and 150,000 people). All of these individuals are to be members of the 633 First Nations presently existing in Canada (Switzer, 1997:2).

basis of gender and blood quantum—largely through not addressing past injustices. For a more in-depth exploration of how Bill C-31 affects Native people's eligibility for status and band membership, see the Appendix.

The reaction of a number of bands to changes to the *Indian Act* under Bill C-31 have been profoundly negative. Some bands appear to have made this bill the occasion to assert their sovereignty by insisting on their right to decide which former community members, if any, should be reinstated as band members. While this issue is of paramount importance to any community's right to self-determination, it is telling that many Native people regard Bill C-31, and not the *Indian Act*, as the root of the problem.¹⁵

At stake are the already-stretched and inadequate resources of most bands, since no provision was made for increasing the resources of bands to account for the massive increases in potential membership. In this, as in other matters, it appears that Indian Affairs deliberately creates situations that make it almost inevitable that some Native people will have to fight other Native people for what they need or for their rights. While the effects of reinstatement have been drastic for some bands, however, most of the other bands have been only relatively moderately affected. Surveys have also suggested that most Bill C-31 Indians do not plan to return to their reserves.

Of the more than 600 bands in Canada, a total of 79, or 13%, face a potential population increase of more than 100%. The majority, 379 bands, or 62%, face membership increases of between 10% and 30%. The Native Council of Canada conducted a random survey of Indians affected by Bill C-31, and less than one-half of those surveyed wanted to return to the band. Of those, about 70 percent wanted band membership so they could regain some of

¹⁵ For example, Maurice Switzer, a newspaper publisher and a member of the Elder's Council of the Mississaugas of Rice Lake at Alderville, Ontario, has equated Bill C-31 (but not the entire legislating of Native identity under the *Indian Act*) with Nazi Germany's racial purity guidelines, and the colour classifications of South African apartheid (Switzer, 1997:2).

their culture, not to go home to live on the reserve (Windspeaker, March 1996, p. 6)

Maurice Switzer suggests that the preoccupation with the financial implications of Bill C-31 has obscured its cultural implications. He notes that many of the individuals who gained back their status under Bill C-31 have a wealth of expertise learned in the non-Native world that could contribute much to the well-being of their respective First Nations—and that the same bands who rejected these individuals have thought nothing of paying white consultants \$400 an hour for legal or economic advice when it might have been obtained more reliably and cheaply from their own off-reserve membership (Switzer, 1997:2).

A central issue shaping the response to Bill C-31 is the manner in which it has become an accepted aspect of on-reserve Native identity that if Native women marry white men they *should* forfeit their right, and their children's, to be band members and live in the community—while it is perfectly alright for Native men to have married white women for years without ever having their rights to band membership or community residency challenged. Even the language which is used by on-reserve Indians in referring to those individuals whose status was reinstated under Bill C-31—terms such as “new Indians” (Switzer, 1997:2) rather than “Indians who have regained their status”—is telling. These perspectives, which virtually deny the Indianness of those reinstated under Bill C-31 have also been expressed throughout the Native press.¹⁶

¹⁶ Two examples suffice to set the tone which Native writers in the press often adopt. Gilbert Oskaboose, in an entirely unrelated article on moose hunting, gratuitously includes the comment: “Indians can be just as stupid, dangerous and wasteful as any of the hunters. And I’m not just talking about Bill C-31 types armed with a rifle and a freshly printed treaty card” (Oskaboose, 1995:4). Meanwhile, in *Obidiah*, another regular humour column in the same paper, during a December article where the author is instructing Santa on ways to cut costs by suggesting items for him to purchase, he includes on his list: “Bill C-31 application form—We suggest you fill this form in and see if you can’t get Indian status somehow so’s you can get some tax breaks on all those supplies you have to buy. All’s you gotta do is fill it in and send it to INAC - Ottawa, c/o Ron Irwin, Indian

Three Alberta First Nations, the Sawridge First Nation in Northern Alberta, the Tsuu T'ina First Nation outside Calgary, and the Ermineskin First Nation of Hobbema, have challenged the constitutionality of Bill C-31 on the basis that it violated the Aboriginal rights of First Nations to determine their own membership, and their Native traditions which stated that women should take on the citizenship of their husbands. In 1995, the courts upheld the rights of Bill C-31 Indians, and ruled against the band's challenge. However, Justice Muldoon, who made the decision, did so by attacking the validity of Native traditions and Aboriginal rights, thus continuing a long colonial tradition of using women's rights (or other forms of individual rights) as a stick to attack the collective nature of Native societies.¹⁷ The bands appealed this decision to the Supreme Court, and in June, 1997, the Court overturned the 1995 ruling, citing bias on the part of Judge Muldoon. The Congress of Aboriginal People, a

Agent Extraordinaire, K1P BOZO'. The boys down at INAC will research whether you have any Indian in you and let you know. With those guys doing the research, you gotta good chance" (Obideah, 1996). Bill C-31 Indians, in these and other articles, are represented as culturally inadequate outsiders whose claims to an Indian identity are spurious.

¹⁷ As I noted in Chapter One, when matters of self-determination pit individuals—most frequently Native women—against their communities, the courts tend to rule in favour of the individual, in ways which undermine Native collective rights and reinforce the appearance of superiority of European law as impartial, fair and just, as compared to the (inherently partial and "tribal" traditions of) First Nations. Justice Muldoon's decision in 1995 was no exception to this. His decision included comments such as "Indians lost their societies upon the coming of Europeans and experienced "false, puppet chiefs". His response to the bands' appeal to tradition was that Aboriginal oral history was unreliable, "fictitious revisionism", amounting to "skewed propeganda without objective verity", and that the Elder's testimonies were "ancestor worship...one of the most counter-productive, racist, hateful, and backward-looking of all human characteristics". By comparison, Muldoon considered the government's documents to be "the authentic historical record" (Windspeaker, 1996:7).

This tendency of the courts to support the rights of Native women against their communities in matters of self-determination should be contrasted to the courts' record on criminal matters between Native people. Particularly in cases of sexual assault, the courts inevitably support the rights of Native men over Native women, using "culture" in defense of the rights of Native men to assault and subjugate Native women. As Sherene Razack notes, white male judges continuously minimize the harm of sexual assault on Native women—most notoriously in the case of *R. vs Curley, Nagmalik and Issigaitok*, where three Inuit men received a sentence of seven days for having intercourse with an Inuk female under the age of fourteen, because the Judge argued that Inuit girls were deemed "ready for sex" at that age (Razack, 1998:60-87).

national group dedicated to bringing treaty rights back to the people, is currently filing for an appeal of the federal court's most recent ruling (McKinley, 1997:2).

In an interview with Catherine Twinn, who with her late husband Walter Twinn were plaintiffs for Sawridge First Nation, she referred to Bill C-31 Indians as "strangers who would bring conflict, stress and problems" to the reserves. She stated that in time, the "strangers" would "destroy the land base" of reserves (McKinley, 1997a:4).¹⁸ Regardless of the vested interests involved in much of the organized opposition to Bill C-31, it appears that the existence of reinstated Native people who did not grow up in Native culture is capable of striking a chord of unease in Native communities. It is worthwhile considering that it is this anxiety over the implications of "opening up" Native identity in unknown directions, rather than solely an issue of sexism, which may be at the heart of the unwillingness of some on-reserve Indians to redress past injustices in reinstating Bill C-31 Indians as band members.

Blatant sexism, however, continues to be an issue in some communities. In July 1997, Gina Russell and Agnes Gendron led a contingent of more than 30 members of Cold Lake First Nation to protest the manner in which their band continues to discriminate not only against Bill C-31 Indians, who they refuse to reinstate, but against women who married non-status Indians or non-Natives *after* 1985. In a sense, the band is continuing to penalise women who marry non-status or non-

¹⁸ The three Alberta bands have argued that they are not opposed to individuals being given back status, only to their being given band membership. They also distinguish between the women who were reinstated, and other C-31 status Indians, stating that "the women returning to membership represent only a tiny fraction of the totally new membership population of 118,000 being forced onto the bands by the government" (thus externalizing the mixed-race children of these women who by far make up the majority of those who gained status under Bill C-31) (Windspeaker, 1996:7). Again, C-31's are being externalized as "new" Indians—when in fact they represent only the children of the women who lost status under Regulation 12(1)b, as well as those individuals and their children who were enfranchised.

Native individuals, as if Section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act* still existed (Dumont and De Ryk, 1997:15). The Cold Lake band is doing this, in defiance of the changes in the *Indian Act* under Bill C-31, as some kind of assertion of “sovereignty”, in claiming their right to control band membership.

2.3 SUMMARY:

After over a century of gender discrimination in the *Indian Act*, the idea that it is somehow acceptable for Native women to lose status for marrying non-status or non-Native men has become a normalized aspect of Native life in many communities. As a result, the very notion of which Native people should even be considered to be “mixed race” is highly shaped by gender. The family histories of on-reserve Native people have routinely included the presence of white women married to Native men, as well as (in some cases) the children of Native women who had babies by white men but were not married to them. These experiences have not been seen, or theorized, as “mixed-race” experiences. The children of these unions have been considered to be Native, and have never had to leave their communities. Native reserves, particularly those adjacent to white settlements, may have grown progressively mixed-race under these circumstances—but they have not been *called* mixed-race communities, and on-reserve mixed-race families have therefore not been externalized as mixed-race people. It has been the children of Native mothers and white or Metis fathers who have been forced to become urban Indians, and who, in their Native communities of origin, are currently being regarded as outsiders because they *have* been labelled as “not being Indian” (implicitly because they are mixed race and grew up urban). Gender has thus been crucial to determining not only who has been able to stay in Native communities, but who has been called “mixed-race” and externalized as such. In this respect, gender discrimination in the *Indian*

Act has shaped what we think about who is Native, who is “mixed-blood”, and who is entitled to access to Indian land. These beliefs are only rendered more powerful by the strongly protectionist attitudes towards preserving Native culture as it is lived on reserves at present, where outsiders may be seen as profoundly threatening to community identity.

If the *Indian Act* has enforced deep divisions on the basis of gender, it has wreaked further damage through creating and emphasising blood quantum divisions. In the next chapter, I will explore the regulation of mixed race identity under the *Indian Act*.

CHAPTER THREE

METIS IDENTITY AND THE INDIAN ACT:

...the history of the metis peoples runs deeper and more broadly across the North American landscape than has previously been acknowledged...the processes and conditions which caused the metis to coalesce at Red River as a self-conscious ethnic group were rooted in both an historic past and a wider geographical frame, just as the processes of ethnic formation or 'metisation' continued after 1885, often independent of the Red River metis (Peterson and Brown, 1985:4-5).

INTRODUCTION:

The *Indian Act* has not only regulated the lives and identities of status Indians. By shaping who can be considered Indian and who can not, the *Indian Act* has also had a profound effect on the identities of non-status Indians and the Metis. In this chapter, I will explore how the *Indian Act* has externalized mixed-race Native people from Indianness, particularly in Western Canada, and the implications of this for Native empowerment.

It is important, however, to take into account the fact that Metis identity historically has been more than a matter of government classification. Some mixed-blood communities have had extremely different histories and have been very distinct culturally from reserve communities; they have also asserted their goals and needs as such. In other instances, however, the differences between "Indians" and "halfbreeds" have been quite minor, and distinctions between them have been created quite arbitrarily by government classification and regulation of Native identity. Below, I will briefly explore some aspects of Metis history and the distinct identities of Metis peoples. For the rest of this chapter, however, I hope to unpack assumptions that an immutable wall

necessarily exists between “Metis” and “Treaty Indian” identities, through exploring the role of the *Indian Act* in shaping Metis identity.

3.1 METIS IDENTITY:

In looking at the history of mixed-race Native peoples in Canada, what becomes immediately apparent is the highly context-dependent nature of Metis identity—how people of mixed Native/white ancestry have faced different options and dilemmas depending on prevalent attitudes to intermarriage, or whether a secure economic base for a mixed-race community is present or absent. For example, historians such as Olive Dickason (1992) and Peterson and Brown (1985) suggest that in the earliest days of contact between Europeans and whites, no Metis identity arose at all. The children of Native/white unions either stayed in their Native communities or were absorbed into Acadian communities, with the Native identities of mothers obscured by baptismal renaming by priests (Peterson and Brown, 1985:8).¹ Dickason suggests that the invisibility of East Coast Metis is also a result of the relatively undeveloped nature of the fur trade, which at that point required little infrastructure, and the protracted period of warfare with the British which ensued in Acadia until 1761, which removed the two sources of employment which Metis men would later prove themselves ideally suited for—as middlemen in the fur trade and in diplomatic relations (Dickason, 1985:29). As was noted in the previous chapter, intermarriage brought about a hybridisation of early Acadian culture with Native values (and much genetic variation among Mi'kmaq and other east coast nations) rather than the creation of separate

¹ Metis historian Olive Dickason notes that the deliberate French policy of attempting to create “one French nation” in Acadia through intermarriage with Native people was the result of European demographic collapse in the fourteenth century due to the Black Death. The repercussions of the relative depopulation of whole regions of Europe, which continued to be manifested in seventeenth century France as a desire for a high population to ensure continental pre-eminence, prohibited the French from exporting large numbers of French people to the colonies (Dickason, 1985:21-22).

Metis identities.

The development of the fur trade in the Great Lakes region was heavily reliant on trade alliances between French and Scottish traders and Native families, alliances usually cemented by marriage. Unlike in Acadia, however, the extensive network of trading posts and trade routes which developed in the interior of the continent provided both Native women and their mixed-race offspring with pivotal roles as intermediaries—as translators or guides, as canoists capable of transporting thousands of pounds of goods over tremendous distances, and as suppliers of provisions, moccasins and snowshoes. By the 1820's, from fifteen to twenty thousand Metis are estimated to have occupied distinct communities around the Great Lakes—communities which differed greatly both from European settlements and Native communities (Peterson, 1985:63). Metis people in fact outnumbered both whites and Native peoples in the region until the 1830's, when large numbers of Anglo-American and British settlers poured into the area. Many of the Metis families who settled at Red River came from the “old northwest” in the first Metis diaspora, from the Great Lakes to Western Canada.

A variety of distinct Metis identities developed in Western Canada in the early and middle years of the 19th century as a result of the fur trade. From the buffalo hunters who supplied the traders with pemmican and who lived a nomadic existence with primarily Native forms of self-organisation, to the wage-earning voyageurs who paddled the huge canoes laden with goods from the west to Eastern Canada, who spoke not only French and English but a number of Native languages and created the hybrid Cree-French language, Michif, to the settled mixed-race farmers and tradesmen, primarily Catholic or Protestant, and French- or English-speaking, who formed small communities in what is now southern Manitoba, a variety of experiences of Western “Metisness” developed with

the fur trade. Other people who would now be categorized as Metis were simply mixed-blood members of Indian bands, or people who were born into Metis families but who then married into bands and lived as band members. The crucial fact of Metis identity appears to have been its flexibility, the extent to which Metis culture was highly adaptable, representing not only different blends of European and Native customs, but also “pan Indian” identities, as Metis settlements were frequently sites where individuals spoke not only French and English but Cree, Ojibway, Sioux and Chipewyan, as well as Michif.

The rise of Metis nationalism was a response to Canada’s expansion westward, and the clear threat it represented to those individuals who were neither recognised as Indian by governments nor accepted as white by settlers, and who were threatened with the same processes of marginalization and displacement by the encroaching Europeans as they had already experienced in the Great Lakes region. As a rule, white encroachment, particularly the emigration of white women, has always signified a hardening of racial attitudes, a lowering in prestige of Native wives, and a racialization of Metis people as “Natives”.²

The attempts by Louis Riel and his followers to form a Metis nation within Canada in 1870, the manner in which Canada rejected and criminalized this attempt, the Metis diaspora westward to Saskatchewan and Alberta, the 1885 rebellion, and the military repression which followed, will not be explored here—this history is amply covered by a number of sources such as the Report of the Royal Commission on

² Ann Stoler suggests that this should not simply be seen as evidence that white women were “more racist” than white men; but rather, that policies encouraging the emigration of white women should be seen as occurring in conjunction with some prior or planned stabilization of colonial rule—usually in response to imperial vulnerability or as a means of securing empire (Stoler, 1989:147). Encouraging the development of a stable white population on the Canadian prairies represented a change in policies towards the west which Canadian nation-building demanded—a move from fur-trade frontier to settler nation.

Aboriginal Peoples (Vol. 4, Sect. 5.2.1, 1996), McLean (1987), Barron and Waldram (1986), Peterson and Brown (1985), the Association of Metis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (1977), and Sealey and Lussier (1975). What is significant for the purpose of this study is the manner in which Metis people after 1885 were caught in a vise of colonial contradictions. As white settlement poured onto the prairies they were increasingly racialized as Indians; however, they faced a colonial government which was determined to eliminate them from consideration by denying their Aboriginality and externalising them from Native communities.

We should be clear the extent to which the federal government chose to deny the Aboriginality of Metis people not only because of racist assumptions about “authentic” Indianness, but as part of a deliberate process of regulating Native identity in order to facilitate the theft of the land by reducing the numbers of groups who would be recognized as having valid Indigenous rights to the land. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald may have declared in 1885 that “the halfbreeds are whites...and must be treated the same as other Canadians...as if they were altogether white” (Harrison, 1985:73), but almost every piece of Canadian legislation dealing with the land in one way or another recognized the Indigenous nature of Metis communities.³ To facilitate white access to the land, a scrip system was devised, whereby a provisional document, which entitled the holder to receive either money or land, was to be issued to each Metis individual. The government then asserted that in accepting scrip, Metis individuals were waiving any

³ Appendix 5 of Volume Four, Section Five of the Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples has a lengthy and informative series of historical, legal and moral arguments as to why the Metis should be considered as another form of Aboriginal people within Canada, and the constitutional and legal protections they require to maintain their identities (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 4, Sect. 5, Appendix 5A-C: 271-371).

collective rights to land which might accrue to them as people of Aboriginal heritage. The North-West Halfbreed Commissions of 1885, 1886 and 1887, the Scrip and Treaty Commission of 1899, and the Scrip Commissions of the early 1900's, all were set up with the express purpose of eliminating "the halfbreed problem" by granting Metis people individual land allotments rather than collective recognition. The land allotments were almost always situated far from existing Metis settlements, and usually scattered, so that no collective Metis landholding system could be recreated from the individual allotments (RCAP, Vol. 4, Sect. 5, Appendix 5C: 335). An orgy of scrip speculation followed, which the Canadian government, despite numerous petitions, deliberately refused to intervene in. Metis people, many of them women and children who did not speak English and who were unaccustomed to having individual land holdings, were targeted by land speculators to sell their scrip for a pittance. By the turn of the century, 90% of the Metis were landless and destitute (Dobbin, 1981:25), and a number of prominent individuals and institutions had amassed considerable fortunes from scrip speculation, including the Bank of Montreal and Bank of Nova Scotia (Harrison, 1985:76). This wholesale theft of Metis land, coupled with the intense racism which developed around the new white settlements, created pressures which began to polarize mixed-race Native identity. Those individuals who could do so made every attempt to assimilate into the white society, while those who could not hide their Nativeness (but who were barred from joining Native communities by government policy) moved further north to the subarctic, to eke out a bare survival in the bush. New northern Metis villages formed as a result of this migration, their numbers continuously swelling by the addition of status Indian women and their families who married Metis men and thus could not live on their reserves. Some historic Metis communities in the southern prairies survived *as Metis communities*,

while maintaining a low profile about Indigenous identity. In general, however, a tremendous silence about Metisness was the result of this massive disenfranchisement of Metis families. Don McLean notes that the number of individuals in Western Canada who identified as “Indian or Metis” dropped by half in the 20 years between 1881 and 1901, to about 26,000 (McLean, 1987:241). This represents not only the Indian people who fled to the United States to avoid government reprisals after 1885, but the significant numbers of Metis people who migrated north, away from white settlement and census-takers, or began to pass as white. In the years after 1885, Metis identity virtually went underground in most of Western Canada.

Distinct Metis identities were thus created by the fur trade, by its encouragement of significant levels of intermarriage between white men and Native women, coupled with an absence of white settlement. By the time the Hudson’s Bay Company moved northward along the Mackenzie river into the Arctic, however, attitudes among the fur trade elite towards mixed-bloods and interracial relationships had already hardened considerably. This filtered down the ranks so that even short-term liaisons between white men and Native women were discouraged, and interracial relationships became marked by the frequent denigration and devaluation of Native women. Mixed-race children were generally not recognised by their fathers, and as a result, in the Arctic, despite the presence of the fur trade, no separate Metis identity developed. Mixed-race children were raised from birth in Native society, as Native people.

Despite disparities of mixed-race experience in different fur-trade regions across an entire continent spanning over three centuries under two different European regimes, the processes of disempowerment and racialization that mixed-race Native people have experienced have followed remarkably common trajectories. With the exception of the earliest days of

the fur trade on the east coast, where the French regime's policy of creating a single "French race" in North America allowed no distinct mixed race population to emerge, and the final days of the fur trade in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, which took place in an era when extensive settlement had already defined most of the continent as white-dominated and where mixed race people were as a result always racialized as Native, the pattern across the continent has been virtually identical. Initial intervals of Native women being the brokers between Native and white societies have brought about the existence of a distinct body of mixed-race people, relatively empowered by the numerous roles they played in the fur-trade, even as their activities "broke open" new areas of the continent for whites. This was inevitably followed by intense racialization due to the similar, distinctly gendered processes of white settlement occurring in region after region, which forced Metis people to the margins of white society, even as it excluded them, through government regulation of Native identity, from re-entering Indian societies.

While many Metis people share a history of distinct mixed-race identity and experience created by the fur trade, in a number of regions the boundaries between "Native" and "mixed-blood" identities have been far more porous than such histories often suggest. Most Native bands have had mixed-race members, and marriages between halfbreeds and treaty Indians has always been a reality. Many people of Native heritage have been eligible for either treaty or scrip, and the extent to which they chose one or another has depended on a number of circumstances.⁴ The categories of "Indian" and "Metis" have in some contexts been quite

⁴ For example, the churches played a role in influencing their parishioners to choose one identity or another. Because church missions received government grants based on a per capita enrollment of treaty Indians in their schools, they generally encouraged their parishioners to take treaty rather than scrip (Harrison, 1985:76).

mutable.⁵ It has been the *Indian Act* which has played the largest role not only in *creating* the separate category of “halfbreed” in regions where no such concept existed, but in forcibly externalizing mixed-race people from Native communities.

3.2 THE NUMBERED TREATIES: EXTERNALIZING THE “HALFBREED”

When Canada passed the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act* in 1869, a blood quantum requirement was added for the first time to the definition of an Indian. After 1869, the only people eligible to be considered Indian were those who had at least one-quarter Indian blood (Dickason, 1992:251).

With the expansion of Canada into the western regions of the continent, however, officials in the Indian Department, in negotiating treaties with the new Nations they encountered, began the practice of exerting much more stringent controls over who would be accepted as Indian. When the *Indian Act* was created in 1876, these practices were made explicit. The Act contained a provision which for the first time excluded anybody who was not considered to be “pure Indian” from Indianness.⁶ It stated that:

...no half-breed head of a family (except the widow of an Indian, or a half-breed who has already been admitted into a treaty) shall...be accounted an Indian, or entitled to be admitted into any Indian treaty (Canada, *Indian Act*, Section 3, 1876. R.S.C., 1951, quoted in Waldram, 1986:281)

⁵ Coates and Morrison describe one example of the mutability of categories of “Indian” and “halfbreed”, as occurred within the family of Marguerite Bouvier. Born in Winnipeg in 1854, both she and her son Michel received scrip as Metis, but her three daughters took treaty as Indians (Coates and Morrison, 1986:258-9).

⁶ As I noted in Chapter One, while stringent standards were used in classifying the Native peoples in Western Canada as Indian, in practice, those who got to *stay* Indian became restricted to individuals who were, in theory, 50% Indian. Section 12(1)(a)(iv) of the *Indian Act*, the “double mother” clause, removed the status of individuals with only one Indian grandparent, thereby enforcing an unofficial 50% blood quantum guideline. This has been preserved in Bill C-31 through the new configuration of who can get or keep status; those with only one Indian grandparent cannot gain status.

But who was “Indian” and who was “half-breed”? Coates and Morrison (1986) suggest that these distinctions have to a tremendous extent been *created* by colonial categories, as well as being regulated by them. The signing of the numbered treaties in Western Canada, and the changes to the *Indian Act* which accompanied it, have been crucial to the creation of different categories of Indianness.

Treaties One and Two, encompassing southern and central Manitoba, were signed in 1871 with the Saulteaux, Cree and other nations. The exclusion of Metis people from these two treaties was made law under the *Indian Act* in 1876 when Manitoba halfbreeds were excluded from being counted as Indians. Treaty Three, signed in 1873 with the Ojibway of northwestern Ontario, cleared title to the Lake of the Woods district at significantly better terms than the first two treaties. Because the Metis had been influential in these negotiations, the Ojibway leader Mawedopenais insisted that Metis people be included in the treaty; as a result, Metis people in the Rainy River district have treaty land as registered Indians. However, when Cree people attempted to have halfbreeds included in Treaties Four and Six, the response of the Canadian government was to modify the *Indian Act* in 1880 to specifically exclude “halfbreeds” outside Manitoba from coming under the provisions of the Act, and from any of the treaties (Dickason, 1992:279). When Treaty Eight was signed at Fort Resolution in 1900, the Chipewyan Indians of the region put forward Pierre Beaulieu, a member of a well-known Metis family, as their chief, because he had a better knowledge of the language and customs of the whites than many Indians did. The treaty commissioner rejected this choice, since anyone recognised as Metis was not permitted to take treaty (Coates & Morrison, 1986:259).

The process of differentiating between “Indians” and “halfbreeds” did not necessarily conform either to actual racial blood quantum or to individual self-identification. In the 50 year interval during which the numbered treaties one to eleven were negotiated with Native bands across Western Canada and the subarctic, treaty commissioners in each location set up tables where potential “halfbreeds” were to present themselves, individual by individual, to be judged by white officials as to *what* they were. In a context where racial mixing was frequently difficult to determine, factors such as lifestyle, language and residence were employed (Waldram, 1986:281). Individuals who were considered to be living “like Indians” were taken into treaty, while those who had worked hauling supplies for the Hudson Bay Company and as a result knew some English, were registered as “halfbreeds”, in each case regardless of ancestry.⁷ Thus ascribed, an individual became, irrevocably, Indian or halfbreed (as did their descendants). If Indian, one’s name was included on the band list as someone who came under the treaty; if halfbreed, one was (in theory) given scrip for fee simple title to 160 acres of land, or money to the value of \$160. Many Native families who were away when registration was first carried out never made treaty lists and ended up being classified as halfbreeds. Indeed, whole bands who were absent during treaty signing similarly lost any chance of acquiring Native status and became, de facto, “halfbreed” communities (Holmes, 1987:4). In other parts of Canada, where the treaties did not expressly separate “halfbreeds” from “Indians”, in the way that the numbered treaties in Western Canada did, such individuals were usually considered to be

⁷ This standard used to distinguish “Indians” from “halfbreeds” has in fact been virtually meaningless since its inception, given the fact that at the end of the nineteenth century, most Native people in Canada had already been forced into some sort of transition to farming life or seasonal wage labour; Metisness in this context scarcely signified a loss of “authenticity”.

“non-status Indians”.

The government frequently sought to “winnow out” from Indianness all who could be claimed to be Metis. In 1879, the *Indian Act* was amended to enable individuals to withdraw from treaty, to take scrip and be counted as Metis (Hatt, 1986:197). Because of the widespread destitution on the newly created Indian reserves, and because halfbreed money scrip could immediately be cashed, a rush to leave treaty status on the part of some bands, regardless of ancestry, ensued, until regulations were created which ensured that individuals who “led the mode of life of Indians” were not to be granted discharge from treaty (Hatt, 1986:197). When the northern boundary of the province of Ontario was set at the Albany River in 1899, it bisected the territory covered by Treaty Three, so that half of the Treaty Three territory fell within what became Ontario, and half of the territory remained part of what was then the Keewatin district of the Northwest Territories. Indian Affairs decided at the time that only Treaty Three halfbreeds living outside the new boundaries of Ontario were to be allowed to take scrip. When the time came for negotiating Treaty Nine in 1905, the Treaty Eight Commissioner, J. A. McKenna, advised against including the Keewatin district into this treaty, to prevent northern Cree and Ojibway people from claiming to be Keewatin “halfbreeds” in order to receive scrip rather than coming under the treaty:

[The Keewatin district should be excluded so that] “all of the people who are really living the life of aborigines will come into Treaty. Otherwise, some natives might set up claims to white blood, to declare that their habitat was in Keewatin, and to demand scrip instead of treaty” (McKenna, quoted in Long, 1978:1).

Halfbreeds in Ontario were not offered scrip. Most of the mixed-race families who for generations had kept the fur-trading posts on James Bay supplied with food were brought into treaty, with the

exception of Moose Factory halfbreeds. These individuals, who were excluded from the treaty but offered no scrip, have petitioned for years for recognition and compensation. In recent years their organization has also included non-status Indians whose families lost status because of Section 12(1)(b) (Long, 1985).

In rare cases, individuals who were known to be half or three-quarters Indian and were said to be following “an Indian way of life”, who were destitute and prevented by hunting regulations from living off the land, were allowed to be taken into treaty. This was the case particularly during the 1930’s in areas of Treaty Eight and Treaty Eleven, when over 160 individuals formerly counted as halfbreeds became treaty Indians (Coates and Morrison, 1986:259).

The later numbered treaties perhaps demonstrate the most glaring contradictions between the government’s rigid classifications of “halfbreed” and “Treaty Indian” and how people actually saw themselves. Mixed-race Native people who lived along the northern Mackenzie River and in the Yukon have never differentiated themselves from Native communities. However, the flurry of prospecting in the Mackenzie valley during the Klondike gold rush convinced the government to negotiate Treaty Eight in 1899 with the Native peoples of the southern Mackenzie Basin. At that point, anybody deemed to be “halfbreed” was separated out and offered scrip rather than treaty. With the discovery of oil at Norman Wells, Treaty Eleven was signed in 1921, with a similar effect. The numbered treaties were thus crucial to the project of forcibly identifying and segregating “halfbreeds” from “Indians”, regardless of how individuals saw themselves.⁸

⁸ Other government policies also enforced or heightened distinctions between “halfbreeds” and “Indians” in the north. In 1922, when Wood Buffalo Park was created, local clergy argued to have hunting and trapping rights extended to Metis people who relied on the land for their livelihood as much as treaty Indians did; Indian Affairs

In the Yukon, meanwhile, where no treaties were signed, fewer distinctions existed between those who were mixed-race and those who were not. The churches, however, attempted to separate mixed-race Native people from Native communities and categorize them as whites, regardless of how the white society ostracized and rejected them. For example, until World War II, mixed-race children were generally unwelcome in white schools; however, they were barred from Indian day schools, thus preventing them from receiving any education at all. After the 1940's, however, these policies shifted and most mixed-race youths were sent to Indian schools. The white father's identity defined the child—if he acknowledged the child, it was declared to be white, while if he did not, the child was considered Indian and raised as such (Coates and Morrison, 1986:265-267). The introduction of the Welfare State after World War II forced a more standardized classification of race on families in the north. Family allowances in the Yukon and Northwest Territories initially were paid to Inuit and “all people living the Native way” in kind, while whites and “mixed bloods not living like Indians” were paid in cash (Coates and Morrison, 1986:269). Later however, distinctions were hardened between those who were said to be living “the Native way of life” and those who weren't; the latter were designated as “non-status Indians”.

however refused. The creation of the province of Alberta similarly divided Metis in the Mackenzie watershed into those who lived north of the 60th parallel, who were given hunting and trapping privileges in 1927 (thus enabling them to maintain the same kind of living as treaty Indians) and those who lived south of it (now Alberta) where such privileges were denied.

Schooling was another way in which divisions between treaty Indians and “halfbreeds” were created and reinforced in the Northwest Territories. Different funding bodies for treaty Indians and whites forced an arbitrary division *among* “halfbreeds”, as “those who lived like Indians” and “those who did not”. Schools in the Mackenzie district carefully categorized who was Indian, who was “half-breed living like an Indian”, who was “halfbreed living like a white” and who was white. Half-breeds who lived like whites were generally classified as “quarter-breeds” and were funded as whites. In most cases, these racial categories had little to do with how community members related to one another or saw one another (Coates and Morrison, 1986: 260).

3.3 IMPLICATIONS OF INDIAN ACT DIVISIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY “INDIAN” AND “METIS” IDENTITIES

If the preceding history clarifies anything, it is that both “Indian” and “Metis” identities have been shaped to a phenomenal extent by discriminatory legislation in the *Indian Act*. In this sense, to view these groups as the products of entirely different histories and the bearers of entirely different destinies belies the common origins of both groups, as members of Aboriginal nations who faced colonization pressures in different ways, or who were classified in different ways by colonial legislation. Focusing solely on contemporary differences between treaty Indians and Metis, without any exploration of what both groups have in common, at this point seems to conform too closely to the logic of the *Indian Act*. It would seem more useful to understand contemporary Metis identity less as an issue of *inherent* cultural difference due to racial mixing and being the product of a “Red River” heritage than as an issue of being non-status and historically excluded from legal rights and access to land because of the relentless rigidity with which racial categories were created and maintained under the *Indian Act*. Because of the struggle of Metis people to have their distinct nationhood recognized, in order to gain legal rights as Aboriginal people, this statement should not be interpreted as challenging Metis claims to cultural distinctiveness. In this view, treaty Indians and the Metis—like status and non-status Indians in general—represent two very distinct sides of a common history, where one side, the Metis, have been forcibly externalized from Indianness, deprived of their rights as Aboriginal peoples, and given little option but to pursue an entirely separate path to empowerment.

The fact remains, however, that while many of the divisions between these groups were created and imposed by the *Indian Act* in a relatively artificial manner, they have nevertheless become very real

differences in experiences of Nativeness. Even in subarctic communities, where cultural differences between “Metis” and “Indian” populations have been relatively minor, the superimposition of a legal definition of “Indian” status has effectively divided populations. When individuals on either side of the legal boundary are treated differently in most of the daily aspects of life, being “treaty Indian” or “Metis” begins to signify increasingly different identities (Waldram, 1986: 286-7). Metis and treaty Indian communities, which often exist side by side in northern regions, are required to access different sources of funding, and to organize from different constituent bases in order to improve the quality of life in their communities. These organizational differences then take on a life of their own and force communities that once saw themselves as one unit into different paths of development (Waldram, 1986:290-293). Far worse divisions have developed in regions where Metis and Native communities have been defined by the *Indian Act* as separate and different for well over a century. These divisions can truly be said to have been naturalized, to the extent that contemporary struggles to renegotiate Native identity still rigidly maintain distinctions on the basis of Native status. The approach taken by the descendants of Chief Papasschase in their efforts to reconstitute their band are an example of this.⁹ On the other hand, the conflict over entitlement between two groups who both claim to be the descendants of the original Pahpahstayo band is an example where colonial divisions between categories of Indianness have been at least partially rejected.¹⁰

⁹ The descendants of Chief Papasschase are appealing only to status Indian descendants to come forward to make their claim for band status, ignoring the Metis descendants of Papasschase who have as much right to be in the band as anybody else does. It is unclear, from the outside, whether Metis descendants are being ignored because they are seen as “not Indian” or because their presence could complicate the process of acquiring a reserve and treaty rights according to *Indian Act* regulations, if the new band has members who are not status Indians (*Alberta Sweetgrass*, 1997:4).

¹⁰ A group calling themselves the Pahpahstayo First Nation announced a land claim for

It is important to emphasize that status Indians are not being simply “brainwashed” by the logic of the *Indian Act* into accepting these colonial categories as natural. Real, tangible benefits—including an increased chance of a community’s cultural survival—accrue to those communities who are able to prove their eligibility for reserve status under the *Indian Act*. We need only look at the circumstances of communities who have lost their reserves—such as the Michei Band No. 132¹¹ which was declared non-existent after its members enfranchised, or those bands which virtually ceased to exist when resource development ruined their traditional hunting grounds, such as the Poplar Point community¹² and the Black Sturgeon Cree band¹³—or who were

part of South Edmonton in July of 1996, stating their intention to reclaim their treaty rights and obtain reserve status. Meanwhile, another group, called the Pahpahstayo Band No. 136, asserts that since all of its members are status Indians, they are eligible to have a land claim and receive compensation from the government. However, this band, which has the support of several other communities, have stated their willingness to accept Bill C-31 status Indians and Metis members into their group. They are hoping that the group calling itself Pahpahstayo First Nation will join them. Representatives of the Pahpahstayo Reserve, which occupied 40 square miles of land which is today part of south Edmonton, first signed a treaty in 1877. Nine years after the treaty was signed, however, the individuals residing on the reserve at that time were forcibly removed, and discharged from the band as “halfbreeds”. The band and reserve ceased to exist at that point. On this basis, some individuals believe that the Pahpahstayo Reserve was a Metis settlement, and not an Indian reserve. These individuals believe that Pahpahstayo Band No. 136 members have treaty status only because their ancestors joined other reserves after the Pahpahstayo Band No. 136 was disbanded (Ziervogel, 1996:8).

¹¹ The last official members of the Michel Band No. 132 were enfranchised as a group in 1958 following a hearing on this matter in 1956. This band had faced gradual loss of their lands to the city of Edmonton between 1900 and 1930. After World War I, ten families chose to enfranchise in order to receive individual farmland; however, during the depression they lost their land. The second enfranchisement was made possible by amendments to the *Indian Act* in 1951, which included a provision whereby a majority of band members was no longer required for enfranchisement. At the 1956 hearings, 17 members voted, and as a result the remaining members were arbitrarily enfranchised, at which point the band ceased to exist and the community disintegrated. More than 650 members have been reinstated under Bill C-31, and in 1997, hearings began at the Indian Claims Commission towards having band status restored (Hayes, 1997:32).

¹² Fifty-one former residents of what was once a community at Poplar Point are currently struggling to regain First Nations status and to reclaim reserve land which is now a ten-kilometre park along the Lake Nipigon shoreline owned by the town of Beardmore. The band, consisting at the time of fifty people, members of three families, were forced from their homes in 1943 when two mining operations polluted their main water supply. A hydroelectric dam had also submerged part of their land base. The Kowtiash family has been collecting documents dating back from 1885 to establish their

signatories of treaties but were not designated as bands or given reserves,¹⁴ to see what a difference having a reserve means for Native people. The access to funding and programs which reserve status brings enables rural or northern communities to *physically* survive in a colonized world which has destroyed their traditional livelihoods. It is for this reason that other rural Native communities—such as those of the Mi'kmaq and Innu people of Newfoundland who do not come under the *Indian Act*—are struggling for recognition as reserves—to ensure the survival of their communities,¹⁵ even at the cost of accepting colonial definitions of their

claim (*Anishinabek News*, 1997:6B).

¹³ The 270 members of the Black Sturgeon Cree band have been landless since SherrGold Inc took over their territories in the Lynn Lake area in the early 1950's, burned down their houses and drove the families off the land. The community, forced to subsist in tents on the outskirts of the town of Sherridon, and prevented by white townspeople from utilizing the town's services, have received no federal funding because they have been made members of the Mathias Colomb band, although their circumstances as urban people have been vastly different from the other 2,700 members of that band. The Black Sturgeon band wants to move 33 km east of Lynn Lake to a reserve of 5,600 acres set aside for them in 1986 (Seddon, 1997:6).

¹⁴ The community of Namaygoosisagagun—formerly the settlement of “Collins” in the Lake Superior region—was signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty, but was never granted reserve status. The community members, assigned to the Dalles, Osnaburgh, or Fort Hope bands, insist that their original settlement is their home, and are struggling to obtain recognition as a reserve. In 1984 they elected a chief and two councillors, and eighty individuals have requested transfer of their band membership to Nameygoosisagagun. With reserve status, they would have access to basic services such as housing, road maintenance, adequate sewer and water supplies, and health services for their membership. With 30 full-time residents, and an additional 100 waiting for housing to become full-time residents, the cultural continuity of this community depends on their receiving reserve status (Laronde, 1996:12). Other communities, such as Keewaywin, Aroland, Slate Falls, Saugeen, Wawakapewin and McDowell Lake First Nations, were ignored during the signing of Treaty Nine in the Sandy Lake area of Northwestern Ontario, and have struggled for years for reserve recognition. Keewaywin, the first community to receive reserve status, has been provided with 200 km of land on their traditional hunting and fishing grounds, as well as access to provincial and federal funding programs (Henry, 1997:1).

¹⁵ Native people in Newfoundland and Labrador—including 4,500 Mi'kmaq people, 1,500 Innu people, and 5,000 Inuit—were not brought under federal jurisdiction in 1949 when Newfoundland joined Confederation, but remained under the jurisdiction of the Newfoundland government. While the government of Canada, which observes a distinction between the Inuit and all other Indigenous people, has assumed fiduciary responsibility for the Inuit through a regulatory agreement with the Labrador Inuit Association, the Innu and Mi'kmaq have, in theory, been administered to by the provincial government, under a provincial-federal Native agreement signed in the 1960's whereby Canada pays for 90% of the costs, but where the communities lack access to most of the benefits of having reserve status. The Innu Nation in Labrador has been

identities. In this light, the fact that Metis people are overwhelmingly urban as compared to status Indians,¹⁶ speaks volumes about how the Metis have had no access to programs and services which would preserve their rural communities, and that only 1% of Metis people live on lands designated for Aboriginal peoples, as compared to the 36% of status Indians who live on land designated as reserves or settlements (Normand, 1996:11-13).¹⁷

Some Native people have asserted that the colonial relationship demanded by the federal government in order to receive funding is not worth the benefits which accrue, and are seeking direct economic empowerment through partnerships with the private sector—which at least does not have the same investment in destroying Native sovereignty one way or another that the government of Canada has. Other Native people comply with government regulation of Native identity as a necessary evil in order for a community to regain lost lands—for example, when the Inuit Association of Labrador, which regulates Native membership for the government of Canada, accepted the government's

struggling to be placed under the *Indian Act* primarily to limit their interactions with the hostile provincial government. At the same time, they are uncertain whether the financial benefits of coming under the *Indian Act* would compensate for the restrictions of placing themselves within so colonial a structure (*First Perspective*, 1996:12). Meanwhile, eleven of the twelve Mi'kmaq communities in Newfoundland are still struggling to be recognized as reserves, fifteen years after one community—Conne River—gained reserve status in 1984. In 1989 the communities united under the Federation of Newfoundland Indians and sued the federal government for breach of fiduciary duty—a case which is still before the courts. They have pointed out that the Canada-Newfoundland Native Peoples Agreement was only instituted for them in 1981 and was never actually implemented before it expired in 1987 (McKinley, 1998a:9).

¹⁶ In 1991, two-thirds of Metis people (65%) lived in urban centres, as compared to slightly less than half of status Indians (Normand, 1996:11).

¹⁷ The only legally recognized land bases for Metis people exist in Alberta, where eight Metis settlements were created under provincial legislation, in Saskatchewan, where several parcels of land have been designated as Metis farms, and in northwestern Ontario, where, because Metis people were included in Treaty Three, part of the Metis population of Rainy River were allocated reserve land and have been recognized as Indians under the *Indian Act*. In parts of the Northwest Territories, the Metis are currently negotiating land claims (Normand, 1996:12).

25% blood quantum standard as their own determinant of “Inuitness” in order to render its membership eligible for a land claim under the federal government’s rules (McKinley, 1998:9). However, there are some communities, such as the three First Nations which are challenging the constitutionality of Bill C-31, which insist on clinging to definitions of Indianness created by the federal government *as an expression of their sovereignty*, not only because the divisions empower them at the expense of other Native people, but because changes to government definitions of Indianness violate deeply internalised ways of understanding Native identity. In this respect, the truly ironic aspect of a history of government regulation of Native identity is the extent to which some Native communities now rely on those very categories to control the boundaries of Indianness.

3.3.1 Reinterpreting The Past Through the Lens of the Present

For Metis people, the route which they have been forced to take towards empowerment, because of their legal exclusion from “Indianness”, has involved proving the Aboriginality of Metis people through the recognition of the Indigenous nature of historic Metis societies, and demanding recognition of the existence of the Metis Nation. Because of the need to reference specific intervals when the Metis were recognised in historical documents, Metis empowerment has deliberately been linked to specific nation-building moments, such as the Battle of Seven Oaks, and the interval in 1870 when Louis Riel proclaimed the desire of the Metis to govern themselves, as the inspiration for a contemporary Metis nation. This history, with its military and European parliamentary overtones, however, is not the only direction Metis people have historically taken to empower themselves. The Metis populations of northwestern Ontario, for example, sought to protect their rights as a distinct people by being included in the signing of Treaty Three. Metis people in that region still

have the land base they gained, and still exist as a distinct community, as a result of being included in this treaty. This option could be considered today, particularly with Treaties Four and Six where Cree leaders originally sought to have Metis people included. However, the manner in which treaty Indian organizations routinely disregard and distance themselves from Metis people appears to be forcing the Metis into increasingly narrow options which can only create further divisions among different groups of Native people.

The contemporary route to empowerment, through the Metis Nation, forces Metis people to continuously assert that they have a *different kind* of Aboriginality than Indians.¹⁸ This involves treating the Indian roots of all Metis people as “ancient ancestry” (ignoring the fact that many contemporary Metis may have many status Indians in their recent family), and instead maintaining a narrow focus on a relatively brief interval of history, which has been described as follows:

What developed [at Red River] between 1820 and 1870 represented a florescence of distinct culture...the new nation was not simply a population that happened to be of mixed European/Aboriginal ancestry; the Metis Nation was a population with its own language, Michif (though many dialects), a distinctive mode of dress, cuisine, vehicles of transport, modes of celebration in music and dance, and a completely democratic though quasi-military political organisation, complete with national flag, bardic tradition and vibrant folklore of national history (RCAP, 1996, Vol.1, Sect.6.2: 151).¹⁹

¹⁸ The attitude taken in the Royal Commission Report about Michif reflects this kind of determination to present the Metis as entirely different from Treaty Indians, particularly with respect to language use. The report continuously asserts that an example of the distinctiveness of Metis culture is the fact that Metis people speak Michif (RCAP, 1996, Vol.1, Sect. 6.2: 151), even though the majority of Metis who are fluent in a Native language speak Cree (70%), while another 16% of individuals speak Ojibway. Only 6% of Metis who speak a Native language speak Michif, while 11% speak other Aboriginal languages (Normand, 1996:22). Through their languages, it appears that many Metis people are still linked to a number of Aboriginal nations as much as they are to “Metisness”.

¹⁹ The Royal Commission Report notes that “It is primarily culture that sets the Metis apart from other Aboriginal peoples. Many Canadians have mixed Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal ancestry, but that does not make them Metis...What distinguishes Metis people from everyone else is that they associate themselves with a culture that is distinctly

As part of asserting distinctiveness from treaty Indians, the Metis Nation seems to be engaging in what Benedict Anderson has referred to as creating an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991), where one kind of experience of Metisness (that of the Red River settlement for a fifty year interval) is reified as *the* history of the Metis Nation in the West, and a homogenous version of “Metis culture” (centred on jigging, fiddle music, and other cultural attributes of historic Red River communities) is being presented as *the* heritage of all mixed-race Native people in Western Canada. What this deliberate invoking of pride in a specific historical experience overlooks are not only the tremendous range of experiences of Metisness which existed in the Red River settlement, but the tremendous contradictions of Native-white contact which were managed but not eliminated in historic Metis communities²⁰.

In this process of filtering the history of all Western Metis communities through the mid-nineteenth century Red River experience, two distinct approaches are taken to the existence of mixed-race Native

Metis...Despite the diversity of modern Metis lifestyles, the celebration of original Metis cultures remain central to all who retain their Metis identity (RCAP, Vol. 4, Sect. 5.1.2: 202).

²⁰ While many Metis communities developed at a time when power differences between Native and white societies were markedly less than at present, we cannot ignore the effect of the steady marginalizing of Native realities on how those who were mixed-race valued their Nativeness. Nor can we ignore how the European men who married Native women came from European traditions where Nativeness signified savagery or heathenness. Because of this, it is important to ask critical questions about the nature of the Red River settlement. Can the community life of the Red River settlement be unproblematically praised, without taking into consideration issues such as Eurocentricism among Metis families? Is the manner in which many Native wives were forced to fit themselves into the mold of French women, to embrace Catholicism and patriarchal family relations *really* to be embraced as part of an Indigenous heritage? Is the manner in which very assimilated mixedbloods, such as Riel himself, inevitably gained ascendancy in mixed race communities to be overlooked? Is the 1870 attempt to establish a Metis nation modelled on European forms of governance the direction that contemporary Metis really wish to embrace? Can any group which has heritages from two such vastly unequally situated peoples as whites and Native people, truly claim to be in the middle, as if the power dynamics of white supremacism do not exist? These and other questions need to be asked by any individual who seriously wishes to revitalize the cultural forms of the Red River settlement for contemporary Metis.

people in other parts of Canada. On the one hand, many Metis universalize Metisness—insisting on the existence of a distinct “Metisness”, which is always separate from Indianness, anywhere where mixed-race Native people exist. In many cases, this insistence on universal “Metisness” denies the actual lived realities of mixed-race people in different communities.²¹

On the other hand, many proponents of the Metis Nation assert that only mixed-race Native people in Western Canada have the right to call themselves Metis, on the basis of their distinct history in this region. While this may be the case, it can also be said that the struggle for constitutional recognition of the Metis nation in Western Canada has been won at the price of the continued invisibility of Eastern mixed-race Native people. Since the basis of the federal recognition of the Metis as Aboriginal people is tied to the regions where numbered treaties were negotiated (the Western provinces and Ontario), the Metis National Council does not recognise Metis people as existing east of Ontario—as the Labrador Metis Association discovered when they attempted to challenge their exclusion

²¹ This insistence on a universal Metis “difference” from Indianness takes many forms. For example, in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the testimony of Bernard Heard, of the Labrador Metis Association, which speaks of how Labrador Metis “lived on the coast...in complete harmony with the land and sea, much the same as their Inuit and Indian neighbours” is immediately commented upon by writers of the section on Metis Perspectives as follows: “The statement that the Labrador Metis are essentially no different from Inuit should not be misunderstood. It may be true that it is only geography and the attitude of outsiders that separates these two groups, but those two factors have been significant in isolating and shaping Metis cultures everywhere”. (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 4, Sect.5. 3.1: 255-256). The Royal Commission report seems to reflect a determination to establish the separate and distinct realities of Metisness everywhere in Canada—a perspective that confirms the logic of separation within the *Indian Act*, by suggesting that mixed-race Native people *everywhere* in Canada *always* have their destinies entirely separated from those of First Nations peoples—and therefore, presumably, always will—even if in some regions they may have more in common with local First Nations or Inuit than with other Metis groups.

from land claim negotiations based on the government of Newfoundland's refusal to recognise them as Aboriginal people²².

While contemporary proponents of Metis nationhood are currently ignoring the tensions inherent in how Metis identity is being constructed today, we must be clear that Metis people are not the only people who are engaged, at some level, in reinterpreting the past through the narrow lens of the present. Treaty Indian perspectives on empowerment generally "naturalize" backward the present differences between Metis and Indian communities. In this perspective, treaty Indian communities represent an "authentic" Indian past which Metis people deviated from long ago. Indeed, the easiest way to secure a vision of an "authentic" Nativeness is by externalizing Metis people from Indianness, by emphasizing how Metis people "lost" their culture (which positions treaty Indian communities as being in full possession of theirs).

For example, Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has penned a blistering attack on the viability of "metisness" as an Indigenous identity. She writes:

The description of the metis, or half-breeds, as a buffer race, which means that they are "a small, neutral race or state lying between potentially hostile larger ones," is, in terms of their relationship to Indians, the beginning of a deception which allows the turning away from what was really happening in Indian communities. The metis would hardly have been called neutral by any of the plains peoples and societies for whom the arranged marriage patterns of ancient

²² In 1996, Metis people in Labrador learned that they were no longer being considered as Aboriginal people by the Newfoundland government (but not the federal government) during the process of negotiating a land claim. The Innu Nation and the Metis National Council appear to have sided with the provincial government in this assertion, each for their own reasons. The Innu Nation has claimed that the Metis land claims negotiations have hurt the interests of "legitimate" Aboriginal people, because the membership criteria of the Labrador Metis Association is too loose. Meanwhile, Gerald Morin, leader of the Metis National Council, has stated that the Metis nation does not recognise the existence of Metis people east of Ontario. The Labrador Metis Association has had a claim registered with Indian Affairs since 1991, and accuses the Innu of abandoned the principal of respect for other Aboriginal nations in siding with the province of Newfoundland to fast-track their own land claims (Hayes, 1996:2).

times were a tool of cultural survival. Instead, the metis were and probably still are seen by native peoples as those who were *already converts* to the hostile and intruding culture simply through their marriage into it. To say that they were neutral would mean that they were “not inclining toward or actively taking either side in a matter under dispute,” and belonged “to neither side or part.” With regard to their role in the enforced assimilation and oppression of native populations by the American and Canadian governments, both statements would be debatable.

Oral historians of Indian nations contend that the half-breed phenomenon was responsible for much hatred and violence within tribal groups. This was and still is especially true in the plains cultures, where it was clear from the beginning that the male person of the native society was being stripped of his power, his role in society, and his lands and possessions by the white man who married the tribal woman and eventually made what they considered chaotic principles of a new, nontraditional government possible. Few historians have really dealt with this matter, but many tribal leaders of the Plains Indians believed that the destruction of culture caused by the killing of the buffalo was no more and no less devastating than the destruction of culture caused by the dismissal of marriage patterns deriving from and supportive of the extended family (called *tiospaye* by the Sioux), so long protected by the tribes. To claim that a society which was produced through unsanctioned marriage and reproductive activities could be considered a buffer is to look at it from a purely European point of view, not from the vantage point of the *tiospaye* value system (Cook-Lynn, 1996:35-36).

Cook-Lynn’s words resonate from a specifically American Indian experience of government regulation of identity (which will be explored briefly in Chapter Four). Her words may or may not be accurate in reflecting the role which mixed-bloods played *within* American Indian communities, since in the United States, halfbreeds were not externalized from Indianness as they were in Canada. What her words do accomplish, however, is to externalize contemporary Metis people from any claim to a viable Indigenous history, and by doing so, secure for all Indian communities a certain claim to innocence from any complicity with a colonial culture. From this perspective, “tribal” value systems,

while corrupted by halfbreed intervention, can be regained through retreating to a recovery of the “pure product” of the past. Plains Indian communities in particular, from her perspective, can remove the stain of colonization by turning to a past which is easily recoverable in an unmediated manner—indeed, cultural survival is predicated on their doing so. In this viewpoint, the role of government regulation of Native identity in shaping how Nativeness and “mixed-bloodedness” is conceptualized drops out of the picture.

Cook-Lynn’s attitude to the Metis appears to be motivated by a belief that Metisness changed plains Indian culture in ways that are unviable, that are too different from traditional Indigenous ways to be considered Native, and that attempting to recover the unchanged Native culture is the only route to Indigenous empowerment. Her words suggest, pragmatically, that an Indigenous identity cannot long be sustained in the face of racial mixing and loss of land.

Exploring, in a preliminary manner, how Metis (and “Indian”) identities are currently being reconceptualized is not to deny the viability of their sovereignty claims. Nor does it suggest that contemporary “Indian” and “Metis” identities do not have an instinctive common-sense “fit” for those who identify with one group or the other. For many Metis people, embracing a Red River heritage accurately fits their family’s experience. For others, Metisness is being embraced because their lives are not easily described according to relatively simplistic and homogeneous notions of what constitutes “First Nations” identity today. The important point is that “common sense” identities are generally based on the logic of the colonizing culture. The broad range of peoples who now call themselves Metis come from histories which are far more heterogeneous than any emphasis on a singular Metis cultural identity within the Metis Nation can hope to encapsulate (as are the Indigenous identities currently being

subsumed under a homogenous notion of “Indianness”. Insisting on the existence of tremendous diversity in Metis and “Indian” histories and cultural identities may mean recognising that some northern rural Metis may prefer to link their nation-building destinies to those of other Cree speaking northern peoples within the Cree nation rather than to southern Metis, or that some urban Native people with both status Indian and Metis ancestors may feel more comfortable with the language and traditions of their Metis grandfathers rather than their Saulteaux grandmothers.

It is also obvious that until the *Indian Act* ceases to unfairly privilege status Indians at the expense of Metis people and non-status Indians, Metis people will have little choice but to continue to struggle for legal protections for their Aboriginal status through the Metis Nation²³, and to continue to build an “imagined community” of Metis homogeneity out of the diverse experiences of mixed-race people of Native heritage. But even as the Metis nation provides the only vehicle which at present advocates for the legal rights of Metis people as Aboriginal people, I believe it is important for Metis people to explore their roots *as Indian people* more closely. The cultural history of internalised racism and wilful abandonment of “Indianness” which many mixed-race Native people have had to wrestle with makes it important that Metis people acknowledge what they *do* share with Indians. Maria Campbell has written:

My first teacher was a Halfbreed woman. She was the one who taught me that the earth was my mother, and made me fanatical about searching her out. She made me look into my Indian side, and there I found it. But I had to dig through a lot of stuff because they said ‘Mother’, but there was no real connection to her, it was only

²³ This paper presented in 1992 to a consultation forum on the Charlottetown Accord by the Native Alliance of Quebec, demonstrates the impatience which Metis people feel at being excluded by status Indians, and their determination to be heard: “We the Métis People of the province of Quebec are distinct Aboriginal People in the province of Quebec and in Canada. We will no longer remain in the back seat of First Nations dreams, hoping for their good will. We the Métis people have a right to the front seat and we are taking it” (RCAP, 1996, Vol.4, Sect.5. 3.1: 259).

the 'Father', the 'Grandfathers' that have the power; the influence of Christianity had pushed her out and the white side didn't even say 'Mother' anymore. But this teacher told me that once, a long time ago, we all had 'Mother,' and that we were unbalanced because we could no longer revere her (Campbell, in Griffiths and Campbell, 1989:20).

3.4 SUMMARY:

In the past two chapters, I have explored how government classification of Indianness through the *Indian Act* has irrevocably affected how Native people see themselves, forcing alien and divisive categories onto communities which have proved extremely difficult to overcome. The older ways of relating as Indigenous people are the models which most communities are struggling to follow. For some communities, these ways exist just below the surface, while for others, recovery of the older ways has been considerably compromised by lengthy histories of colonization. In struggles for Native empowerment and cultural regeneration, then, issues of identity are crucial.

The nature of the *Indian Act* demands that Native communities adopt individual, rather than collective solutions to problems of survival. When individual bands seek recognition of their rights under the *Indian Act*, it precludes their negotiating arrangements to deal with conflicting claims with other groups of Indigenous people—particularly if one group has been granted privileges which another group has been denied. It is almost impossible to avoid profound intergroup conflicts while everybody is struggling with a colonial government for individual rights, rather than attempting to develop lateral relationships among Aboriginal communities which diminish colonial control. It is my hope that by unpacking some aspects of Metis history as intricately linked both to the *Indian Act* and the signing of the numbered treaties, a broader vision of both “Metis” and “First Nations” history and identity can be generated, one which can

negotiate the divisions imposed on both groups by the *Indian Act*, and embrace new forms of Indigenous nationhood which are more accurately rooted in the ancient ways of self-government.

While the past two chapters have focused on ways in which the *Indian Act* has regulated Native identity, in the next chapter I will attempt to broaden this picture, by looking briefly at the entirely different system devised by the American government to control Native people, and its repercussions on how Native identity is conceptualized in the United States.

CHAPTER FOUR

REGULATING AMERICAN INDIAN IDENTITY: BLOOD QUANTUM AND FEDERAL RECOGNITION

This is not our way. We never determined who our people were through numbers and lists. These are the rules of our colonizers, imposed for the benefit of our colonizers at our expense. They are meant to divide and weaken us. I will not comply with them.

- Leonard Peltier¹,

INTRODUCTION:

It is impossible to fully grasp the arbitrary nature of the distinctions which the *Indian Act* has created among Native people in Canada without taking into account the bigger picture of how other colonial regimes have created different methods of classifying and regulating Native identity. In this chapter, I will briefly explore the system which the American government devised to control American Indian identity during the nation-building process in the United States. In order to do this, however, it is necessary to first of all have some basic knowledge of colonization history in the United States.

4.1 HISTORICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS NATIONS AND THE UNITED STATES PRIOR TO THE DAWES ACT:

The establishment of the thirteen colonies on the eastern coast of North America which became the United States was premised on an openly exterminationist relationship to Native people. The colonists from the start used warfare to establish a bulkhead on the eastern boundary of the continent (most notably, with the Pequot war of 1637 and King Philip's War in 1675-6), and further violence to extend those colonial boundaries westward. With Britain's ascendancy over the French in North America, the impossibility of maintaining constant warfare with the east coast

¹ Statement from Leavenworth Prison, 1991. Quoted in Churchill, 1994:106.

nations, both in New England and in the Maritimes, over such an expanded territory was one of the reasons for the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which recognized the need for the British crown to negotiate treaties with the Aboriginal nations prior to attempting to acquire land. This nation-to-nation relationship was maintained through the time of American Independence, when the United States as a nation was relatively weak with respect to the Native nations, and in any case was anxious to demonstrate its “civilised” nature to the international arena. The new republic therefore officially recognized the fact that the land belonged to the Native nations through the *Northwest Ordinance* of 1787 (Hirschfelder and Kreipe de Montano, 1993:3-10). The nation-to-nation relationship, regulated by treaties, lasted until the new nation-state was firmly established as a sovereign nation. Federal recognition of Native sovereignty was definitively abrogated in 1831, when the Supreme Court, during a decision on two cases (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* and *Worcester v. Georgia*), ruled that Native American tribes were “domestic dependent nations” within the United States (Hirschfelder and Kreipe de Montano, 1993:44). Thereinafter, with the removal of most of the eastern Nations to territories west of the Mississippi, the United States was able to consolidate its eastern territories and begin another phase of westward expansion. A treaty-making relationship was maintained however until 1871—at which point, the federal government had ratified 372 treaties with over 100 different Native nations (Hirschfelder and Kreipe de Montano, 1993:53). From the 1860’s, America’s policy of Manifest Destiny—its determination to rule the southern half of the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific—was instituted through open warfare, until the western Nations had been “pacified” by the 1890’s.

4.2 LAND ALLOTMENT AND BLOOD QUANTUM:

The United States did not begin to codify definitions of Indianness until it had managed to assert control over most of its western territories—and those definitions were firmly tied to controlling the captive populations of (and diminishing the territorial base of) the newly-created Indian reservations. Federal blood quantum regulations were instituted at the time of the 1887 *Dawes Act*, which broke up most of the reservations into individual allotments. The allotment policy, an all-out attack on the collective nature of American Indian life which attempted to force Native people to adapt to concepts of private property, was also a means of appropriating large amounts of the land set aside for reserves under various treaties. The remaining "leftover" land after allotment on each reservation was "freed up" for white settlement. By the end of the allotment period, in 1934, 100,000 Indians were landless, deprived of over 90 million acres of former reservation land (Hirschfelder and Kreipe de Montano, 1993:22), and an official discourse of racial classification had become permanently enshrined in Indian country.

In implementing the *Dawes Act*, the federal government began the process of dividing "fullbloods" from "mixed-bloods" through a policy of measuring an individual's "blood quantum", and setting standards regulating if and at what point mixed-bloods should be externalised from their nations. These definitions were crucial to the land acquisition project—if mixed-bloods, some of whom were more acculturated to white ways, were considered tribal members, their presence would conceivably add a definitive voice in favour of allotment on each reservation, thereby fulfilling the conditions that three quarters of the adult male population had to agree to allotment before it could be instituted. At the time, mixed-bloods were generally recognised as capable of handling their own affairs, while full-bloods were deemed legally incompetent. By 1906 and 1907,

however (a mere twenty years later), the federal government had passed laws providing for the sale of lands of anybody with less than 50% blood quantum. Mixed-bloods were thus rendered landless in their communities, as “weak links” in the tribal circle who could be singled out for *additional* land theft.

Proving blood quantum, however, in a context where European methods of record-keeping and classification had been unknown, was difficult to do. On some reservations, this resulted in bizarre series of tests being devised by physical anthropologists, who determined that size of feet, degree of curl in hair, and the extent to which a scratch “reddened” could determine degrees of Indianness (Wilson, 1992:121). More grotesque processes soon developed, whereby the dead bodies of those Native people killed in army massacres were used for “scientific studies”:

In 1868... the Surgeon General issued an order to Army medical doctors to procure as many Indian crania as possible. Under the order, 4000 crania were obtained from the dead bodies of Native Americans. Indian men, women, and children, often those killed on a battlefield or massacre sites, were beheaded and their crania taken to the Army Medical Museum. There, doctors measured the crania, using pseudo-scientific assumptions to prove the intellectual and moral inferiority of Indians. These studies were used until the 1920's by federal officials as a measure of racial purity to determine who was and who was not a full-blood Indian...Tribal enrollment lists from the early twentieth century based on such racist biology continue to be the legal documents used to determine heirs in awarding land claim compensation (Yellow Bird and Milun, 1994:18).

Vine Deloria Jr. asserts that this obsession with proving blood quantum contributed to significant grave-robbing, as well as other racist atrocities:

Indians were hardly on their reservations before government employees began robbing graves at night to sever skulls from freshly buried bodies for eastern scientists to measure in an attempt to prove an entirely spurious scientific theory. Indeed, it may have been that Indians were unnecessarily slaughtered in battles, since it was a custom to simply ship bodies of Indians

killed by the army to eastern laboratories for use in various experiments. Some Eskimos staying at a New York museum to help the scientists died and were boiled down for further skeletal use instead of receiving a decent burial (Deloria, 1997:6).

In later years, the official blood-quantum level determining Indianness was set at 25%. Tribes have a final say in accepting members (although it is not clear how this affects their ability to be funded). At least one tribe allows an individual with proven 1/256 Indian blood to become a member, while others demand one-half blood quantum from the mother's side. Most tribes accept the federal standard of 25% blood quantum (Wilson, 1992:121), however, problems can still arise:

In areas such as Oklahoma, where there is much intertribal and interracial marriage, matters can get complicated. I have a friend who describes himself as a "mixed-blood full blood" because his four grandparents are all full bloods but members of different tribes. Record keeping not infrequently stumbles over quantum issues. In one case eight siblings were listed with five different Indian blood percentages, although all shared the same mother and father. A few years ago, one of my students related a horror story in which her family's quantum had been reduced to less than one-fourth - on paper. It seems members of a rival family had taken positions at the tribal agency and "lost" the paperwork detailing her family's multi-tribal blood quantum....In Montana, many of my Native American acquaintances were "card-carrying Indians", having miniaturised and laminated their blood quantum certificates, which were drawn from purses or wallets at appropriate or, as it seemed to me, inappropriate times....

Mixed blood Indians today are often viewed dubiously by their full-blood brethren, by non-Indians, and quite often by themselves because of past history and present concerns that they are nontraditional, culturally suspect, and possibly fraudulent. Full bloods frequently employ subtle and occasionally pointed references to mixed bloods' minuscule blood quantum, questionable motivations for identifying as Indian, and "lack of culture". Non-Indians express disappointment over physical appearances, and comment

about wanting to see some "real Indians" (Wilson, 1992:121-123).

4.3 FEDERAL RECOGNITION OF TRIBES:

The other key aspect of American Indian blood quantum discourse is the notion of "federal recognition" of Indianness, with the corollary that those Indian nations which are not federally recognised are frequently seen as "extinct" within the dominant culture. Federal recognition of a tribe means that the U.S. government acknowledges that the tribal nation exists as a unique political entity with a government-to-government relationship to the United States. Some tribes, like the Wampanoag and the Lumbee (many of whom are highly mixed-race with Black and white settlers but have maintained an identity as Native peoples) are not federally recognised because they were never at war with the United States and did not sign any treaties. Indeed, many of the tribal groups in the Eastern United States who evaded the army during the times of forced removal have avoided contact with the government since then but retained their identity; occasionally such groups are recognised by state governments but not the federal government. Some tribes have had their relationship with the federal government ended by termination, the withdrawal of federal responsibility and services to tribes. And finally, some federally recognised tribes have "unrecognised" components, often composed of traditionalists who continue to live a semi-subsistence existence in great poverty on marginal lands².

² An example of this dynamic is the situation of the Seminole Nation in Florida. The Seminole nation, after fighting continuous wars with the United States, was split into two groups - the Seminole Tribe of Florida who obtained federal recognition in 1957, and a traditionalist group, the Independent Traditional Seminole Nation, composed of about 200 individuals who live off-reserve, do not get access to tribal services, do not participate in tribal government or tribal gaming, and do not collect the monthly dividend cheque distributed to tribal members. This community officially never capitulated to the government, but their marginal lands are continuously threatened by the state government which denies that the Independent Traditional Seminole Nation exists (since there is a federally-recognised tribe of Seminoles already in existence) (Tomas, 1996:11).

In 1978, a "Federal Acknowledgement Project" was created, to deal with the forty-odd tribal groups petitioning for recognition (and a reserve). In some cases, such as the Tunica-Biloxi of Louisiana, the petition was first mounted in 1826 and was finally granted in 1981. As of March 1992 there were 132 groups seeking federal recognition (Hirschfelder and Kreipe de Montano, 1993:39-40). So institutionalised has the discourse of blood quantum become (and the notion of federal recognition that accompanies it), that federally unrecognised tribes are considered officially non-existent in the dominant culture³. The question of federal recognition has remained confused, inextricable linked with the Indian identity issue, itself clouded by popular and scholarly notions of blood quantum, phenotypic appearance, and past treaty relations. Indeed, as Wilson notes, much of contemporary Native American concern about identity, with its mixed-blood/full-blood connotations, stems from attitudes and ideas fostered by the majority White culture (Wilson, 1992:116).

The extent to which the discourse of blood quantum enters into attempts to critique its effects is considerable. Elizabeth Woody demonstrates this contradiction, as she challenges her mother's community's attempt to limit individuals whose blood quantum falls below specific levels from tribal membership, while at the same time

³ In Chapter One, I mentioned how common it is for theorists such as G. Reginald Daniel to classify the mixed-race Native communities of the Lumbee, Shinnecock, Chickahominy, Poospatuck, Montauk, Mantinecock, Nanticoke, Narragansett, Gay Head, and Mashpee Indian peoples as "tri-racial isolates"; a network of "anomalous" communities in the Eastern United States which should be considered to be "really" African-American communities, but which continue to claim Indianness in order to avoid the stigma of Blackness (Daniel, 1992:99-100). As Terry Wilson notes, few researchers have considered miscegenation as a means of maintaining Indian identity. Most scholars, instead, postulate that tribal extinction is an inevitable result of racial intermixing. However, the east coast Native nations, dispossessed and overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of white and black people settling around them, had only three choices: assimilation, intermarriage or migration. Many chose to remain in "marginal environments", clinging to an Indian identity and to small bits of land, while intermarriage and the acquisition of the majority population's material culture traits often gave them the appearance of non-Indians (Wilson, 1992:113). Contemporary concerns of these communities usually focus on classification as Indian and recognition by the federal government.

using the discourse of blood quantum to identify herself, in what (to a Canadian Native person) seems like an almost a bizarre reliance on quantifying her racial “pedigree” to determine her identity:

I will remain enrolled at Warm Springs because for five generations my maternal ancestry has been part of the people there. Standards have been set by contemporary tribal governments that may fracture this lineage in the future. If descendants are ineligible for enrollment because of the fragmentation of blood quantum, who will receive the reserved rights of our sovereign status? I am 16/32 Navajo—which means my father was a full-blooded Navajo—12/32 Warm Springs, 3/32 other tribes and 1/32 European descent (Woody, 1998:154).

Gerald Vizenor has challenged this process, and its accompanying valorization of “the fullblood” (and denigration of the “the mixed blood”) in a playful and bitingly satirical fashion. In his work, Vizenor has created characters such as Captain Shammer, founder of the Halfbreed Hall of Fame, who lectures:

Geometric blood volume was introduced by colonial racists, and from time to time, measure to measure, depending on the demands of federal programs and subsidies, tribal blood volume increases or decreases. You could say that tribal blood volume follows the economic principles of supply and demand (Vizenor, 1981:16).

This character also introduces the “skin dip”, providing tribal peoples with the opportunity to change their skin colour, to enable them to more easily fit their political convictions or pursue specific opportunities.

Another of Vizenor’s characters, challenging the 25% cutoff point for determining American Indian status, proposes to create: “an organization of mixedblood skins which demands one-fourth degree of tribal blood or less to be enrolled as a member” (Vizenor, 1981:16). Indeed, throughout his work, Vizenor seeks to challenge the assumption that fullbloodness is *necessarily* equivalent to “traditionalness” and that by seeking to promote higher blood quantum levels one can automatically bring about

a return to traditional tribal culture, stating that these beliefs are saturated with dominant culture myths about Indians, and are ultimately detrimental to the survival and flourishing of tribal cultures.

A final consideration to take into account is demographics. Creek/Cherokee Metis academic Ward Churchill has referred to the whole notion of blood quantum as "arithmetical genocide or statistical extermination". He notes that if the blood quantum is set at 25%, and intermarriage is allowed to proceed as it has for centuries, then eventually Indians will simply be officially defined out of existence:

...in 1900, about half of all Indians in this country were "fullbloods". By 1990, the proportion had shrunk to about twenty percent and is dropping steadily. Among certain populous peoples, such as the Chippewas of Minnesota and Wisconsin, only about five percent of all tribal members are full-bloods. A third of all recognised Indians are at the quarter-blood cut-off point. Cherokee demographer Russell Thornton estimates that, given continued imposition of purely racial definitions, Native America as a whole will have disappeared by the year 2080 (Churchill, 1994:93).

He also notes that when you take into account the members of the 200-odd Indigenous Nations whose existence continues to be denied by the American government, the Native peoples such as the Juaneno of San Diego who were once recognised by the federal government but were declared "extinct" in the 1970's, and those individuals who now fall below blood quantum levels, the numbers of individuals with a legitimate claim to being American Indians by descent, by culture, or both, rises from the official number of 1.6 million to upwards of 7 million (Churchill, 1994:94). It is obvious, then, that blood quantum discourse critically controls and shapes the directions American Indians take towards empowerment.

4.4 BLOOD QUANTUM IN CANADIAN CONTEXTS: KAHNAWAKE MOHAWK TERRITORY

For the most part, in Canada, the imposition of Native status as a method of controlling Indianness has to a certain extent obscured or served as a buffer against the American obsession with degrees of blood quantum. But in response to Bill C-31, the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, on the South Shore of Montreal, instituted a blood quantum-based membership code, and regulations which restrict intermarriage, which have been in effect for over a decade now. As this tendency is growing in certain communities, it is worth exploring how rejecting one government discourse of Indianness in favour of another affects Native communities.

To a certain extent, the tendency to embrace a concept of Indianness that is dependent on blood quantum appears to be prevalent in all of the Nations who habitually work or live for periods of time in the United States—such as the Mohawks, the Mi'kmaq and the Maliseets. In some respects, the protracted struggle to end sexism in the *Indian Act* may also have accelerated the tendency to reduce Native identity to blood—since Native women who were deprived of status for marrying white men could only fight back by declaring that they had a right to status because of their Indian blood. The “choices” offered by colonial regulation of Indianness—the highly patriarchal system of the *Indian Act* with its covert regulation of blood quantum, versus the apparently gender-neutral system of blood quantum which is overtly race-based—essentially involves exchanging a system that generates high levels of sexism (along with racism) for another which generates high levels of racism (along with increased fragmentation of Native identity, as dividing one’s heritage into 128 or even 256 “parts” to assert which “parts” are Native attests to). It is a moot point as to which is more destructive for

Native communities. The American system has had the advantage that descent is not reckoned patrilineally as in Canada—enabling traditional matrilineal descent systems to be maintained.

Other communities than Kahnawake have voiced the belief that “Indian blood” must be preserved in order for Native people to remain Native. Bet-te Paul, a Maliseet woman who participated in the struggle to abolish Section 12(1)b of the *Indian Act*, described this concern succinctly:

You see a lot of blond-haired Mohawks in the States, but you never consider them “non-status” like you do in Canada. They see themselves as Mohawks and so does everybody else. Their identity comes through the clan, and if the woman married a white guy it didn’t matter; the child would be whatever the mother was. It was the same for us traditionally and obviously the government wanted to break it up.

But we believe now that membership has got to be restricted somewhere down the line. That is only common sense because, if you don’t restrict it, after some point you wouldn’t have a drop of Indian blood in you. We have to make our blood-line stronger, and instill in our children a pride in our culture (Bet-te Paul, in Silman, 1987:227).

Gerald Alfred, a Kahnawake Mohawk academic, suggests that the racist philosophy of membership which the community adopted has its roots in generations of living under the *Indian Act*. He notes that Mohawk people undertook biological restrictions on membership and the moratorium on mixed marriages because of the perception that the Mohawk culture was being eroded—with racial mixing being seen as the chief agent of this erosion of culture. The community relied, in traditional fashion, on a committee of Mohawk women to take up the membership issue. They apparently voted to develop restrictions on intermarriage, but rejected the notion of having biological membership criteria (as did Longhouse traditionalists who stated that racial-based membership

violated Mohawk traditions). Nevertheless, the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, with community support in the form of a referendum, implemented the following membership rules:

- *Moratorium on Mixed Marriages*: Any Mohawk who married a non-Native after May 22, 1981 loses the right to residency, land holding, voting and office-holding in Kahnawake.
- *Kahnawake Mohawk Law*: As of December 11, 1984, a biological criterion for future registrations requires a “blood quantum” of 50% or more Native blood (Alfred, 1995:165)

The primary concern of the community, in taking up this relatively extreme membership code, was to maintain “Indian” bloodlines as some form of clear boundary against the dominant culture.

We must be clear though that the charge of “racism” instantly leveled at Kahnawake, by white people and by Native people who uphold the system organized by the *Indian Act*, needs to be unpacked with respect to the actual practices of the federal government. For example, Peter and Trudy Jacobs, residents of Kahnawake who had been denied certain services as non-members, brought a case against Kahnawake to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Jacobs, a Black man adopted as a child by Mohawk parents, who grew up in the community is, according to its current membership criteria, not considered to be Mohawk. His wife Trudy, a Kahnawake Mohawk, lost her membership when she married him. The couple, accordingly, are not entitled to the benefits and services which accrue to Kahnawake band members. The tribunal ruled in favor of the couple, and ordered the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake to stop racially discriminating against the couple, and to provide them with the rights available to other members of the community, including land rights, housing assistance, welfare, education, burial, medicines and tax privileges (*the First Perspective*, 1998:2). This tribunal has ruled against other bands in the past, for

example, when the Shubenacadie band of Nova Scotia was found guilty of discriminating against the non-Native spouses of band members on reserve, in refusing to pay them social assistance benefits. At that time, Canada forced the Shubenacadie band to pay \$7,500 in damages and retroactive social assistance benefits (Windspeaker, 1995a:2).

At the same time as the Canadian Human Rights Commission is monitoring racial discrimination in Native communities, however, Canada has been forcing a 25% blood quantum requirement on Inuit people in Labrador in order to be eligible for a land claim⁴. Canada and the Government of British Columbia, during self-government talks with the Sechelt Indian band, have also demanded that the band limit its membership to people of Sechelt ancestry, excluding their non-Native spouses, even though the Sechelt people have *specifically* refused to make this distinction between categories of membership (Gregory, 1996:3).

Commenting on this issue, Alexandra Macqueen notes that the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal is scarcely an nonpartisan “third party”, but is simply part of the federal government, which draws quite confining boundaries around the space in which First Nations can govern

⁴ In September, 1998 834 people in Labrador were informed that they were no longer recognised as Inuit by Indian Affairs, Health Canada, or the Labrador Inuit Association. This is the result of their being reclassified as “ineligible for membership” in the Labrador Inuit Association in the wake of new membership criteria based on proven one-quarter Inuit blood and the requirement that they be born in the Labrador land claim area. Labrador Inuit people, who do not come under the *Indian Act*, have had their identities informally regulated by the Association since 1973. The federal government relies on the Association for determining who it should assume fiduciary responsibility towards as Inuit people. About 900 individuals of Inuit ancestry (out of a total membership of 5000 people) have been affected so far. Individuals who are no longer eligible will still be considered Inuit—but not eligible for uninsured health benefits and post-secondary education funding (McKinley, 1998:9). It should be clear that this reclassification of Inuit identity is the result of eligibility criteria determined by the federal government and the government of Newfoundland in land claims discussions—and in this respect, the federal government is now moving to regulate Inuit identity as it has always regulated status Indian identity. Under the rubric of “self-determination” and a land claims settlement, those with high levels of blood quantum are having their identities as Inuit endorsed, while those with less blood quantum are being externalized—in effect, as “non-status Inuit”.

themselves (Macqueen, 1998:7). For Canada to elevate a branch of its government as a “watchdog” for human rights violations in Native communities is extremely ironic, given its history as a colonizing power which has for over a century maintained a body of racist and sexist legislation which controls every aspect of Native life in Canada. Canada appears to enforce blood quantum restrictions when communities attempt to defy them, while at the same time penalizing other communities if they practicing racial restrictions as part of their self-determination mandate.

For all that, however, the blood quantum system remains a flawed and contradictory attempt to control boundaries between the dominant society and the community. Controversial issues continue to arise in the community with respect to the membership code. In 1995, for example, the Band Council barred students not on the Mohawk registry from Kahnawake’s schools, an edict which the school board refused to enforce. The Mohawk students who are ineligible for membership, by virtue of having less than 50% blood quantum, had initially been allowed into the community schools following the Oka crisis, because of the community’s concern for the safety of these children in off-reserve schools (*The First Perspective*, 1995:1). The firing of Kahnawake Peacekeeper Kyle Cross Briseboise after he was ruled to have only 47% Native blood, is another problem which the community has had to deal with (*Windspeaker*, 1995:1), as is the barring of Carl “Bo” Curotte from running for Chief of Kahnawake on the basis of having only 46% Native blood (*Windspeaker*, 1996a:12). Enforcing blood quantum rules has continuously forced the band council to make decisions which fragment and objectify Native identity, and encourage the community to deny individual needs in support of collective rights. It appears that people at Kahnawake are being continually asked to turn their backs on

community members in order to protect the community. Meanwhile, the community continues to actualize the notion that “Indianness” is purely an issue of blood, even as they attempt to validate the reality that culture also determines “Indianness”.

Furthermore, in the changeover between defining Indianness by status and defining Indianness by blood quantum, it is important to consider how the sexism of the old system might be replicated in the new system⁵. We can only speculate on the extent to which a rejection of “racial mixing” in Canadian contexts might overlay earlier frameworks of rejection of Native women who had lost their status, and their mixed-race children. Any purely racial means of determining Indianness in Canada will continue to affect women differently from men—because of the history of sexism in the *Indian Act*—and cannot be treated as a gender-neutral process. Many Native women, however, have embraced blood quantum systems as necessary to community survival.

4.5 SUMMARY:

In the last three chapters, we have seen that a central aspect of the colonization process is the development of systems of classification and regulation of Native identity. These systems forcibly supplant traditional Indigenous ways of anchoring relationships between individuals, their communities and the land, erasing knowledge of self, culture and history in the process. Native identity is categorized and “measured” according to

⁵ Any discussion of the negative effects on Kahnawake women of having been deprived of their status is notably absent from Gerald Alfred’s book *Heeding the Voices of our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995) which is the best exposition currently available about this band’s change to the blood quantum system of membership. Alfred’s silence about gender issues speaks volumes, given the pivotal role which Mohawk women such as Mary Two-Axe Earley played in organizing early resistance to sexism in the *Indian Act*. Alfred’s silence about this history, and his constant blanket assertions that it was Mohawk women who have most consistently opposed Bill C-31, gives outsiders no way of really understanding the depth and complexity of this issue as it was manifested in Kahnawake. Indeed, Alfred appears ready to critique the *Indian Act*’s racism, but not its sexism.

racist and sexist criteria; these categories are then used to divide communities and deny entitlement to land to certain groups of Native people. For the colonizer, this not only facilitates the theft of Native land, but it effectively divides Native opposition to the land theft.

These systems of classifying and regulating Indianness function discursively to naturalize certain ways of understanding Native identity, so that attempts to resist government systems of classification and regulation can all too easily end up replicating colonial divisions in new forms. The process is facilitated by the images of Native people which exist within the colonizing culture; images which have been crucial to the colonization process and which at the same time represent the concrete residue of its history. These racist images assist in normalizing government regulation of Native identity even as they are central to creating its categories. In the next chapter I will look at these images of Indianness within the dominant culture, and how urban mixed-race Native people must negotiate their identities in the face of these images.

CHAPTER FIVE **RACIST IMAGES**

But as soon as I started kindergarten at the Bureau of Indian Affairs day school, I began to learn more about the differences between the Laguna Pueblo world and the outside world. It was at school that I learned just how different I looked from my classmates. Sometimes tourists driving past on Route 66 would stop by Laguna Day School at recess time to take photographs of us kids. One day, when I was in the first grade, we all crowded around the smiling white tourists, who peered at our faces. We all wanted to be in the picture because afterward the tourists sometimes gave us each a penny. Just as we were all posed and ready to have our picture taken, the tourist man looked at me. "Not you," he said and motioned for me to step away from my classmates. I felt so embarrassed that I wanted to disappear. My classmates were puzzled by the tourists' behavior, but I knew the tourists didn't want me in their snapshot because I looked different, because I was part white.

- Leslie Marmon Silko¹

INTRODUCTION:

Mixed-race urban Native people grow up in a culture flooded with images of Indians. From the casual uses of dismembered symbols of a prostrate people—such as the "Indian chief" television signal pattern which for years was beamed into Canadian homes, or the "wooden Indian" statues commonly found in public places until recently—to the contemporary environmentalist deification (or denigration) of the "ecoIndian", a tremendous body of hegemonic images of Indianness have been generated from both Canada and the United States, each with its own sets of messages about Native people. These images have contributed both to forming and naturalizing the government systems of classifying

¹ Leslie Marmon Silko. *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. New York: Touchstone (Simon & Schuster), 1996, p.63

and regulating Native identity which I discussed in the first three chapters of this thesis. In this chapter I will be exploring the images of “the Indian” which flourish within the dominant culture. Later in this thesis, I will focus on how the participants negotiate their identities in the face of these images.

Because of the different colonization histories in Canada and the United States, there have been subtle differences between the two countries in how Indianness is taken up within the dominant culture. Since Native people in Canada are exposed to American images of Indianness as well as those originating in Canadian contexts, I will explore both those bodies of images.

5.1 IMAGES OF THE INDIAN IN AMERICAN CULTURE:

There are few people more stereotyped, on a world-wide basis, than American Indians. The final stages of “Manifest Destiny”, the EuroAmerican determination to conquer a continent, captured the imagination of Europeans with the notion that an entire race of “noble savages” might be soon be considered to be eradicated. Edward Curtis², deliberately archaic photographs of plains Indians, and the romantic portrayals of Indians by the German writer Karl May, are but two of the most obvious sources of the cult of fascination with the North American plains Indian that sprang up in Western Europe, which even today shows little sign of abating. In fact, the Western obsession with “the Indian” has been going on for centuries. As Haida writer Marcia Crosby notes, for hundreds of years Europeans have been collecting and displaying “Indian”

² Edward S. Curtis was an early 20th century American photographer who, obsessed with the notion that the “true Indian” was facing extinction, travelled across Canada and the United States attempting to document authentic unspoiled Native culture. With over 40,000 photographs (many of them reconstructions, where Native people posed in costumes, with their contemporary household items removed from the picture to render them more “primitive”), Curtis captured the imaginations of a whole generation—and most of his glorified, marketable images have until recently been regarded as historically true (Pahuja, 1997:46).

objects—or Indians themselves as objects or human specimens—as well as making Indians the subjects (or objects) of literature, the visual arts, and the social sciences. The result has been the creation of what Crosby calls “the Imaginary Indian”, the creation of “pseudo-Indian” images which combine to render “the Indian” as unreal, and thus ultimately irrelevant in an everyday sense, within the settler culture (Crosby, 1991:294).

Certain images of Indianness have been essential to the colonization process. Ward Churchill has devoted considerable attention to the manner in which colonial elites in the United States began producing novels about Native people from the earliest settlement period which rationalized the killing of Native people by white settlers and the taking of their lands by presenting Native people as bloodthirsty savages, devils and pagans. Later literature contributed to soothing the guilty conscience of the children of settlers through presenting the myth of a Noble savage as *inevitably* doomed to die out in the face of superior civilization (Churchill, 1992). Canadian settlers who had pushed Native people off their lands also utilized this myth, claiming to mourn the “passing of the noble savage” even as they enjoyed the fertile lands that Native people were being forced to leave behind.

American cinema has been a crucial force in organizing and maintaining the central myth of American nation-building—the conquest of the “wild West”, and the natural superiority of the white man in fulfilling his “manifest destiny” to control a continent (which in contemporary times has developed into the American desire to control the globe). For over a century, Hollywood has been making movies based on Native American stereotypes—cinematic imagery that has been deeply engraved into the popular consciousness, to the extent that to most non-Natives, the word “Indian” conjures up the images below:

...a man on horseback wearing a flowing feather bonnet, breechclout and moccasins, holding a tomahawk in one hand [or an] Indian women [in] a beaded brow band with an upright feather in the back, a long beaded buckskin dress, moccasins, and usually... a papoose” (Hill, 1996:16-18).

The Hollywood western has created images of “cowboys and Indians” which are so powerful that even Native children have sought to emulate them:

As the Oneida comedian Charlie Hill has observed, the portrayal of Indians in the cinema has been such that it has made the playing of “Cowboys and Indians” a favorite American childhood game. The object of the “sport” is for “cowboys” to “kill” all the “Indians”, just like in the movies. A bitter irony associated with this is that Indian as well as non-Indian children heatedly demand to be identified as cowboys, a not unnatural outcome under the circumstances, but one which speaks volumes to the damage done to the American Indian self-concept by movie propaganda. The meaning of this, as Hill notes, can best be appreciated if one were to imagine that [Jewish] children were... engaging in a game called “nazis and Jews” (Churchill, 1992:240).

The central role which conquered Indianness plays in the white American national identity is also demonstrated in the practice of naming cars and other commodities after Native nations and Native heros, the proliferation of racist mascots and place names (and a real retrenchment on the part of the dominant society towards maintaining the status quo, evidenced by an absolute refusal to abandon these racist images³), and numerous other aspects of everyday racism against

³ The degree of resistance which Americans demonstrate towards abandoning the names which summon stereotypes about Indians indicates the extent to which American identity seems to depend on these images. Repeated domestic campaigns to get racist sports names changed have been to no avail—with each attempt, teams like the Washington Redskins spend more money on public relations campaigns stating that their uses of these names—and their team logos—are not racist. Recently, at the request of the Belgium-based human rights organization KOLA, the United Nations Commission for Human Rights’ Indigenous Project Team will be investigating the use of racist athletic and academic mascots, in particular, the University of Illinois’ mascot “Chief Illiniwek”. The logo for Chief Illinewak is the standard feather-bonneted “Indian head”; their mascot is a “buckskinned, face-painted, war-bonneted white boy who does

American Indians which in contemporary times would not be tolerated against any other racial group. Commanche activist and writer Paul Smith writes:

Indians face a particular, highly developed and highly ideological kind of racism. Chief, tribe, warrior, medicine man; these are all terms invented by Europeans to objectify Indians (as is the term Indian itself). For chief, president or prime minister would be equally accurate. Why tribe instead of nation? Warrior instead of fighter or soldier? Medicine man instead of religious leader or minister? Because it makes Indians strange and primitive. These terms make us the “other”. They make it impossible to imagine us as contemporary human beings, or players in our own destiny (Smith, 1991/92:17).

Ward Churchill reminds us that the role of racist images in justifying the ongoing colonization and cultural genocide of American Indians must not be underestimated:

A concerted, sustained, and in some ways accelerating effort has gone into making Indians unreal. It follows, therefore, that what

cartwheels for the university” at public gatherings (Logan, 1998:10). The university has consistently refused to relinquish this mascot—its board of directors going so far as to specifically affirm its value recently. One American Indian student leader was advised to leave the campus if the mascot adversely affected his educational climate (*Aboriginal Voices*, 1998:8). Only Stanford University has responded positively to pressure from Native activists, in choosing to drop the word “Indians” from its sports team; meanwhile, a single Oregon newspaper, given the refusal of the Washington Redskins to change its name, has developed a policy that they will only refer to this team as “the Washington team” until they change their name (Churchill, 1994:70-72). Leslie Logan has noted that Ted Turner, the megamillionaire and international philanthropist who owns the Atlanta Braves—the team with the “tomahawk chop”—has the power to stop this racist abuse, but refuses (Logan, 1998:10).

In another direction, repeated attempts to change place names which include the word “squaw” (currently 1,050 geographic sites in the United States contain that name) have been only partially successful. Certain states—Minnesota and California for example—have banned the use of the word in geographic place names, however, most states have not. Open defiance of the state law in Minnesota has been manifested in a few counties. The last geographic names pertaining to other racial groups were changed in 1967, when 143 place names containing the word “nigger” and 26 names containing the word “Jap” were changed (*Native Americas*, 1996:4). This discrepancy between the resistance shown to abandoning racist names about Native people, and the manner in which other forms of racist place names were relinquished over thirty years ago, suggests, again, that in fundamental ways, American identity is in some way dependant on images of conquered and controlled Indians. The issue has not even begun to be addressed in Canada.

has happened, is happening, and will *continue* to happen to Indians, unless something is done to fundamentally alter the terms of our existence, is also unreal. And the unreal, of course, is purely a matter of entertainment in Euroamerican society, *not* a cause for attention or concern. As was established in the Streicher precedent at Nuremberg [where Julius Streicher was executed for his role in creating racist propaganda which was seen as ultimately promoting the genocide of European Jews], the cause and effect relationship between racist propaganda on the one hand, and genocidal policy implementation on the other is quite plain (Churchill, 1994:81).

These images continue to shape how non-Natives view Native people—most critically during times of crisis for Native communities. In situations where confrontation between Native communities and the Canadian state escalates to a stand-off and the use of direct force against Native people, the Canadian media has repeatedly demonstrated its inability to provide coverage which actually informs the public about the issues in Indian country, and instead relies on racist imagery. Miles Morrisseau has described Canadian media coverage of the Gustafson Lake and Ipperwash crises as “seeing savages behind every bush” (Morrisseau, 1995:6). The media’s tremendous reliance on stereotypes and two-dimensional images of Indianness not only prevents whites (including those who are concerned about Native issues) from actually learning about the tremendous difficulties Native communities face—it reinforces the same old story about Native “savagery”—as Morrisseau puts it, “the story that is as old as Columbus washing up on these shores” (Morrisseau, 1995:6).

5.2 RACISM IN “COLDSTONE CANADA”⁴

In Canada, the avowed desire of Canadian elites to “preserve” Native culture in the face of the demise of “the noble savage” has, in fact, been all about the need for a relatively young settler state to appropriate a culture for itself. Haida writer Marcia Crosby notes that for the elite members of a settler culture actively displacing Native peoples to set themselves to the task of “preserving” the artifacts of a so-called “dying race” is to enable themselves to become the owners and interpreters of their artifacts or goods (Crosby, 1991:274). She describes how Canadian artists of the early 20th century, such as the Group of Seven and Emily Carr, embellished their work with appropriated Native motifs, or created pictures of a stylized and somewhat exoticised “wilderness” devoid of Native people. These artists and others have since become icons of Canadian nationalism, and are largely responsible for creating one of Canada’s foundational myths—that the essence of “Canada” is to be found in its “empty”, uniquely “Canadian” northern landscape, in which Native people are absent. Crosby notes that it has been a standard Canadian tactic to ignore Native people and regard their artifacts as part of Nature, to be appropriated along with the land. In describing how the industrialist and art collector Walter Koerner set out to “save” Haida and coast Tsimpsian totem poles, Crosby writes:

Through his simple identification of these “great” art objects in the plural possessive as “our province’s” and as “our British Columbia and Canadian heritage,” he not only establishes himself nationally and regionally as Canadian, but as a citizen with a heritage that reaches back to time immemorial...For those who read of Koerner’s patronage and philanthropic endeavors, it would seem that the poles he “saves” exist—like Carr’s images—in a forest by themselves, connected to a geographical location, rather than a people; it is an

⁴ The phrase “coldstone Canada” is Emma LaRocque’s, from her preface to *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*. Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Vance (eds). Edmonton: NeWest Publishers, xxix

idea that lends itself to the smooth transference of [Haida] land and heritage to public institutions, corporations, private enterprise and individuals...Native imagery and art is already deeply entrenched in the public arena and in institutional collections, as a symbol for a national heritage, a signifier for Canadian roots, a container for the Canadian imagination and a metaphor for the abstract ideals of Western ideology (Crosby, 1991:282, 287).

The violent response of the Canadian establishment to the attempts by Native people to enter this discourse created on their objectified bodies and “artifacts” is quite telling. Plains Cree/Metis writer Emma Laroque has described how in the late 1960’s, Canadian publishers first of all tried to ignore Native writers, preferring whites who told “the Native story” while describing Native people as “voiceless”, and then, when a handful of individuals managed to get published, reacted with anger and condemnation:

Apparently unable to understand or accept the truth of our experiences and perceptions, many white audiences, journalists, and critics resorted to racist techniques of psychologically labelling and blaming us. We were psychologized as “bitter” which was equated with emotional incapacitation, and once thus dismissed we did not have to be taken seriously.

We were branded as “biased”, as if whites were not! Sometimes we were even unabashedly charged with lying. The innocence and goodness of white Canada was stridently defended. How could all this oppression happen? How could police, priests, and teachers be so awful?

Our anger, legitimate as it was and is, was exaggerated as “militant” and used as an excuse not to hear us...Influenced by uncomprehending critics and audiences, publishers controlled the type of material that was published. It is no surprise that whatever Native protest literature was produced from authors like Harold Cardinal, Howard Adams, George Manuel, Duke Redbird, Wilfred Pelletier, or Waubageshig was short-lived. In direct contrast to the hailing given “Black protest literature” as a new genre by white American intellectuals, Canadian critics accused us of “blustering and bludgeoning society”. Basically, we were directed just to tell our

“stories” (and the more tragic the better), not...to be so “arrogant” or so daring as to analyze or to call on Canadian society for its injustices (Laroque, 1993:xvi-xvii).

While the Canadian elite has appropriated Native culture to create itself as a nation (and attempted to silence those attempts by Native writers to call their actions to account), the daily circumstances faced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada have been very different. The use of Native artifacts to enrich Canadian culture has been accompanied by a deliberate denigration of actual Native people and specific ideological attempts to eradicate any notion, within Canada, of Aboriginal nations as viable cultures. Myths that Native cultures “died”, and images of Native people as destitute, alcoholic, bestial, untrustworthy and pathetic reigned supreme until the 1960s in most regions of Canada (and are still deeply entrenched in the Canadian psyche). These are highly gendered images, with highly specific repercussions for Native men and women. Native men have been portrayed as violent, savage and inherently criminal, while Native women face phenomenal levels of sexual violence because of the “squaw” stereotype which still flourishes in the contemporary society⁵.

⁵ It should be noted that some Native women feel that even to mention the so-called “s” word (as they refer to it) is to reinforce its usage. While any use of this word is distasteful, I believe it is a significantly different thing to describe the racist history and blatant inequalities which the word summons and to simply use it as a racial epithet. Because of the central place which appropriated images of Indians have in the psyche of white Canadians, large numbers of white people refuse to believe (for example) that the use of the term, particularly in place names, is racist. In such contexts, to point to the history invested in this term is to force middle-class whites to own to the cruel history of their society.

More to the point, the fact remains that the so-called “squaw stereotype” continues to permeate the Canadian legal system in its treatment of Aboriginal women; particularly in the blind eye it routinely turns to the specific confluence of racist and sexist violence which Native women face in this society. The rape of Native women, particularly if they have been drinking, is often treated as little more than a misdemeanor within Canadian courts, precisely *because* of this stereotype. For this reason, it may be necessary for individuals to continue to use the “s” word to describe how Native women are viewed by the courts in this country; with all due apologies to those who would wish to stop any use of the term at all, even to refer to the racism it summons up.

In the 1960's, with the liberalizing of Canadian society, the blatant racism informing these images of Native people became distasteful to numbers of younger middle-class whites. However, these same people called on a body of other images of the Indian—specifically those of the “noble savage”—signifying the concerns of *their* generation, specifically around themes of social protest, resistance, and environmental activism. As a result of this, other, more apparently “positive” images of Indianness—of Native people as romantic rebels, of the “ecological” Indian, and countless other versions of what Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has referred to as “the Indian story” (Cook-Lynn, 1998:112) began to proliferate. This process has only accelerated since then, as part of the generalized post-modern crisis of meaning which afflicts mainstream North American society. The result, for Native people, has been a considerable increase in levels of cultural appropriation, as whites search for meaning within (and at the expense of) Native spirituality.

5.3 THE NEW AGE, CULTURE VULTURES AND WANNABEES:

Affluent, educated white people, upstanding Church members, sought out Lecha in secret. They all had come to her with a deep sense that something had been lost. They all had given the loss different names: the stock market crash, lost lottery tickets, worthless junk bonds or lost loved ones; but Lecha knew the loss was their connection with the earth. They all feared illness and physical change; since life led to death, consciousness terrified them, and they had sought to control death by becoming killers themselves...old Yoeme used to brag that she could make white people believe in anything and do anything she told them, because the whites were so desperate.

Leslie Marmon Silko⁶

Contemporary urban Native people face a paradox: many white elite Canadians, wholly invested in a culture which has positioned “the Indian”

⁶ Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*. New York: Penguin, 1991, 717-19

as exploitable, despicable, wretched, untrustworthy and barely human, are nevertheless currently seeking out “Indian wisdom” with a desperate hunger (and a determination to possess whatever they desire) that makes “authentic Indianness” (as whites determine it) a prized commodity. The Canadian New Age movement, however, is only the tip of the iceberg of a North America-wide phenomenon which reaches dizzying heights in the United States. Rebecca Cochran, in an interview with musician Bill Miller, engages with the obsessive manner in which New Age devotees pursue American Indian artists:

[Miller] relates a few experiences that would leave less experienced performers confused. “I was at an event where this guy, all dressed up in beads and buckskin, comes to me and has me sign 7 copies of some book and says ‘Master Miller, my heart is heavy.’ Where do these people come up with this stuff? He was talking to me like HE was some Hollywood Indian himself..”. [Miller] goes on to say that he even had his life threatened once when he wouldn’t go to a sweat lodge with people he didn’t even know. “They think I’m some peaceful New Age guy, then get mad when I won’t go along with that con.” (Cochran, 1996:5).

Many Native people have commented on the New Age phenomenon, and how it represents a terminal phase of theft of anything Native (from land to resources to spirituality), with devastating results for Native communities, in the gradual debasing of cultural traditions which is the inevitable result when they are appropriated, replicated, and marketed as panaceas for white angst. The New Age movement complicates the attempts by many urban mixed race Native people to learn about their Native identity, as individuals often end up wading through oceans of new age books in search of “real” Native writings. Urban mixed-race Native people are also vulnerable to the countless messages proliferating about spirituality within the New Age movement— notions that spirituality can be “shopped around for” and sampled, and understood in a few short sessions with a “healer”, rather than being part of ancient systems of

knowledge grounded in the earth which traditional elders spend their lives learning about. Even the attitude, common among some mixed-race urban Native people, that Native culture is “generic”, and that it is sufficient for individuals to indiscriminately shape an identity based on a mixture of teachings from a dozen different nations in order to understand “the Native way” may have been influenced by the phenomenal interest in “quick fix” pseudo-Native spirituality by New Agers, as well as images of “Indianness” from the media.

Underlying the “love of Indianness” which culture vultures engage with is a subtext of contempt—because this phenomenon is premised on the existence of an impoverished and decimated people, where there will always be somebody desperate enough to market spirituality to those who will pay for it, and where the majority of people are too disempowered by the dominant culture to be able to stop this from happening. Former American Indian Movement leader Russell Means is only one of many activists and spiritual leaders who have spoken out about appropriation of spirituality:

What’s at issue here is the same old question that Europeans have always posed with regard to American Indians, whether what’s ours isn’t somehow theirs. And of course they’ve always answered the question in the affirmative. When they wanted our land they just announced that they had a right to it and therefore owned it. When we resisted the taking of our land they claimed we were being unreasonable and committed physical genocide upon us in order to convince us to see things their way. Now, being spiritually bankrupt themselves, they want our spirituality as well. So they’re making up rationalisations to explain why they’re entitled to it. (Means, quoted in Churchill, 1991/2:41).

Ward Churchill, in a thoughtful essay on the Men’s movement, has commented on the “scent of undeniably real human desperation” clinging to the Men’s movement and its New Age and hobbyist equivalents—and in general, the sense of despair which emanates from the “white, mostly

urban, affluent or affluently reared, well-schooled and young or youngish people of both genders who, in one or another dimension, are thoroughly dis-eased by the socioeconomic order into which they were born and their seemingly predestined roles within it” (Churchill, 1994:229-30).

Deborah Root, exploring the actions of white “wannabees”—those individuals who pretend that they are actually Native people—suggests that this phenomenon is rooted deep in the middle-class white despair which Churchill refers to (Root, 1997:227). She suggests that this despair stems from elite white peoples’ passivity in the face of an extremely brutal and inhumane society, which privileges them and in which they are entangled in a web of complicity, and which appears to them to be far too powerful to oppose. She notes that because of the sense of powerlessness which many elite whites feel about the directions their culture has moved, it is common for white people to feel a curious identification with what they see as the powerlessness of Native people. In this respect, they buy into images of Indianness as inherently victimized, pitiful and weak—or as a symbol of romantic rejection of mainstream, bourgeois white society.

Western culture, according to Root, is permeated with what she refers to as a duplicitous, Christian notion of victimization. On the one hand, to be victimized in Western culture grants an individual a moral or spiritual superiority; on the other, however, those who have been victimized are generally despised as weak, and treated with contempt. For white people, identifying with the images of Native peoples that permeate the dominant culture provides them with a sense of redemption, and allows them to disengage from their own participation in a genocidal culture. They can project their own pain about their positioning at the helm of a dehumanizing and destructive culture onto Native-people-as-victims, and thus avoid recognizing their own

anguished sense of impotence, and their unwillingness to challenge their own complicity (Root, 1997:229).

Santee Dakota poet and activist John Trudell, during his speech at the Black Hills survival camp, is careful to distinguish between real power—the power of nature and the earth—and military and economic power, which he refers to as forms of terrorism. Trudell comments:

When I go around America and I see the bulk of the white people, they do not feel oppressed. They feel powerless. When I go amongst my own people, we do not feel powerless. We feel oppressed. We do not want to make the trade. We see the physical genocide they are attempting to inflict upon our lives, and we understand the psychological genocide they have already inflicted upon their own people. That is the trade-off they want us to make for survival, that we become subservient to them, that we no longer understand our real connection to power, our real connection to the earth...(Trudell, 1988/89:iii)

Deborah Root engages with Trudell's words, suggesting that at the heart of "wannabeeism" are individuals who cannot find a way to transform and locate power in their own tradition. These individuals, identifying with victimization because of their alienation from their own culture, cannot see themselves as part of the ruling white society, and therefore choose to see themselves as "really" being Native—a posture which equates Nativeness with "a romantic discourse of inevitable defeat and disappearance", and white culture with "the dead, shopping-mall culture of our time" (Root, 1997:229). Faced with these choices, cultural appropriation becomes the only escape. Meanwhile, the deeply racist worldview at the heart of "wannabeeism" means that these individuals can never really imagine themselves as standing side by side with Native people as equals. Indeed, Ward Churchill suggests that it is precisely their investment in Native culture as an exotic storehouse of adventure or font of wisdom which enables privileged whites to continue their soul-

destroying participation in the very “civilization” which is invested in the eradication of Native people:

The mining engineer who joins the Men’s Movement and thereafter spends his weekends “communing with nature in the manner of an Indian” does so...in order to exempt himself from either literal or emotional responsibility for the fact that, to be who he is and live at the standard he does, he will spend the rest of his week making wholesale destruction of the environment an operant reality. Not infrequently, the land being strip-mined under his supervision belongs to the very Indians whose spiritual traditions he appropriates and reifies in the process of “finding inner peace” (i.e. empowering himself to do what he does).

By the same token, the corporate lawyer, the Wall Street broker, and the commercial banker who accompany the engineer into a sweat lodge do so because, intellectually, they understand quite well that, without this, their vocation would be impossible. The same can be said for the government bureaucrat, the corporate executive, and the marketing consultant who keep Sacred Pipes on the walls of their respective offices. All of them are engaged, to a greater or lesser degree—although, if asked, most will adamantly reject the slightest hint that they are involved at all—in the systematic destruction of the residue of territory upon which prospects of native life itself are balanced. The charade by which they cloak themselves in the identity of their victims is their best and ultimately most compulsive hedge against the psychic consequences of acknowledging who and what they really are (Churchill, 1994:227-28).

A similar process of hiding within the identity of one’s victims is at stake when privileged class whites, who have absolutely no intention of ever joining in solidarity with Native people, talk about having “Indian blood”. As Strong and Van Winkle have noted, for an otherwise entirely white person to claim to have *distant* “Indian blood” enables them to appropriate the moral positioning of the vanquished, even as they continue to enjoy the fruits of being the victors. Jack Forbes (Powhatan/Lenape/Saponi) has referred to this kind of behavior as “fooling genocide” (Forbes, 1987:120).

[T]he power of a drop of “Indian blood”—if no more than a drop—is to enhance, ennoble, naturalize and legitimate...What is this peculiar form of appropriation that lays claim not only to land, labor, and knowledge, but even, when “properly diluted”, to “blood,” the presumed (though colonially imposed) substantive basis of the colonized’s identity? In claiming drops of “indian blood”—and especially in tracing it to Pocahontas or another “Indian princess”—the victors naturalize themselves and legitimize their occupation of the land. Meanwhile...the vanquished are required to naturalize and legitimize themselves in terms of “blood quantum”—an imposition of the victor’s essentialized reckoning of identity that becomes an integral, often taken-for-granted aspect of Native subjectivity (Strong and Van Winkle, 1996:551-52).

To a certain extent, due to the bounded nature of the concept of “race”, all mixed-race people are expected to be able to quantify “how much” they are of any racial identity, and to justify their choice of identity accordingly. However, the unique issue facing Indigenous people, which is why their identities are subjected to such intense government regulation, is that at the heart of the obsession which colonialists have demonstrated towards quantifying “Indian blood” is the manner in which it has been directly connected to land title. In both Canada and the United States, measurement of Indian blood, one way or another, has been the means by which settler governments have separated those who they recognize as having title to certain lands, from those whose title they have disregarded as marginal.

5.4 THE COLONIAL DEMAND FOR 'AUTHENTICITY':

The dominant society has created a homogenized history of tribal people for a television culture. Being an Indian is a heavy burden to the *oshki anishinabe* because white people know more about the *Indian* they invented than anyone. The experts and cultural hobbyists never miss a chance to authenticate the scraps of romantic history dropped by white travelers through the *indian country* centuries ago. White people are forever projecting their dreams of a perfect life through the invention of the *indian*—and then they expect the *oshki anishinabe* to not only fulfill an invention, but to authenticate third-hand information about the tribal past (Vizenor, 1972:15-16).

Rey Chow, commenting on the situations of Chinese people who do not behave in an “authentic enough” manner for either Sinologists or Maoists, has raised the whole issue of how colonial elites demand “authenticity” of the colonized subject. She writes:

...Western anthropologists are uneasy at seeing “natives” who have gone “civilized” or who, like the anthropologists themselves, have taken up the active task of shaping their own culture. Margaret Mead, for example, found the interest of certain Arapesh Indians (in Highland New Guinea) in cultural influences other than their own “annoying” since, as James Clifford puts it, “Their culture collecting complicates hers” (Clifford, 1988:232, quoted in Chow, 1996:125)...What confronts the Western scholar is the discomfiting fact that the natives are no longer staying in their frames. (Chow, 1996:125-6).

Chow notes that the politics of identifying “authentic” natives requires us to pay careful attention to the images of Nateness which are presented, and how they are produced. Gerald Vizenor has explored this issue with tremendous humour and wit, pointing out how the 19th century images of plains Indians produced by photographer Edward Curtis, which have influenced popular notions of Indianness worldwide, were deliberately rendered archaic by having the clocks and other contemporary items used by Native people at the time removed from the photograph by

touching up the negatives. He asserts that the colonizer demands authenticity of American Indians in order to preserve his own identity—in essence, that whiteness can only identify itself by creating a marginalized or archaic “other” to identify what it is not:

The lead speaker on tribal identities in the modern world, Tune stands on stage, between two photographic images. On the right is his captured image in braids, sitting on the ground in a teepee with several peacepipes and an alarm clock. The photograph projected on the left side of the screen is “In a Piegan Lodge”, by Edward Curtis.

“See here,” Tune said as he pointed to the images. “Curtis has removed the clock, colonized the culture games and denied us our time in the world...Curtis paid us for the poses; it was hot then, but he wanted us to wear leathers to create the appearance of a traditional scene, his idea of the past...Curtis stood alone behind his camera, we pitied him there, he seemed lost, separated from his shadow, a desperate man who paid tribal people to become the images in his captured families... Lyman tells us that Curtis set out to construct a ‘photographic monument to a vanishing race’. Not so, it was the photographer who would have vanished without our images to take as captured families” (Vizenor, 1990:415-16).

Marcia Crosby has also discussed how “the dominant culture [constantly engages] in a conversation with itself, using First Nations people to measure itself, to define who it is or is not (Crosby, 1991:271). This colonial need for Native “authentic otherness” to enable it to locate itself as central, in particular, demands that the “authentic” Native is a primitive, one who lives close to nature, obtaining their living from the land. As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples notes, colonial governments could only see “Indianness” if it was “primitive”.

The matter the British never clarified...was the defining difference between Europeans, and Aboriginal people so apparently European that they were taken to be “settlers” rather than “Indians”. The British insisted that Aboriginal people had to be part of a known Indian community of their own, to be recognized by other Indian people as an “Indian band” in its own right. Aboriginal people who

did not meet either test were deemed to be “Half-caste squatters,” dubious settlers in advance of legitimate settlement (RCAP, 1996, Vol.1, Sect. 6.2: 149-150).

So tightly did colonial administrators hold to this fantasy of theirs about “authentic primitiveness” that it was the decisive factor in deciding who was “Indian” in Western Canada and who should be externalized as “halfbreed”. This was upheld by the force of the *Indian Act* and the treaty negotiations which followed it.

In contemporary times, many of the stereotypes about the “degeneracy” of urban Indians (where for most non-Natives the image of an urban Indian is a drunk on the street corner) are linked to this demand for “authentic” primitiveness from Native people. Meanwhile, for mixed-race urban Native people, many of the denials of their Indianness that they encounter from whites are based not only on the fact that they may not look entirely Native, but that they do not come from a reserve. The contemporary Canadian consciousness still requires a certain degree of “authentic primitiveness” from Native people before they will recognize them as being *really* Native.

Gerald Vizenor has suggested that because the term “Indian” has been invested with such a body of fantasy within American culture, contemporary Native peoples might consider beginning to identify themselves as “post-Indian”. Paul Seesequasis, in an interview with Vizenor, quotes him:

“The invention of the Indian is so persuasive in popular culture that aboriginal people themselves can become the invented images,” Vizenor says. “The noble warrior and the bloodthirsty savage; the child of nature and the Mother Earth messenger to the New Age; the wise elder, the Indian princess and the plains warrior; the buckskin and braids, plastic chokers, dream catchers, and the pan-tribal spirituality of the urban elders—the list is endless, the simulations overwhelming...No matter what we think, we are after the invention of the Indian...I am not a victim of

Columbus. Even if you want to be, it's way past that. Social sciences have driven it past that. Time itself has exhausted the category. So you're post-Indian by default. Many of us are, of course, post-Indian by action; by resistance to categories and by imagining a new literature and by challenging historical assumptions." (Seesequasis, 1998:55).

Seesequasis notes how troubling Vizenor's words are to many mixed-race urban Native Americans. He describes how Native American students have occasionally protested the use of Vizenor's work in their classes because his books challenge their own sense of their identities so radically:

[Because of Vizenor's] outrageous challenge to all preconceived definitions..the students' carefully nurtured and fragile identities as Indians stood challenged and shaken. Ironically, the images they embraced were imposed by an invading and dominating culture that first demonizes, then romanticizes the Indian (Seesequasis, 1998:55).

Most of the participants in this study have had to contend, at some point in their lives, with the fact that they do not fit the examples of what has been held up to them as "real Indians". The response of many of the participants has been to struggle to measure their lives up to the images before them, and to feel their identities tainted and diminished because they cannot be the "real Indians" they feel they are supposed to be. Thus, ideological racism—a war of images which urban Native people in particular are forced to constantly deal with—is a constant issue to be reckoned with for urban mixed-race Native people.

5.5 SUMMARY:

As this chapter demonstrates, while centuries of European obsession with "the Indian" have resulted in the childhood images of feathered Indians which have permeated popular consciousness world-wide, different dynamics are at foot in North America. Because both Canada and the United States have had to actively displace "the Indian"

in order to establish settler regimes in North America at all, an entire discourse about “the Indian” which not only naturalizes the regulation of Native identity, but rationalizes their dispossession and genocide has developed. As a result, images of conquered and contained Indianness have been, and continue to be, central to the national identities of white Canadians and Americans. It is these images—both the detritus of a history of colonization and its contemporary manifestations—which mixed-race urban Native people must wrestle with, as they attempt to understand what it means to be a Native person in North American society. Racism has also been central to the logic of the systems of classification of Indianness—by degrees of Indian blood and by degrees of “savagery” (“authentic” primitiveness)—which Canada and the United States developed to regulate Native identity.

PART II:
URBAN MIXED-RACE IDENTITY
IN THE
TORONTO NATIVE COMMUNITY

SECTION ONE:
NATIVE HERITAGE
“WHERE WE COME FROM”

Introduction:

Mixed race urban Native people may or may not look “Indian”. They may or may not have Native status. They may or may not have come from a reserve. In many, perhaps most, cases they do not speak their Native language. For many of them, by far the majority of their time is spent surrounded by white people. And yet, as this section will demonstrate, mixed-race urban Native people *are* Native people for one clear reason: they come from Native families, that is, from families which carry specific histories, Native histories. In urban contexts, where other group identities (on the basis of language, specific First Nation, territory, or clan) may no longer apply, family becomes all the more important for grounding a person as Aboriginal.

At the same time, a number of the participants have described how their families, which are the sources of their pride in their own identity, are also the sites where they have been most frequently discouraged from expressing any pride in that identity. The reasons are myriad and complex. Some of the participants were abjured to be silent about their identity for their own protection in the face of racism, while others were told nothing about their heritage because “it would be easier for them to be white that way”. Some of the participants came from families so disintegrated by alcohol and cycles of abuse that Nativeness had become too associated with pain and shame to be discussed. And probably for the majority of the participants, their parents and grandparents were silent about Nativeness simply because lifetime habits of silence, learned in childhood at residential school, and reinforced by a racist society, have been almost impossible to break. The paradoxical responses of Native families to the violence and loss that colonization has represented—

silence, adaptation, resistance—are all reflected in the participants' stories.

A recurrent theme in the family histories of the majority of the participants' families (and in their own lives) is loss of relationship to their communities of origin. The extent to which government policies of deliberate interference in Native family life, such as residential school, loss of status, and the forced adoption of Native children, have resulted in individuals being permanently exiled from their communities will be explored throughout this section. The implications of this rupturing of family ties to community, for peoples whose identities are rooted in a connection to land and other people, are profound. One participant referred to her family's experiences of loss of community as resulting in "generations of loneliness, isolation and alienation". In a sense this has been a common experience for many of the families of the participants. These issues will be explored in the first three chapters of this section.

The participants may come from Native families; however, as mixed-race people they also have to negotiate their identities with white family members. One chapter in this section will explore the relations which the participants have with their white family, and how this has impacted on their identities.

The final chapter of this section explores the cumulative effect of family legacies on the individual identities of the participants. The relationship which each participant holds to her own Native identity as a result of other circumstances of their life, such as their gender, class, and appearance, will also be briefly explored.

CHAPTER SIX
FAMILY HISTORY/NATIVE HISTORY:
THE LEGACIES OF URBAN NATIVE FAMILIES

“I think we share so much in terms of recent history, in the past 150 to 200 years, in terms of a decline in economic importance and power, the weakening of health and life expectancy, and a host of other different problems that are mostly associated with poverty and abuse of rights. I believe that we all share that. We might have different experiences, we all experience something differently, but each of us has had...our fill of it. And its a question of where we go with it.”

INTRODUCTION:

In this chapter, I want to introduce some of the participants by including their descriptions of some aspects of their family histories. In a thesis which relies to such an extent on interviews with participants, it is important to provide the reader with at least some opportunity to form a more holistic view of the participants—by hearing a few accounts from them in their own words of the issues that have most affected their families’ lives. While the sheer numbers of people interviewed prevent me from including everyone’s stories, in the pages that follow, I have selected excerpts which demonstrate the range of experiences which have shaped the families of twelve of the participants. Confidentiality demands that the participants remain anonymous; therefore, a pseudonym is provided for the story excerpts. All other quotations from the participants are anonymous.

6.1 THE PARTICIPANTS' STORIES:

"KAREN":

My great-grandmother married into the Oneida band. She was from the Moraviantown band. My grandmother was born right in Oneida, and went to residential school there. And when she left residential school, she never went back to the community. She lived in Woodstock, all the years that I grew up, and still is living there. I have an aunt, my mother's sister, who still lives on the reserve—she's the only one who stayed on the reserve. I think my grandmother left her to be raised by another family in Oneida. Nobody knew about her until....later on.

When my grandfather came back from the Second World War, he went back to Oneida, and apparently there was no land for him there, there was no house for him there. He was very angry when he came back from the war, and found nothing for him. And he found out that his wife had had a baby from another man when he came back. That's the aunt that still lives on the reserve, that I was talking about. And then there was the issue of voting, and other rights. He came back to a country he had fought for where he wasn't even allowed to vote. So he enfranchised.

My grandfather and grandmother had my mother AFTER the war, and after they left the reserve. By that time, all the other siblings were already registered, already had their status. But my Mom came afterwards, after the war, after enfranchisement. And she was never told anything about being registered for her status. But when I went to Toronto, and started getting involved with the community here, I kept hearing about status, and talking to my mother about it. Finally she decided to check with Oneida about it. She called the band office at Oneida, and that's when she found out from the band clerk or status clerk or whatever—the woman said "oh yeah—your name's here." I guess that's when my Mom first found out that she was

registered. That all she had to do was apply. It didn't take long for her to get her status at all, but she only got partial status, and that was because of her father having enfranchised. For some reason, even she didn't understand it.

My grandmother hasn't told me too much about her story, but I think there's a lot of secrets. I think she was very hurt, I think she's bitter. She doesn't talk so much about the fact that she was separated from her mother, her mother left her there, at residential school. My great-grandmother was single. Like, my grandmother's father died at the age of 39 from pneumonia. It was usually when the men died that the children ended up in residential school. She was really young when her Dad died. She talks about other deaths, from tuberculosis. I didn't know that was one of the diseases at Oneida—like I'd heard of that disease, and that it'd killed a lot of people, but I'd never realized that it was that close to my family. So I just found that out. So when her dad died, that's when my grandmother went into residential school, because her mother couldn't manage financially, and went out to work.

“TERESA”:

I grew up in Toronto, so any involvement with a Native community would be the urban Native community, through the agencies. I never really met anyone Native until I was in my teens. As in a peer group, that sort of thing. I think I became more involved when I went to York University, and discovered the Native students' association there.

My father is Italian, and my mother comes from Missinabi. But she never actually lived there. She grew up around....you know where Lake Nipigon is? Those little towns all around the shore? That's where she grew up. And then she came to Toronto when she was eighteen. She's been here ever since. Because of family problems, she left her family, to start anew.

My family has never been on the reserve. Our reserve is fairly new. My grandmother was born in Moose Factory, and then her family just moved

to the smaller communities, the small towns around Lake Nipigon. Why they did it I don't know. This was years ago, I never really understood. When my mother reclaimed her status, after Bill C-31, then Missinabi started getting involved in telling us about the reserve, and the land claim that we're doing. It's sort of a push and pull thing. She sort of went away from her Native background, because she married a non-Native. But when they started reforming everything, and getting our band together, you know, we heard from them. I don't know how we became part of the Missinabi band. My grandmother was in a residential school, so she never talked about anything. Nothing along traditional values, no. I don't know the name of the school.

When my Mom married my Dad, she just assumed her status was gone, because that's what she knew—that's what happened to everyone else that married a non-Native person. But what in actuality happened—when Bill C-31 came out and was passed, she thought "okay, I'm going to go and get my status again". She went and applied for it. And then she found out that for some reason, her status had never officially been removed. But what they did then was—they still put her under Bill C-31. So she's officially a Bill C-31 status Indian, when she could have stayed a regular status Indian, if she'd known about it. There's implications for our family, now. My daughter has her status. But you know, my sister just had a little boy, and her son cannot get his status. The reason is because... when me and my brother were born, my parents weren't married yet, so we got full status from my mother. But my sister was born after they were married, so my sister's kids can't have it, but mine can, and my brother's kids can. So...it sort of breaks the family in that way.

“CATHY”:

Well...my mother, I found out, was born in (a northern reserve), and probably was orphaned, I would have gathered, at around 4, 5 or 6 years old, somewhere around there. Somehow she was transported down to residential school—that would have meant a canoe trip in those days—and grew up there, totally without any contact with family. My mother was very bitter about her experiences there, because she had no family, no visits, and she was never taken out to go home. From the age of six years old until she left in her early twenties, she grew up totally there, for fifteen years. She went to high school while living in the residential school—she would go into town to high school and go back to the school at night. Then she went into (a nearby town) to board when she attended normal school, to become a teacher. So you know, that was her home and her family. Her role model was this white woman, probably from England, originally. I think that was one of the people my Mum was closest to—she used to call her “my little mother”. They had quite a close relationship. So my mother was sort of modelled on the English woman.

The only time I remember my mother returning to (her reserve), it seemed to be about a year before she died, when she was around 64, 65. Her and my Dad went up for a couple of days. Looking back now, I would think that maybe she was trying to find some identification. Because she was trying to get, I guess, her birth certificate, to apply for her old age pension—so I presume she was going up there trying to find out if any records existed. That's the only time I ever knew her to ever go back.

My father's family claimed to be white, but I'm beginning to find out that there is Native there as well. They believed themselves to be white, though. I've been talking to my aunt, that I just got in contact with. She's very middle class, and it doesn't seem to dawn on her that her parents have this connection to a Metis community in Saskatchewan. I remember my

father did say that, growing up in town, he had it a little hard because he was somewhat dark. There's a reference in this little newsletter from the Carlisle Indian School in the United States, about his mother being a Chippewa Indian, a graduate of Carlisle Indian School. And his uncles were at Haskell Indian school.

I remember my aunt telling me on the telephone "I don't remember my parents ever holding me and telling me they loved me". I think I wrote to her and said "there's a reason for that and we'll talk about it some day". Because they were at Carlisle. But she doesn't know this stuff, you see. I'm thinking "no wonder they wouldn't have that affection, they both grew up in this residential school". And yet it's so cute, because my aunt said "but they were affectionate to each other. I remember one day when I was a kid, seeing him carrying her down the stairs, and they were giggling". I thought "what a view of them". I never thought of my grandparents that way....

"LENA":

In my particular case, my ancestors came together during slavery. Both my Cherokee and African ancestors were enslaved on the same plantation. It was the Reynolds tobacco plantation—you know that Reynolds magnate that just had his house burned down and everything? I thought—it's about bloody time! But, in that respect I'm very proud of the history of Africans and Native people when they have come together, you know, they did some amazing things. That's as far as we know where we came from. It's really only one line that we know of. I had a Cherokee great-grandmother, who was, I think about fourteen when Emancipation came. And she married an African man, and they built their house together in Stanton, Virginia. This is my father's mother's mother, who was Cherokee. My father's father's mother is also of Native background, but I don't know what nation she came from, or anything. The only reason that we know that she exists is that there was a portrait over the mantle piece of a couple of

these elderly lesbian aunts that I have in Stanton, Virginia, and they said that this was their mother, and there wasn't a lot of information that got handed down about her background. So they were all enslaved together.

Because of the Jim Crow laws in the south, which is, you know, the U.S. equivalent of apartheid, everybody was defined as "Negro" and had to live in the Negro sections of town, and, you know, take the Negro jobs and that sort of stuff. My father lost his parents when he was very young, so he was raised by his Cherokee grandmother, who was a Baptist, out of touch with her own culture, obviously. So there's not a lot that has come down from that culture. And we couldn't participate in the censuses, which are usually used to determine whether you are Cherokee or not, because we were in the Black, you know, the Negro section of town. So we weren't part of those censuses, we were always listed on the census as "Negro". It doesn't matter—I don't need their laws to tell me who I am, anyway.

My father was kind of in to his Native identity for a bit when he was around, you know—but then again he was also poor and couldn't afford to travel or anything, to learn more about it. So we were quite unconnected. His grandmother was fourteen when Emancipation came, and she married right away. I've seen pictures of her—she was a very tiny woman, which suggests to me that she had physically been through a lot in her life. She probably lived a hell of a life—malnutrition and that sort of thing, you know, brutalised and everything. So I doubt she was educated. She'd grown up in slavery.

All of my uncles married African women, probably mixed race, but people who identified as Africans, right? It was an African community. And again, its not that they weren't aware of their Native heritage, and there was a lot of pride when they talked about it, but in terms of being connected, and living that way—No. Its not like they had a choice in those days. It was clearly defined by the law who you were.

“SONJA”:

We are Mapuche, which means the people of the land. The history is like this. My grandmother, on my mother's side, is the granddaughter of the last Chief who appeared in the history of Chile. The Cacique, he's called—he fought the Spanish, and never surrendered to them. He's the last one, who appears in the history books. And that's very interesting, because I never knew that until I came to Canada. One day, on my birthday, a friend came with a book, and he said "I have something for you". And there was the name of my great-great grandfather, the last Cacique.

My grandmother was rich. My grandfather, who came from Spain, was forty-four. He might have been married before. My feeling, from what my grandmother told us, is that he only married her because she was rich. And he spent all the money that she had. She'd had land. Many times we would go to a hill, Cerra Niador, with my grandmother, and she'd say "you see all the land there—it used to be mine."

My father was Native, too. But he was adopted by a family and they changed his name. So we should have a Native name—we have Native ancestry from my mother's side and my father's side. He died when I was 3 years old.

My grandmother—even when she didn't want to live like a Native person, or to keep all the culture—she still WAS a Native person. Everybody would tell her their dreams. She could look at a person, and say "there is something wrong with you". Because she had those powers. I grew up with that, it was natural for us. She would ask us to tell her our dreams—that was also a regular thing, and that is being kept in my family. My whole family does that, even today. When my child was sick, I never gave him any pills for anything, because I just internalised that that was our kind of medicine. And it was taught to me by my grandmother. That is how she

raised me, and that is how I raised my child. So you see, there are things that you keep, even if you don't know that it's Native.

“ARTHUR”:

My grandmother is Ojibway, from Bear Island. She left there when she was young, married a guy from Golden Lake, and had some children with him. He died in some sort of accident. I'm not sure if it involved steelwork or not, but he was down in the states. That's when she came to Toronto. When he died she had numerous....liaisons... with different people...and so we don't know who my Dad's father was.

My Dad was originally born in Elliott Lake, or Kirkland Lake, one of those two. He came with his mother to the city. They were living down by Gerrard and Bay. The Catholic Children's Aid got involved, and there was a court case to take my grandmother's children away. I think it was just how she was making her living. There's some suggestion that she was prostituting herself, stuff like that was going on. So by the age of about seven or eight, my father was taken away from his mother by the court, and put into foster homes. And four aunts, they were sent to Johnnie Brown camps. But then they were taken to a home for incorrigible girls.

So then my Dad wound up with this family, and he lived there for a lot of years. He married my Mum in 1960. My sister died in '69, and that sort of caused a rift, but even before that there were some problems. There was a lot of violence—my Dad had a lot of anger—so he split up with my Mom. He put her in the hospital a couple of times. So in 1971 we sort of went on our way. My Dad wasn't really around from '71 or '72 until about '83. Even now, only I see him about once a month, or once every two months.

And then my grandmother died in '82 or '83. She had a lot of mental instability. My father went through some really strange stuff, there. I think there's a lot going on in his mind, because of the violence that he experienced in Toronto, when he was younger. He had eleven uncles and aunts, plus his

mother, and all but one or two of them were alcoholics. One of them spent the rest of his life in Penetanguishene for axe-murdering his wife. I found that out from my Mum. When she first married my Dad she went up to Penetang for the funeral, when his uncle died in the mental hospital. There were a lot of alcoholics, a lot of family problems all through my family. Not understanding what families are. Even now, I don't think my Dad really understands what family is or how to deal with it.

“ELIZABETH”:

In the United States, I'm a member of a small Native American tribe. But here in Canada, I'm non-status. Our people once lived in what is now New Brunswick, and welcomed the loyalists. But then the loyalists drove them off their territory to a little island in the middle of (a nearby) Bay. But even that was, I guess, still a little too close for the Loyalists. So my people were driven to the other side of the bay, in what is now the United States. My great-great grandfather was allowed to stay on his land in New Brunswick, because he was a guide, and probably because, from what I gather, he was not too Native looking.

For a long time, people believed that the reserve—it wasn't really a reserve then—but they thought it was on the Canadian side. So it wasn't until it became clarified that the International Border was the St. Croix River, that we got into the whole thing of “oh gosh, you have to check in at the border, because you're now American and we're Canadian”.

We never really did have a deed to the land. It was supposedly done by handshake. Two of my cousins visited the family who made the handshake, in England, during the war. And it's written up in a couple of books too. But certainly my grandfather, and other members of my family, believed that there was a deed...

My mother literally fought off the town, because they had made more than one attempt to move us out. It was a white, Anglo-Saxon, Loyalist

town. Now, according to the oral history, one hundred acres on the Point was to be reserved for Natives. There had always been a path there, or maybe a dirt road. But in the fifties, I remember, the town decided to asphalt the road, to make it easier for the lobster plant. My mother decided that they shouldn't be doing that, so she literally put up a barricade, and wouldn't let them pass. Eventually a man—I don't know what his title was—the town sheriff? He certainly was in charge of the town trucks. He came along with the Mayor at the time—who also owned a grocery store in town. I remember the two of them, walking very cautiously, past the barricade to meet with my mother. She seemed to get along a little bit better with the sheriff, he was a bit more open minded. And so they convinced her that with all those kids it would be better for her to have a road there.

My father only became confrontational when they decided, after my mother had died, that we couldn't stay on the land, because he had no right to it, even though we did. And here he was, with seven kids. They had foster families picked out for each of us, the town council. They had places picked out for all of us! But he fought it. He went to town council, and they backed right off, and we stayed.

When my father died, the town decided that he didn't have a will, so the land was theirs. So we spent seventeen years in court. We have a deed, now, for five acres, out of the original hundred. But the claim we put in was just for usage—and we did put in for twelve acres. I felt clearly that we had used ten of the acres. My great-great grandfather is on the census, on that piece of land. They never said we weren't there originally, they just said we'd only started out with 1.7 acres. That's why we ended up in court.

“SELENA”:

My Mom's family had come from Turtle Mountain, North Dakota, but they had never really lived there. When they moved back to Saskatchewan, my grandmother went to LeBret Residential School. It's only a couple of years ago that my cousin, who is a lawyer, tracked down this information, and decided to do his homework on it. He found that my grandmother's name, the name of her parents, was changed by the school records. When she went in, her parents were listed under a certain name, but when she came out, the school record had changed the names of her parents. And when she went in, she was registered with Muskowegan reserve in Saskatchewan. When she came out, there was no such record. My cousin, who got his law degree, was freaking out when he read all this, because he's trying to understand, you know, "am I Native or not"? When you try and track it back to say "well, who are we?" it just goes on and on. My mother's cousin played a strong leadership role in the Saskatchewan Indian First Nations, in the 1960's, and she didn't even know it. I didn't know it when he was alive and I met him—I didn't find out until much later. He was so interested in politics, and he kept asking me and my husband, about all the stuff that he knew.

My mother didn't even know that my grandmother was registered with Muskowegan band. My grandmother lived in Saskatoon after coming out of residential school, anyway. She never really lived on that reserve, as far as my Mom knows. I think she was born in North Dakota, but they lived in Montana as well, when she was very young, and then they moved back to Saskatchewan. My Mom said that they had lived in Saskatchewan before the Riel rebellion, but afterwards they moved down to the States. They came back up around the turn of the century, around 1902 or 1903, I think. I'm still trying to piece together the whole story.

My grandpa was born on a ranch or in the bush near Lewiston, Montana. And they lived a Metis kind of a life. They had an old shack that I

saw a picture of one time, and they hunted and trapped quite a bit. But they also had horses. My grandpa's family were considered Metis, but they lived off the land, and they spoke their language consistently. In fact, they also spoke the Sioux language as well as Cree, because, you know, they knew a lot of Lakota people. They lived such a traditional lifestyle, but they never considered that they were Indians, because they weren't from the reserve. But they were still treated the same way as all the other Indians were. That's where it was a double whammy for them, they really suffered a lot of racism.

My grandpa, his brothers and sisters grew up doing anything to survive, anything. Some of them joined the circus. They would go bone-picking. They'd go out on the prairie and pick buffalo bones, any kind of animal bones, but mainly buffalo. They'd collect them by the ton on an old stone boat, and haul them back in to Saskatoon, where they would be paid, because the pharmaceutical companies used them for different drugs, the calcium or whatever, I don't know. They would dig Seneca roots at certain times of the year. My grandpa would ride the rails to find jobs. And when he married my grandmother, they were both kind of young. When my grandmother came out of Lebret at the age of 18, all she had was a Grade 3 education. Because by the time she was 11 or 12, she was big and strong, and so they had put her out to work for farm families instead of letting her stay in school and learn. And she had wanted to go to school, so she could get an education. So she married my grandfather when she was very young, and they had children right away.

The way my Mom remembers growing up—sometimes she runs into somebody that she remembers from 40 or 50 years ago, who tells her "oh I remember when I spent the winter with you and your family in the tent". She doesn't even remember how many winters they spent living in a tent. They lived on the land. But then, sometimes, for two or three months of the year,

when the snow was very high, they'd rent a house in Saskatoon. So they travelled a lot. And she remembers a lot of hunger, and eating a lot of wild meats. She taught my youngest girl how to make a snare. There's so many things that she knows that I never learned from her. But I'm glad that we're close, because this way she can teach my girls these things—because I never have time.

My mother is kind of schizophrenic about her identity. I would say she has about 5% non-Indian blood, and yet she says she's "just a little Indian". A huge conflict comes up around that. She can't say, with calm peace "Yes, I am a Native person". There's no acceptance. But I feel sorry, because she's turning 72, and I don't think she'll ever really come to think of herself as a Cree woman, or an Indian. It's always been that way—and there's not too many left in the family, now. There's only her and her sister left of the immediate family. And my aunt had a stroke almost a year ago, and is very, very ill. I just feel that something is really disappearing, in my family, and that they've never had a chance to claim it. My mom says "we're not REAL Indians". But I don't know if they had a name for themselves. I asked her, one time "what did you call yourselves?" And she said "sometimes we would just say 'breeds'".

"ELEANOR":

I was not proud of who I was, because to me, being Native was attached to being drunk, and down and out. I know as an adult today, that probably a lot of our living expenses went to alcohol. And it took my Mom away a lot. Being a chronic alcoholic, sometimes she was away for weeks, and we would stay with friends of the family. So there's a lot of sadness. And I couldn't separate the two. Like, to me, being Native meant being drunk and down and out. That's all I knew as a child.

My mother's mother was from Big Stone Cree First Nation, in Alberta, up by the lesser Slave Lake. When she married a Metis man, she lost her

Native status. My grandmother had a drinking problem as well. My Mum had sober periods of time, and so did her brothers, but the family ties were damaged so badly because of the alcoholism.

My mother was in residential school. I think sometimes she was ashamed to speak her language. I can understand that, coming from residential school and not being allowed to speak Cree at school. If you're taught that as a child in school, it becomes ingrained, a habit, not to speak the language outside of your circle of friends.

When I came here to Toronto from Alberta, it was really hard for me, sometimes, living so far away from my sisters and my friends. I'd find it so hard, especially when there were family crises out west and I couldn't be there. I would feel....devastated sometimes, and there'd be no emotional support for me. My husband had to work, and I had tiny little children with me.

But my mother-in-law really helped, because she's been working in that field, being a grandmother to people in the community and counselling people for twenty years. I developed a strong, good relationship with her. I feel really lucky to have that, with her. Because my mother went missing about ten years ago. She still is missing—we believe that she's deceased now. But I sought out my mother-in-law. She's very much in a mother role for me, because I never had my own mother. I stopped drinking, and I started asking her questions. I was really interested. I could sit there for hours with her, listening, and feeling like I'd drunk about five cups of coffee—feeling excited like that. I guess it was a thirst for knowledge, wanting to find out about Native people in a different way, a positive way. Whereas before it was all negative, when I lived out west, because I was drinking too. And if you're part of that negativity, you're part of the shame still.

I think, personally, for me, the alcoholism has ripped up my Mum's family—its blown so many holes in her family, that its not possible to string it

back together. But you know, putting it down on paper, gathering some of the stories—there's that. I haven't exhausted myself in doing that, yet.

"DANIELLE":

I'm Metis, from a place called Beauval, in northern Saskatchewan. My grandma was originally from a little place called Ile a la Crosse, about an hour north of Beauval. My Grandfather's from a place called Canoe Lake, which is about an hour west of my community. Canoe Lake is a reserve.

I think my grandfather was raised by his grandparents. But then the priest came, and took him away to residential school. My grandmother was raised by her grandma too, because her parents died when she was young. And then she was taken away to residential school as well. They both were raised in the residential school, in Beauval. My grandfather only got as far as Grade 4 in the school, before they sent him out to work. My grandmother got as far as Grade 6, I think. The nuns arranged my grandma's marriage to my grandpa—even though they didn't know each other. They had gone to the same school, but they didn't know each other, because my grandpa was already working by the time my mother was there. She was 16 or 17 when she married. That's how she got out of residential school, because the nuns married her off. After they got married, they settled in Beauval. Most of the elders and seniors that are in Beauval were from the residential school—they're all from different places originally.

My dad is English and Irish. My Mum met him when she was sixteen. But his parents didn't like Native people, so she came back home and had me, and never heard from him again. It's his loss. I've talked to him a couple of times, but that's about it. I grew up with my grandparents. My grandfather was a trapper, and my grandmother took care of her kids. My grandpa trapped right up until he died—I think he was 83. He trapped in the winter, and in summer he would do whatever was available.

When my grandmother was about eight, there was a big fire in the residential school. The school was made of wood at the time. At night, the nuns would lock the boys in their room. The girls weren't locked in, but the boys were. So then there was a huge fire—I forget what year it was, but to this day the old people still talk about it. There were 30 little boys killed, locked in there. And they were pounding and pounding on the door—they couldn't get out. So after that, the school was torn down. The townspeople made their own bricks, and built a brick school. And my mom's generation didn't go into the residence, because they lived right there. They went to the school, but they didn't live in the residence.

The school just got torn down last year, after all these years. It used to be on a hill above town, with a huge cross that shone at night. Whenever you went to my village, you could see it, just like a beacon up on the hill, shining. When it got torn down, my grandmother was really upset. Because that's where she spent her childhood. She never went home, after being at that school. That's where she grew up, that was her home. It was very hard for her. I took her there when they were going to tear it down. She walked through the halls, and she just cried and cried.

“RENE”:

I'm very clear that I'm not Indian, I'm Metis. Native people are Indian and Metis, but the categories are not synonymous. This name that I carry is not an Indian name, its a Metis name. My family comes from Pembina territory, which went down to the 47th parallel in those days. There are probably more people with my family name, that are my line, in the Fargo area of North Dakota then there are in Manitoba.

I don't know everything about it either. I know a bit, because I've pursued it, but there's a lot that's unwritten. For example, I did an identity quest. I travelled down to North Dakota to where this Holy Cross mission used to be. There's two communities that come up in my family. One is Wild

Rice, North Dakota, and the other is Holy Cross Mission. Holy Cross mission is the first place—they moved to Wild Rice, and then went north. This is all sort of oral stuff that I've heard. But travelling to North Dakota, I found nothing. There was only a museum near where Holy Cross used to be, and the museum exhibit said that "the people who first settled in this community were Scandinavians". They've wiped out any vestige of the Metis community that was there 150 years ago, when my family was there. So I haven't been able to find out that much from there.

In 1870, when the Metis were forming a provisional government, my father's family was living in a place called St. Francis Xavier. It was the second oldest parish in the west, and a real Metis settlement. I know that this was the community that marched, down that trail along the Assiniboine River, and broke down the doors and freed Riel. Was my family doing that? I'd like to think they were. I don't know. But they were certainly at the cusp of all that historical development, of the forging of a Metis identity.

But—all that being said—since that time, I think there was a marked change in Metis culture. What happened was a defeat, with Gatling guns by Wolsley's troops, and all that repression. And so individual families made choices—to go further west, away from all this encroachment of Eastern Canada, and the Englishman and the Protestants, or stay. Many on my mother's side went out to Saskatchewan, and lived wild, for a while. But they eventually came back to Manitoba. My family actually became fairly affluent at one time, I think. And they stayed in that old Metis community—which is all gone now. Its now a bedroom community of Winnipeg. And all you have is artifacts left.

Its funny, how when you go searching for your identity, you get things like place mats telling you a bit more about who you are! This place mat is from a place called the Medicine Rock Cafe. They actually mentioned my family's name on that place mat. I went there to see what was left of the

Metis community that my family is from. Well there's nothing left! Its a bedroom community of Winnipeg. They've built this lovely restaurant on my family's traditional land. And they've turned my family's original home into a souvenir shop! I went in and said "Hey, I'm part of that family that you talk about here!" And the guy kind of gave me a look and said "I..I just work here, buddy—don't blame me!" I think the guy thought I was gonna try and pull something, you know. But that's what I know. And I feel...very rich in that.

But I'll tell you—my father anglicized his name for years. I don't know when that started, with himself or with other people—but clearly something happened to his own self-esteem, about his affiliation both to Frenchness and being Metis. I mean—it had no currency in Manitoba. The best you could do was to become a good farmer and distance yourself from your Native identity—"yeah, sure, you're a little bit browner than the rest, but..."

It never worked, these attempts at assimilation. My family would be one of the oldest families in all of Manitoba, and until my generation nobody had ever been to university. My father's got Grade Eight, and my mother's got Grade Three. They're not stupid people, but the opportunities weren't there, no matter what they did. Anglicizing their name didn't fundamentally change the marginalisation. My mother was a cleaning lady all her life, and my father was a construction worker. There you go. They might have been better off just keeping what they were.

"CORINNE":

My sister and I were taken away from my Mom when I was two years old. My sister was only a year old, and my Mom was not married. We were placed in a foster home, and when I was three, my sister was fostered by one family, and I was adopted out to another. I grew up with a Dutch family. They were immigrants from Holland, who came over after the war. I had two older brothers who had been adopted as babies as well, but they were both

non-Native. I lived with that family until I was sixteen, and then I moved out, and have been on my own ever since.

We moved around a lot. I grew up in Edmonton, but we lived in Montreal for four years. We went to France for two years when I was eleven and came back to Canada, to Toronto, when I was 13. We were in Toronto for a year, and then we went back to Edmonton.

I was one hundred percent immersed in the non-native community. The word "Indian" never came up in my home. Although I always knew I was different, because I was dark. When I was young, the stuff that I dealt with was things like "how come my brothers are so light and I'm so dark?" But then as I got older, into high school, it was other people that reminded me that I was different. I remember in art class in high school, hearing somebody say "you fucking squaw!". I was just blown away. I didn't even know, really. I did not have an identity.

I've come to understand this today, but I didn't understand it back then, when I started to lead a really self-destructive life—that my spirit was broken. And my only way to deal with it was to drink. I was very, very angry, really enraged. I almost died from alcohol. And I was really self-abusive, before that. I would do stuff like punch my eyes in, you know, and really hurt myself a lot. Because I didn't know who I was and I was really angry. I was hanging out a lot in the bars in Edmonton, and these wild things would start happening. I'd be walking down the street, and Indian men would say "Tansi" to me. They totally recognized me, right? Indian people always know I'm one of them. But I would just say "What?" I didn't know how to react, because I had no experience in the Native community. I was pretty scared. I didn't have any Indian friends. I was very disassociated from who I was.

Its only been recently that I suddenly realized "Holy shit, I never even thought that people would see me as a drunk Indian". Because that's truly

what I was—I was a drunk. I only made the connection recently that I was a drunk Indian. In Edmonton, of all places.

When I moved to Nova Scotia, and my drinking was getting really bad, every time I got really drunk I'd start having these breakdowns around wanting to know who my Indian mum was. It was so important to me. But I got sober first, and then I started looking for my family. I'm really, really grateful that I got sober first. That's when I connected with the Native Child and Family Services in Nova Scotia, and they started writing letters back and forth to Alberta. Because they know who to write to. That's when my uncle came forward—he traveled three or four hours to get to Edmonton to clearly identify that I was his sister's daughter.

That's when I found out that my Mom had died. She died in her early thirties from a drug and alcohol overdose. And I've just recently been reunited with my sister. That has been the hardest relationship I've ever had to deal with. It just hasn't been good. She didn't even know she was Indian! Its just been really, really difficult.

There was no mention about either of my parents being Indian, on the documents they gave to my foster mother, which provide a bit of background about the birth parents. They put my mother's racial origin as Irish and Scottish, and my father's racial origin as French. When I joined the post-adoption registry, the agency in Alberta sent me what they call more identifiable information. They gave me a little bit more information about my Mom and about my Dad, the time that I was born, and the hospital I was born in. At that point, they put "mother's racial origin" as "Indian". But for my father, they put "French". But my Dad is Metis. He came from a huge family, of twelve kids. I found that out later.

I will never, ever forget the call from my uncle, from Alberta. He was the kindest, nicest person. For some reason, we got on right off. It was great, hearing him say "this is Tom _____, and I'm your uncle, and its so great to

talk to you. Your voice even sounds like our family". Then I asked him "what kind of Indian are we?" And he told me "we're Cree and Saulteaux." He was a medicine man, and because he had those gifts, he had gone into the sweat lodge and put flags up, and asked the spirits about me. So on the phone, on our first conversation, he was able to tell me "you're going to be all right. You've had a very difficult life, you've led a life of a lot of self-destruction, but things are going to get better". I went home that night, and I looked in the mirror, and for the first time in my life—and I was wearing purple, I'll never forget this—I looked in the mirror, and I thought "you DO look Indian!" It was the first connection I ever had. And I really believed from that day on that I was really an Indian.

And then my life started to change. All of my life, I wanted to belong, and then all of a sudden, I was belonging, and people were recognizing that. My own people were welcoming me home. That's what happened.

But with my family, there's lots I still don't know. My mother's father is from Montana—there's a group of landless Indians there that he comes from. My mother's grandmother is from Cold Lake First Nation. I know that my Mom came from a family of 12 kids, and they were all orphaned at a really young age. And so all of my mum's brothers and sisters are dispersed all over Alberta. My uncle was living at Saddle Lake First Nation. I think my mother spent a lot of time at Enoch, just outside of Edmonton, which is another reserve. My sense is that none of these people were necessarily band members, but the bands would let them live there. I know nothing about their schooling. I'm sure my Uncle Joe and Uncle Tom went to residential school, but I'm not sure about my Mom.

I met my Uncle Tom before he died. And then I met my Uncle Joe, who's 72, who lives in Saddle Lake now, too. I met my aunt—there's just one living aunt now, on my Mom's side, who lives in Edmonton. But I didn't really connect much with her. There are family members that I've met that I

really want to stay connected with, and other people that I didn't want to have anything to do with, because they are still using drugs or alcohol and not really healthy. I didn't want that in my circle. So that was an interesting process.

But you know, I still feel kind of disconnected, sometimes, around who I am. Because when I really put it in perspective, coming from an Indian family—there's not one person in my family that has not been affected by some kind of violence. I have cousins in prison you know. I have people who have killed themselves. I have alcoholism, and residential school. This is my blood family, but I still feel pretty disconnected from all of those experiences. It's hard to explain. Because genocide touched me in a different way.

6.2 REFLECTIONS:

The family histories above are fairly representative of the diversity of the experiences told to me. For every detail told about one family, there are other interviews with similar stories from other families. In listening to them, it becomes clear that these families share a number of common experiences. Although they are from different Aboriginal nations, and from different regions of the Americas, an underlying pattern emerges, of families continuously forced to deal with one or another form of government assimilation policies, all of which are lived as experiences of violence. Many of the families also came from histories where violence from white settlers—in each instance either directly organised or condoned by the state--had scarred their families.

Many of the participants have parents who spent years in residential schools. For the most part, the participants' parents—and often their aunts and uncles—simply never went home again afterwards. In another way, the schools also functioned as a sort of “catchment basin” for many of the grandparents or great-grandparents of the participants, as their

communities were devastated by colonization. For small children whose families were torn apart by epidemics or alcoholism, in communities where all traditional institutions which might have protected orphaned children were being broken up and invalidated by the Church, there was no cohesive “safety net” left to shelter them, and so these children were left to be raised at residential school in inordinate numbers.

The powerlessness involved in having your identity legally defined, and your life’s options dictated by a colonial government was also a common theme for the families of many of the participants, whether they were status Indians, non-status or Metis. Section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act*, which deprived Native women of their status for marrying non-Native or non-status men, played a significant role in forcing the mothers or grandmothers of a number of participants to leave their communities of origin. For a handful of other individuals, voluntary or forced enfranchisement removed the status of whole families. In all but a few cases, the children and grandchildren of those who lost status are virtual strangers to their former reserves. Meanwhile, a number of Metis participants spoke of the profound sense of marginalization their parents and grandparents experienced. As “halfbreeds”, legally excluded from Indianness by the *Indian Act*, they were forced to live in urban centres or constantly moved around squatting on marginal lands, where they received the brunt of white racism, and lacked even a cohesive sense of their own identities other than as “breeds”.

For several of the western Metis participants, a common experience for their Metis and Cree great-grandparents was forced migration in the face of government repression and white settler violence after the 1885 rebellion. For some of the individuals, white settlers had been allowed—or encouraged—to entirely overrun their families’ Metis communities; for others, their Cree grandmothers came from families which had fled to the

United States after 1885 to avoid government repression, and only returned around the turn of the century. Meanwhile, the families of the two east coast participants came from lengthy histories of violent encroachment by white settlers, as well as a heritage of government policies of deliberate starvation and bounty-hunting. Their communities had been pushed off the land generations earlier, and no reserves had been set aside for them. These families for generations had encouraged their children to be silent about Nativeness, in a context where survival itself was at stake. Suppressing the language had been crucial to this process.

The theft of Native children—by Children’s Aid societies, or by the outright illegal sale of Indian children—was another common set of experiences for a number of the families, with devastating effects both for the individuals and their communities. The heavy hand of Indian agents, and the Church was also obvious in these families. Priests and nuns arranged marriages, apprehended Native children to force their parents to marry, and chose the careers of the handful of children who went on to higher education after residential school.

A crucial aspect of these different forms of violence has been the erasure of knowledge of heritage. Residential schooling devastated Native families and removed knowledge of language and culture from individuals and their descendants. The forced dislocations which ruptured Metis and non-status Indian families and separated them from any knowledge of their histories, and the invasive rules which externalized “halfbreeds” from their bands, and arbitrarily removed status Indian women from the life of their communities by terminating their Native status, have made it very difficult for a number of the individuals I interviewed to understand clearly who they are.

There is also the reality of deliberate government misinformation. Officials routinely erased all record of Native heritage on adoption forms, and refused to categorise individuals or whole communities as Native on censuses, listing them as Black, White, or French, or Spanish instead. Priests changed the names of individuals or their families on residential school admission records, and routinely listed the Native wives of French men as “French” on marriage registries. Nativeness was erased however and whenever possible, on many of the official documents which today are used to determine an individual’s identity and heritage. In many cases, this deliberate misinformation has made it difficult, or almost impossible, for individuals to recoup any knowledge of their own histories, as family stories and official records do not match. Finally, for many of the families, christianization, slavery, and alcoholism have wreaked their particular havoc, cutting off the transmission of language, culture, and history at the root.

The histories of violence that these families all carry make clear the extent to which the Canadian government—as well as settler governments elsewhere in the Americas—for years have engaged in intensive campaigns to destroy Native communities and families, and have exerted almost continuous pressure on the survivors to assimilate in the interests of survival. In the next chapter, I will explore some of these processes more closely, and examine the costs to the participants and their families.

CHAPTER SEVEN

KILLING THE INDIAN TO SAVE THE CHILD:

THE PRESSURES TO ABANDON NATIVE IDENTITY

“My brother and I used to get angry at my mother for not teaching us anything about our culture—and then, when questioned, she would say: “I made that conscious decision to protect you. The less you know about being Native, the more you will survive in this world”. And then I was struck, on meeting all those other older Native women, from The Pas and places like that, who said exactly the same thing—‘I’ve only wanted the best for my kid....and being Native wasn’t any good”.

INTRODUCTION:

In this chapter, I will explore the various means by which pressure was asserted on the participants’ families to abandon their identities as Native people. The families’ experiences of residential schooling, and other government assimilation policies such as forced apprehension of Native children, and regulation of their identities under the *Indian Act* will be examined more closely, for a deeper understanding of how these forms of violence worked on individuals’ sense of who they were and how their Indianness was valued.

7.1 RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS:

It is far beyond the scope of this chapter to adequately do justice to the issue of residential schooling—I will not attempt to do so here. But since residential schools have had a significant role in the urbanization and assimilation of generations of Native people, I will devote some attention here to the role which they played in the lives of the participants. Perhaps not surprisingly, residential schools represented the single greatest assimilation pressure reported in the interviews. Fifteen of the twenty-nine participants whose interviews form part of this survey had families who had attended residential schools. None of the

participants had lived at residential school themselves, although one woman, a northern Saskatchewan Metis, attended the residential school in her community while living at home.

Many of the participants had been told very little about their parents or grandparents' experiences in residential school, or the circumstances under which they had entered the schools. Four individuals, however, did know that their mothers or grandmothers had been "dumped" into the schools after losing one or more of their own parents. One person connected this directly to the epidemics—in this case tuberculosis—which had ravaged her community. Another spoke of the neglect her orphaned mother had experienced before entering the school—of her wandering, barefoot and crying at the age of four, after dark, in cold weather, until the priest had her sent south to the residential school. In two cases, children went into the schools after their fathers died violent deaths, with murder suspected. In all four cases where individuals had been left for the school to raise in the absence of family support, the participants spoke of their mothers' and grandmothers' bitterness over spending most of their youth—up to 15 years in one case—institutionalized, without any connections to home. Most of the other children who attended the schools were removed from their families by Indian Agents or priests, and sent to schools which were often a great distance from their homes, where maintaining contact with their families was almost impossible. In this respect, the mandate of the schools—to remove Native children from any access to Native culture—appears to have been highly successful in the case of the participants' families. Almost none of the individuals who attended residential schools returned to their reserves afterwards. For most of the participants, their uncles and aunts had also left their communities behind after residential

school. Having immediate relatives left on the reserve was the exception, rather than the rule, for most of the participants.

In only one case, a participant reported that the experience of residential school could not cut the strong ties which bound her father to his community:

“When he was six, my father was taken away to the residential school, where he spent most of the year—I guess with the exception of Christmas and summers. And I should explain to you that, coming from a west coast background, our cultures are very class-oriented, and my father comes from a very high class background. He's also the oldest son, so there's a considerable amount of responsibility placed on him, within the community and in terms of being the person who'd hand down information, and names, and things like that. So he dropped out of school when he was in Grade Ten, to help take care of the family. With him, going away to residential school did have a big impact, but I think because the community invested so much in him, in terms of passing down knowledge, that there was always a really strong connection. The community was always thought of as home, and I think in the back of his mind he always imagined that he would go back.”

In this case, however, the local minister in the community appears to have made a “second try” to sever this individual from his culture, by encouraging him and advocating for him to leave the community for divinity school. In this respect, he was partially successful; however, the individual ultimately did return to his community and has been there ever since.

“My father became very involved with an Anglican minister in the community, and through his involvement with this man, he ended up going in to Vancouver and got early admission into divinity school, which obviously would never happen now, but at the time they were very interested in having Native people in the ministry, so they overlooked the fact that he didn't have his high school or his BA. He pretty much stayed away from the time he left, with the exception of visits, until he was in his forties or so. And then he went back and became band manager. His involvement with the Native Brotherhood and the Church gave him a fair amount of political experience, and some organizational experience.”

Three individuals from southern Ontario reserves said that their parents had lost the use of their language in residential schools, while their grandparents who had been to the schools still spoke it, but not in front of their families. For those whose parents were from more northern communities, in most cases they still spoke the language after residential school, but they did not teach it to their children. Only one individual, a Metis woman from northern Saskatchewan, spoke her language fluently. She reported being an exception in her community, because she had been raised traditionally by her grandparents; in most cases her contemporaries were losing the use of Cree.

One individual whose grandmother had been to a residential school spoke of how officials had changed the names of her grandmother's parents on the school records during the years when she attended the school. In this respect, the school functioned not only to remove Cree culture from the individual, but also to re-name her. This remaking of the grandmother's identity made it very difficult for her grandchildren to trace their lineage, as parental names do not match on different documents. This participant also reported that while her grandmother was at school, she had either been removed from her band list, or the fact of her being a band member was removed from the school records. Another individual also described how she was not able to find any record of her orphaned mother on the treaty lists for her reserve after she was sent to residential school; this made it more difficult for the participant to get her status back.

For some individuals, the family disruption caused by residential school went far deeper than record keeping. Two individuals reported that their parents had siblings who were sent to different residential schools; this almost entirely severed their relationships with those

siblings. In one case, the individual did not even know that her mother had a half brother until after her mother died.

Several of the participants described the damage to their sense of self-esteem from the intergenerational alcoholism, sexual abuse and other kinds of violence which had wracked their families since residential school. They spoke of how parents had been sexually abused in the schools, or had come out without parenting skills or the ability to be close to anybody. One participant described the intergenerational violence which both sides of her family had experienced, below.

"I would say that I was ashamed of being Native. I always blamed it on my grandma, my Dad's mother, because she used to call us down for being Native. My grandma was of Native heritage herself, but because my mother drank a lot, sometimes we were left with my grandma. And she would call down my Mom and her friends. So I was not proud of who I was, because to me, being Native was attached to being drunk, and down and out.

I asked my Dad about Grandma putting down Native people. He told me that the reason she was so prejudiced against Native people was that she was there when her grandfather was shot by another Native person, shot and killed, when she was a child, and they had been close.

In my Mom's family there's three boys and three girls that I know of. I don't know if they've ever gone back to live on the reserve after residential school. I know that they were chronic alcoholics. One was in jail for murder, or manslaughter. I thought that my Mom had a chronic alcohol problem, but theirs was worse. My Mum had sober periods of time and so did her brothers, but...my uncle tried to sexually abuse my Mother."

Another participant, below, also spoke of how the devastation of family ties caused by her father's experiences at residential school made her feel, for a while, the need to distance herself from her Native identity:

"For three summers, I tried to maintain a connection with my father's side of the family, by going back to his community to spend a month with him. But I was not able to go back after the age of eleven because of family problems and my father not being able to take care of me very well. There was a lot of emotional, and sexual abuse, that took

place during that time. After that, I had a lot of anger towards my father, and towards my father's side of the family for not protecting me, once they knew I was being abused. No one really stepped in. Up until then, growing up, I had been very proud of my father, because he had good standing in the Native community. It had been a source of pride. But after the abuse, and the disclosure of the abuse, I just...intentionally represented myself as white, for a while. And I didn't really relate to the fact that I was Native until the end of high school, which for me was when I was eighteen or nineteen. At that point, I was able to start approaching things with a little more distance and understanding, doing some reading, and thinking things over."

A number of the other participants described more subtle ways in which residential schooling had affected their mothers' sense of the value of their Native identity. One woman described how her light-skinned mother had modelled herself entirely as an Englishwoman, after one of her teachers in the school; she did not even know, for most of her life, that her mother was Native. Another woman described how her mother would scold her in Cree whenever she grew her hair long or in other ways manifested an "Indian look"—telling her that she looked like "a big, thick Indian!" A third woman described her mother frequently making remarks such as the following: "You know, we left the schools knowing we were Indian, and also feeling that this was not something anybody would want to be".

Residential schooling represented a profound violence to the participants' families. The schools deprived the participants' parents and grandparents of most opportunities to transmit language, customs, or knowledge of living on the land to their children, because this knowledge was taken from them as part of the schooling process. The alcoholism and cycles of abuse which a number of the participants have struggled with, and the devaluation of Indianness which such devastation brought continue to manifest themselves in the participants who are the descendants of residential school survivors. Finally, the residential

schools severed links between the survivors and their communities so thoroughly that most of the survivors did not return to their communities afterwards. Urbanity for a number of the participants began with this process, with their mothers and fathers leaving residential schools for the cities.

It is one thing to grow up so alienated from your culture that you choose to never return to it. It is quite another to be legally barred from ever returning, or to have grown up landless and alienated from the community because of how you are positioned with respect to legal categories of Indianness. Regulation of Native identity under the *Indian Act*, both through gender discrimination and through the exclusion of halfbreeds from entitlement to land and recognition as Indians, has been responsible for creating a large body of disenfranchised urban Native people. In the next few pages, I will explore more closely how the *Indian Act* has affected the families of the participants.

7.2 NATIVE STATUS AND ASSIMILATION:

Having or lacking Native status has been an extremely significant issue in the lives of all of the participants, one way or another. Out of twenty-nine participants, twelve are status Indians through their own lineage. Six other individuals, however, had status Indian grandmothers who lost status from marrying Metis or white men. One individual is an enrolled member of a small northeastern Native tribe in the United States, a stone's throw from the Canadian border. In Canada, however, where her family has always lived (and where her tribe originally comes from, until they were pushed off their land into what is now the United States), she is non-status. Her family is currently making a case for their right to have Indian status and band recognition in Canada. Six participants are Western Metis whose families were classified as halfbreed, and as a result have never had status. Four individuals identify as "non-status Indians" because their families were excluded from legal

recognition as Indians, for one reason or another, in regions where the category “Metis” has had no historical validity. Two individuals had family members who either voluntarily or involuntarily enfranchised; both individuals, however, also had mothers who had lost status through Section 12(1)(b), and could thus be said to have been twice deprived of Native status. Out of the nineteen individuals who by lineage have some claim to being status Indians, fourteen have been affected by loss of status as a result of Section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act*.

In many respects, this entire study has been shaped by gender inequities in the *Indian Act*. As I outlined in Chapter Two, the *Indian Act* for years has deprived Native women of their status and forced them to leave their communities for marrying non-Natives, while Native men who married non-Native women had the choice to stay on-reserve. Because of this, any work which deals with mixed-race urban Native people will deal to a far greater extent with individuals who grew up urban and non-status with Native mothers than with individuals who grew up on reserve with Native fathers and with white mothers. This gendered history has underpinned this project—eight of the twelve status Indians I interviewed are the children of white fathers and Native mothers, while only four individuals have Native fathers and white mothers.¹ When the six individuals whose grandmothers lost status are taken into account, we can see that thirteen out of twenty-nine participants come from families which have had no choice about being urban at all—their mothers or grandmothers were removed from their communities solely because of gender restrictions in the *Indian Act*. Of the thirteen individuals, only six are now band members in their mothers’ communities. Loss of status because of sexism in the *Indian Act*

¹ Of the eight individuals with Native mothers, seven of the mothers had lost status through marrying white men. The eighth individual grew up on reserve, as his Native mother had never married or even acknowledged his white father, and his status was never protested under Section 12(2), which removed the status of “illegitimate” children of Native women. Of the four individuals with Native fathers, three were entirely

appears to have had almost as assimilatory an effect on Native families as residential schooling, albeit in a different way. It appears to be a central reason why significant numbers of Native people are *permanently* urban. Unlike the individuals who left their communities after residential schooling, who lived in cities for most of their lives and only returned to their reserves periodically, loss of status permanently severed most of the families of the participants from their communities of origin.

The issue which stands out from all this is the extent to which Section 12(1)(b) represented a process of “genocide by numbers” to the participants’ families. Native status has been whittled away to an amazing extent in this interview group—of nineteen people only twelve currently have status, and only five will be able to pass their status on to their children in perpetuity.² The rest either could not get their status reinstated because of the second-generation cut-off in Bill C-31, or were reinstated but will not be able to pass their status on to their children for the same reason.

As compared to Section 12(1)(b), enfranchisement affected only two of the participants. One participant’s mother was enfranchised against her will for leaving the community to work; this woman also married a non-Native and had her status reinstated under Bill C-31. Another individual’s

unaffected by Section 12(1)(b); the fourth, however, grew up with full status but then lost it herself when she married a non-Native.

² One of the individuals whose mother had lost status was able to have her status reinstated as “full” status (capable of being passed on in perpetuity), because her mother had given birth to her *before* she married and lost her status, seven others can only pass it on to their children. Meanwhile, of the four individuals who inherited full status from their Native fathers which they can pass on to their descendents in perpetuity, one individual lost status herself when she married a non-Native; as a result, she can only pass her status on one generation, to her daughter. Finally, one of the individuals whose grandmother lost status gained it back through marrying a status Indian prior to 1985; her children have full status, and will be able to pass it on in perpetuity. It should be noted that since Bill C-31, being able to pass status on “in perpetuity” is now conditional on an individual’s descendents marrying status Indians.

grandfather chose to enfranchise after World War II, as a result of the limited opportunities he saw for himself on the reserve; in doing so his wife and children also lost status. This individual's mother has only been able to receive partial status; however, as she is legally eligible for full status, the family is pursuing the matter.

Beyond these issues of loss of status are the people whose ancestors were arbitrarily denied status, particularly through exclusion as halfbreeds in western Canada—including six of the participants. Their experiences—along with those of people who lost status—will be explored more deeply in Chapter Thirteen.

In addition to the problems of residential schooling and regulation of Native identity, a third set of assimilatory pressures were common to several of the participants interviewed—loss of access to their culture through adoption.

7.3 THE THEFT OF NATIVE CHILDREN:

“I’ve come to understand this today, but I didn’t understand that back then, when I started to lead a really self-destructive life—that my spirit was broken”.

Like the issue of residential schools, an in-depth exploration of the apprehension of Native children by the government—in particular, the phenomenal epidemic of baby-snatching known as “the sixties scoop”—is far beyond the scope of this thesis. It is impossible to do justice to the complex levels of experiences which adoptees have lived through, and the implications for Native communities as a whole. However, adoption as a tool of assimilation has shaped the lives of significant numbers of urban mixed-race people—including four of the participants. In addition to these four people, two other individuals reported instances of authorities apprehending their children. For these reasons, some of the experiences of adoptees will be reflected in this work.

Two of the individuals I interviewed had been adopted, while two were the children of adoptees. One individual's parent had been illegally sold from her American Indian community to a white family in Saskatchewan.

One of the adoptees had been given up to Children's Aid by her white mother, while another had been apprehended from her Native mother. Both have been reconciled to their birth families and communities, but both learned that their Native parent had died before reconciliation. One woman learned that her Ojibway father had been injured in the street, had passed out, and was not taken to hospital because passers-by looked at him and assumed he was just another drunk Indian; he died as a result. The other woman learned that her Cree/Saulteaux mother had died in her early thirties of a drug and alcohol overdose after losing both of her children to adoption.

Both individuals, when they were adopted, had their Native ancestry hidden or minimized on the Children's Aid records. One woman's "fullblood" Ojibway father was listed as being mostly French and Scottish, but one-quarter Ojibway, while the other woman's Cree/Saulteaux mother was listed as "Irish/Scottish, and her Metis father was listed as "French". Despite this, both were eventually reconciled to their communities of origin, and welcomed by their extended families.

This was not the case for the individual whose Ojibway father and four aunts were apprehended by the Catholic Children's Aid in the 1940's. The father, who spent years in foster homes, knows who his mother is and what her community was, but had little other opportunity to learn anything about his heritage. In any case, the violence and alcoholism that marked his adult life, and his inability to parent caused him to be separated from his own wife and children. The individual I

interviewed does not know much about his father's life, and virtually nothing about their heritage, other than the name of his grandmother's community. He never met his grandmother before she died. While he still has one or two relatives in that community, there has been no real reconciliation process.

One individual that I interviewed had been told little about her heritage by her mother, but had some access to her Navajo grandmother in her childhood. Her mother's absolute silence about her past, which was a constant feature of her childhood, recently has become more comprehensible when this individual learned that her mother and one of her aunts had been sold from her Navajo community to a white family in Saskatchewan. The grandparents had tracked down the children, and maintained contact until adulthood, when they moved to Toronto. This individual knows only that she is Navajo; she was never even told the name of her Native community.

One individual reported that Children's Aid had apprehended her as an infant when her white father was arrested for fraud. They detained her until her Native mother was cleared of any role in the fraud and had settled down with *her* mother, and then released her. She did not speak of any issues which might have arisen from having been apprehended.

The mother of one of the participants had her second child arbitrarily taken away by hospital nuns at birth because she was not married. The participant describes the complex string of repercussions which this action had on her family:

"When she had my sister, the Catholic nuns at the hospital took her away from my Mom the minute she was born. Because my Mom was a Native woman, and she already had a child, and she wasn't married. They removed my sister from my Mom, and said "we'll give you a year to get married and get settled down and get your life together, and if you can do that, then you can come back to us in a year and we'll give you your child. But if not, you'll never see her". They let her know that

it was a girl, that's all, then they took the baby away to Children's Aid, and gave her to a farm family in Saskatchewan.

So that's the reason why my Mom decided to marry my Dad. He had gone to Toronto to try and find a job, because he wanted to marry her. He wanted her to live with him in Saskatchewan, but it wouldn't have worked, because his whole family shunned her. After they took her baby, she made her decision to leave everything behind, leave the whole family behind, all the supports and everything else—because there was a chance to make it here with my Dad. So she came here to marry him, and got settled down with him, but in the process she got pregnant with baby number three. She managed to get back to Saskatoon to get my sister, and brought her back here, and then two months later she gave birth to her third child. Meanwhile, she'd also brought my oldest brother to live with her in Toronto, who by that point was about five years old. Until then, he was used to being with Grandma and Grandpa in Saskatoon, so for him it was like he was suddenly living with a total stranger, my Dad. And by the time she got my sister back from Saskatoon, she was already one year old. As she got older, she was constantly running away, because she had not bonded with my Mom. I was the fourth child, and by the time I came along things were easier. They had a slightly bigger house to live in, my father was working, and everything was settled. And so, with me, everything was good. But there was always conflict, and fussing, and sibling rivalry with the first three kids, because there were so many family issues to deal with during those first years in Toronto. There was a lot of chaos in my family for a few years, because of the nuns taking my sister away.

My sister that got taken away—she has had really bad eczema all her life. You can just see all the scars on her. And she had such health problems when she was a child. It was terrible—she was always sick. She had smallpox, and nearly died a few times. She still has asthma. And when she wasn't sick, she was always unhappy. And even now—she's still not happy in her life. She always is thinking "what could I do differently". She doesn't have a career that she's satisfied with. She's not happy in her marriage—she's just not a happy individual. She's not fulfilled, and I think it's all related back to that experience of being taken away as a baby. And I've tried to suggest to her for years now that maybe counselling would be a good option for her, to help resolve some issues. But I don't think she ever will."

Most of the adoptees, or children of adoptees, have experienced considerable problems with alcoholism, drug addiction, suicidal

behaviour, and uncontrollable rages. For their families, the removal of their children added a new layer of violence and loss to the other problems that they faced. Below, one individual discusses the “big picture” of what the wholesale adoption of Native children, which took on immense proportions during the 1960’s and proceeded unabated for over a decade, signified for the children and their communities:

“It’s phenomenal, the adoption process that happened with Native people during “the Sixties Scoop”. I was one of those Indian children that was scooped away, you know. There were literally thousands and thousands of Indian children scooped up at that time. It was supposed to be for the betterment of the Native community, because of the alcoholism—the white families would supposedly provide a better life for the kids. But really, it was a direct and completely deliberate attempt at assimilation and cultural genocide.

I don’t know of one adopted person that hasn’t been really affected by the adoption process. Everything from prostitution to drug and alcohol abuse, to crime, to self-abuse, to attempted suicide. All of us, all of us—there’s not one of us that I know of that’s been adopted out that hasn’t abused themselves in some way, shape or form because of a lack of knowing who we are and where we came from. The statistics down at Aboriginal Legal Services say that sixty-five or seventy percent of all Aboriginal criminal offenders who come through there have been adopted out.

There was one teaching that I remember. People who work in our communities were sitting around one day, and they all said “who do you think are the hardest people to work with, the people from the residential school system or the people who’ve been adopted out? And clearly everybody said it was the people who’d been adopted out who were the hardest to work with. Because in the residential school system—and this is not to minimize the atrocities that happened in the residential school system—you still knew you were Indian, and you were with your brothers and your sisters and your aunts and your cousins. But when you were removed, you didn’t have nothing.”

These problems become intergenerational. The son of the man fostered out in the 1940’s described his struggles as a young adult with alcoholism, with uncontrollable anger, with keeping jobs, and with staying in school. The daughter of the woman who had been sold at

birth described the weight of intense silence in her home around the subject of their Native identity, because of the shame her mother felt at being Indian, and its effect on her:

I guess I was maybe seven years old or something, when I was taken away from my grandmother to live with my parents, and that's when the sort of "going into the closet" process began, you know. No more speaking the language, no more running around like a "little savage", no more wearing my hair braided or long—it was all cut and permed, in a real attempt to make, and keep me white. They did everything they possibly could. They didn't want me to wear jeans, you know—no beads, no moccasins, nothing. It was all....whitewashed, that's the word. And it wasn't hard, because I'm really light to begin with. And if you can imagine a seven year old kid having her hair permed—it would burn my scalp, but it was all done for the purpose of making me not look Native. I was supposed to look white. Frizzy hair was supposed to be part of that treatment. That's how I think of it now, a treatment. Everything was kept a secret. I ended up in therapy because of all the secrecy. I didn't know who I was—everything about me was kept suppressed. I couldn't identify with the Scandinavian side, because they were always putting me down as being, you know, savage. So I didn't know what I was.

And there was a real sense of shame around my mother. So for me, being the oldest, and being female and Native and being light-skinned—there were all these complex things going on that a kid wouldn't know about, that sort of unravelled. I was punished when I was a kid if I ever spoke the language, so I'd get scared when I'd begin to remember it. It's like somebody just pulled the curtain—I don't know, the language is gone. I'd get so scared that I was gonna be punished. My whole childhood seemed to be one long punishment, and one long attempt to force me into a place that I didn't belong."

The adoptees, and those whose parents had been adopted, described a range of problems with their identities. One of the light-skinned women had always thought of herself as white. Another woman described her belief that Native people have a blood memory, which made it impossible for them to fit into the white families where they had been placed, given the drastically different value systems of Native and white societies. All reported being initially dismissed as "white" (regardless of

their appearance) when they attempted to become involved in the urban Native community, because of their ignorance of Native ways and values. One adoptee summed up the devastation that adoption, in conjunction with residential schooling and loss of status had wrought in her family:

"There are so many unknowns for me. I don't know where everybody is, and why they were all displaced, and why they were orphaned, and what happened to my grandmother and my grandfather. Where did they come from? Were they ever together as a whole family? I don't know any of that. When my uncle talked about it, at the age of 72, he talked about how my mother's family wasn't a very close family because everybody was just so scattered."

The other described her adoption as part of a whole complex of intergenerational racism that continues to afflict her family:

"The fact that I lost my father because he was injured, and they thought he was passed out—they just looked at him and saw a Native guy who's passed out, and that's how he died. Losing my father, I think, is a pretty big issue of racism. And it's also connected to the fact that my Native family's been so screwed up since my grandmother left for residential school, and that in some way we're all reacting to that, or still dealing with that. And there's the fact that I was placed with a white family instead of a Native family. I have this whole feeling of them having power over me. Power over my grandmother, power over my father, power over me. I have a real strong feeling, of picturing myself as a little baby, with these white people just passing me around. You know—you can look at this whole other side of it, where they were trying to find the best care for me—and that's probably all still true. But there's this feeling that I was completely powerless, cut off from my family. And the anger in me about that goes out to the Native community, as well as to the white community. Especially when people come up to me and tell me "you should be this, or you should be that". I just tell them "fuck you, you weren't there! I had to get through that whole time alone. I got through everything alone. If I'd killed myself, way back then—I was suicidal by the age of nine or ten—you wouldn't have even known about me. I survived. I chose to be here. I set the rules for my life!"

To the specific racism of residential schools, government regulation of Indianness, and the forced removal of Native children, we must also add

the pressures to assimilate which come from families and communities experiencing extensive, daily racist assault from whites.

7.4 RACIST ASSAULT AND ASSIMILATION:

The role of racist violence in forcing individuals to maintain silence about their identities cannot be understated. In Western Canada in particular, organized military violence against Cree and Metis people has been recent enough to have affected the great-grandparents and even the grandparents of some of the participants, while violence from the settler population remains a constant reality, particularly for Native women. The stories of the Western Metis participants resonated with family and community breakdown, with the disintegration of Metis villages and the persecution and repression of Cree bands. As one of the participants described it, being Metis, for his family, signified a legacy of defeat and shame, which led to a profound silence about their identity:

"I was raised pretty well in silence in terms of my heritage and my culture. It doesn't mean that values weren't communicated, or practices weren't communicated, but it meant that it wasn't talked about. Nothing was named. It was all silence. And silence in that sense can be a real chiller, right? A lot of the breakdown that went on in Native communities in the forties, fifties and sixties in Ontario happened in my family three generations ago. Alcohol, violence, a whole downward spiral, a lot of tragic deaths. That sort of breaking of the past happened very soon after the hanging of Riel, for my family. A lot of people just went underground. My family was one of them. They just survived. They sold their scrip land in Manitoba, and moved west, prior to Saskatchewan becoming a province.

My mother has said "it might be trendy to be Native in Toronto, but it's not trendy in Saskatchewan!" And when I was learning traditional teachings, and I was talking to them about the Elders—it was one of the few times in my life I've seen Mom get really mad. She looked at me, and she said "Don't talk to me about Elders. I'll tell you what our Elders gave us." And she started to list it. "Family violence. Rape. Syphilis. Child Abuse. Alcohol. Debt. That's what they gave us. Don't talk to me about the Elders". These were the type of stories that she didn't want to pass on. If that is your sense of history—and it just

hangs there—why would you want to pass it on? She said ‘isn't it best to just be thankful for what you've got, and to keep on going?’”

The two east coast participants, both non-status Indians with long histories of living off-reserve on parts of their traditional landbase that their families had lived on for centuries, most clearly showed the effects of the long-term colonization processes endured by their peoples. East coast Native people were the first on the continent to encounter Europeans. Some of the nations of the Wabanaki confederacy, such as the Mi'kmaq nation, were militarily defeated by the British in the 1750's after almost a century of warfare. Excluded from the Royal Proclamation that their resistance helped bring about, so that very few reserves were set aside for them, they were considered enemies of the British, and therefore faced government campaigns of deliberate starvation, and having bounty posted on their scalps for many years. For almost 250 years, the Mi'kmaq and other eastern Native peoples have faced the violent encroachment of white settlers willing to kill Native people for their land, and the absolute indifference of settler governments to their plight. One individual describes the effect of this history in silencing her people and encouraging them to assimilate:

“When the tribe decided that they had to protect their heritage, and, you know, find the language again, back in the '70's, or even later, I think, they were down to fifty-six people. They were just decimated by the Loyalists—they out and out killed them. North American Indians were massacred, and most of it was intentional. That's really well documented, if people choose to read about it. Our language was almost lost. Our people almost went extinct. It wasn't until some old people sat back and reflected “we're not living in the same time anymore”. Or maybe they felt that they didn't have very much to lose any more. You know, “We're going to die soon—so what about our heritage?”.

For me, it comes down to survival. Indians were so decimated that our ancestors knew that if they didn't assimilate they weren't going to survive. I think our parents very consciously didn't want us connected to our culture. Because they knew that we would only

survive if we integrated. 'You're gonna be white or you're not going to survive'".

In addition to these historical collective strategies of silence about Nativeness in the interests of survival, there have been numerous families who in contemporary times continue to leave the intense racism of rural environments, particularly on the prairies, for the cities. There was a consensus from many of the participants that the larger Canadian cities, especially in eastern Canada are, as a rule, less dangerous than the Prairies for Native people, because of the lesser visibility of Native people in the more heterogenous environments which are found there. In many cases, this means abandoning community; their children do not choose to return because they wish to continue to avoid such extreme racism:

There's such a huge difference in the way Native people are treated, if you're in a smaller town, or even a smaller city, where there's Native people living on reserves near by. It's very different, very, very painful. That's the reason that we grew up in the city of Toronto, because my Mom wanted to keep us from being exposed to the kind of racism, that was so predominant in Saskatchewan. When I thought about it, I realised that as much as I want to have my connections to where I'm from, because I feel so good when I'm out there, and I know that's where I would love to live—my kids would then be exposed to a whole scenario that they haven't been, here. Because in Toronto there's also such a cosmopolitan mix. Nobody ever points at them and calls them anything. The last time I can think of that happening was twenty years ago. My sister was walking down the street in Toronto, and a bunch of high school kids came chasing after her and started pointing at her and screaming "paki go home!" But the instances of that that we've experienced in this city have been very, very few. Nobody has ever, here, done anything to me because they thought I was an Indian."

Finally, one individual has found that she cannot live in her community since the Oka crisis. The anger that she carries within her as a result of her community's experience of the occupation is so intense that to even be around French-speaking people brings it to the surface.

This participant referred to her reaction as “racism”, despite the obvious power imbalances between Quebecois and Mohawk people—although throughout the interview she spoke continuously about the pressures which Quebecois nationalism is bringing to bear on Mohawk people. In the city, she still finds that on “bad days” she often does not show her status card in stores, and in other ways struggles for the anonymity of being taken for non-Native:

“When the crisis was over, there was a point where we all had met in Toronto, somewhere. And we were sharing a hotel room. And my sister was lying on a hotel room bed, with the pillow in her hands when she was sleeping, and she was holding it so tight. I just said “hey—look at this!” My sister, even in her sleep she was just...holding that pillow so tight, tight. She'd been through quite a few different things at the food bank. She was there when the soldiers arrived and when Lasagna came in wielding his baseball bat, wielding his anger around, with his bat. It was really nice when they had that peace rally outside the barricades, outside of the village of Oka, because it had been two weeks of just pure harassment and not being able to sleep, and then you just walk into this group, and that was like “oh, somebody's on our side!” That type of thing. I know that I still have lots of anger in me about it all. Partly because I was having epileptic seizures, and partly because I felt so helpless.

Part of the reason why I left Kahnésatake was because I just needed to get away from all that. In fact, I'm having a hard time even listening to people speak Quebecois. Because I'm just so pissed off at what happened. And its making me into a racist, you know. Like, I don't even want to listen to them speak. I just want to get out of there.

Even outside of Quebec, I still have a hard time showing my status card sometimes. I think its because I've got all this rage in me. Because I know that if anybody gives me a problem about it, I'll just scream and yell, and I don't want to have to do that. And there have been times where I have questioned whether I should wear certain T-shirts, with Native themes, because then it will be clear that I'm Native. Most of the time I'll wear them anyway, but sometimes I've decided not to put one on.

The individuals and families above have adapted to the hostility of their home environment in a number of ways—through silence and the appearance of assimilation, and through migrating to less hostile

environments at the cost of leaving communities behind. For the participants who negotiated this hostility every day, as children, the trauma sometimes resulted in a sense of shame over being Native, as the participant below described:

"When I was in grade school, I was told that I should go and scrub the dirt off my hands, off my skin. So I went and took a steel pad, to my skin, trying to rub it off. There was a lot of racism. The Native kids were picked on a lot. There used to be this one girl that lived down the street from me, her name was Stephanie. She was a white girl, who used to torment me on the way home from school all the time. One time, I was coming home with an Easter egg, and she wanted me to give it to her, and I said "No", so she threw water all over me. I used to pee my pants walking home from school because I'd run into her and she'd threaten me. I was terrified to walk home from school alone.

My grandparents would speak Odawa to me from time to time. But I used to get mad at them for speaking Indian to me. I thought it sounded stupid, and I used to say I didn't want to try and learn. I tuned them out—I put my fingers in my ears, so I wouldn't have to hear them speaking Indian. I was ashamed of it."

For others, there were more subtle incidences of shaming:

"I was a person, that's all that mattered. I could compete in sports, I could compete academically, and I was a person. All of our friends were white, except a couple of people that I knew were Metis but they would never admit it. I got in a lot of fights at school, from people that I didn't know, but then, I just thought "well, this is the normal way a young guy grows up". They'd call me names, but again, that never bothered me. My male friends, all through high school, didn't even think that I was Native, or had any Native blood in me at all, they considered me white. But then, they were all Ukrainian and Polish speaking, so they didn't know. They didn't even realise that I was different.

The only time it did bother me was sometimes, in high school, when they'd have the dances and things like that. I wouldn't really get out and mingle, except with my male friends. I guess I never thought I'd ask any girls out. It was probably a combination of being a shy teenager and being brown. I can't definitely say it was one or the other, but it was a combination of the two. I did feel that part of it was because my skin was brown. But it didn't last very long, I'd just forget about it, and we'd go on. I had a lot of friends who were girls, but not

any real girlfriends in my high school years. It was a combination of the two."

Some of the participants whose appearance does not target them as Native, have described their decisions as children in white communities to stay silent about their Native heritage, stemming in many cases from their embarrassment at the reactions they received on identifying openly as Indian:

"Once I say I'm Native, I feel a tension within white groups. I don't remember being singled out as a child—maybe, yeah, stuff like "Are you Italian? Spanish?" Stuff like that. If pressed, I'd say "I have a French-Canadian background". But I never could say "yeah, there's Indian"—because you know, once you say that, everything else gets erased, and you're an Indian. And this big silence spreads through the room."

7.5 SUMMARY:

Most of the families of the individuals interviewed had experienced not one but multiple episodes of state-organized or state-condoned violence, from institutions and from individuals. Taken together, certain trends can be observed. Over half of the participants came from families which had been damaged—in some cases devastated—by residential schools. Two thirds of the families had also experienced tremendous assaults on their legal right to be called Indian through the loss of status of a grandmother or a mother; most of the remainder had been legally excluded from this category by the *Indian Act* in the first place. The most devastating effect of these genocidal policies on the families of the participants was the manner in which they alienated the participants from their communities. In many cases, the effects of this loss of community, and of the relationship to the land which was intrinsic to it, are still being felt by their descendents two generations later.

Paul Gilroy has suggested that the identities of African diasporic peoples have been profoundly shaped by a legacy of racial terror in the

face of New World slavery (Gilroy, 1993). In looking at the histories of Native peoples in the Americas over the past 500 years, it is probably safe to say that if any experience defines them, it is that of indescribable and harrowing loss—of land, of community, and of culture. The violence of these losses has been manifested, to a greater or lesser extent, in every Native family, and has deeply shaped contemporary Native identity. For mixed race urban Native people, however, a common thread of this experience of loss running through their narratives has been silence—about their identities, and about their histories. In the next chapter, I will explore this silence, and the other responses of urban Native families to the legacy of violence and loss that they carry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RESPONSES TO A HERITAGE OF VIOLENCE: SILENCE, ADAPTATION AND RESISTANCE

“I think they tried as much as possible not to ever talk about being Native at all. So this is the reason why it's been such a pain for my mother to have somebody like me asking questions and talking, you see? It would have been better, in many ways, she thinks, if we'd never said a word. And even yet—I have a cousin who's over fifty years old, living in the city of Saskatoon. Now, there ain't no way he could pass himself as anything but Indian. And it's total denial, even now. Total denial. If anybody tries to accuse him of being Indian, they're in trouble.”

INTRODUCTION:

The family histories of most of the participants demonstrate that generations of Native people have faced genocidal violence through the multiple institutions of a society determined to erase their Nativeness. For those who lived outside of Native communities, in highly racist environments, the only way to try and assert some control over a difficult and sometimes dangerous situation was to try and avoid *acting* Native around whites.

From the participants' accounts, a crucial difference between the experiences of urban Native people and those who grew up in Native communities is the need on the part of urban people to find some way of managing intolerable pressures on their identities. People who grew up in Native communities (three of the participants, in addition to two others who spent significant intervals of their childhood on reserve) did not speak of facing the same kinds of issues as those who lived in all-white environments did.

For one individual who grew up in a northern Metis community, the memories of the intolerable racism she faced in the years when she lived outside her community have stayed with her:

"My grandma raised me until I was about eight. Now, in Beauval, everybody's the same, right? The only people that are different are the teachers, who are white. We used to think they were weird, and we wondered if they peed—stuff like that. They were so different, and so clean, and they lived behind this big high wire fence, you know, in a compound. They had a special place, you know—they had nice houses, and running water. And here we had our houses—no telephone, outdoor toilets. So to me, the only white people had been those teachers.

And then my Mom married, so we moved to Prince George. That's the first time I ever saw so many white people. In Grade Five, I spent the whole year in class with my face behind my hands. It's not an exaggeration—I spent the whole year like this. The kids would call me names. I was so shocked. I didn't know there were so many white people in my whole life—not to be prejudiced or anything like that. But for me, a nine-year old, all of a sudden, being different! I never told my Mom what I was going through. I lived in Prince George for five years, and that's the only place I ever experienced so much racism, and at such a young age."

Another woman contrasted the silencing around Nativeness which had marked her family's life until she was seven years old, with the sudden immersion in a Mohawk environment which resulted when her family moved back to the reserve. Her different positioning on and off reserve is reflected in her experiences of school:

"When I was in Grade one, in St. Jean, a woman who said she was Native came in to speak with our class. Thinking back on it now, I don't even know if she was. But she had long hair, and a headband on, and she sat down, cross-legged, on the floor, and talked to us about being Native. And I thought it was the coolest thing I had ever heard. And I went home and said "Mom, Dad—there was an Indian in the class today, and it was so cool". And they said "well, you're Indian". And I said "What?" And I got so mad that I couldn't share with the class that I was Native too—and that I'd never heard this before. I was totally pissed off at my parents. I think it was maybe one of the first times when you realize your parents aren't always truthful with you.

Being Native just wasn't brought up. It's because my Dad was in the air force, and looking to move up in the ranks. There was a lot of racism, and if you moved up in the ranks, you were definitely not Native. I think he knew enough not to talk about it at all. Especially when he had a family to feed. But when I was about seven, my father got early retirement. So he decided to retire on the reserve, and brought all of us back to Kahnésatake. I was called Frenchie at first, when I got there. I remember getting off the school bus and somebody yelled "go home, Frenchie". But it didn't take long for the "Frenchie" label to wear off. We went to an English-speaking school, in St-Eustache. All of the Mohawk kids—we went there on the Mohawk bus."

All of the individuals who spent most of their childhood and youth in Native communities entered urban life as adults at a time of relative Native empowerment; however, they have still felt considerable pressures on their identity in the city, particularly for the individuals who do not look Native:

"My appearance wasn't an issue, growing up on the reserve. Even going to school—like, from Grades Three to Twelve I went to school in Lakefield, which is twenty minutes from Curve Lake. Even then I didn't get much flak—because, you know, we were on the Curve Lake bus, and everybody knew either my last name, or the fact that I was from Curve Lake—so I never really got any flak there. But it's when I left the reserve, and came to Toronto, and was hanging out here that I discovered people had a much harder time believing I was Native. Identity wasn't an issue, until I left the reserve."

Many of the other participants, however, who grew up in urban environments, came from families where attempting to hide their Nativeness from the dominant society was their primary response to the many violences which shaped their lives. This response was never absolute, however. Many of the participants were also able to name incidences of covert resistance to the white status quo which their parents sometimes engaged in. Meanwhile, for the families of other participants—and for most of the participants themselves—their lives have been bound up in efforts to resist these processes, to assert pride in being Native, and

to recreate their lives as Native people in positive ways. In this chapter, I will explore both of these trends.

8.1 SILENCE AS A SURVIVAL STRATEGY:

For many of the participants who grew up urban, their families had developed a “defense mechanism” of silence around Indianness, in the interests of safety. Individuals were taught to avoid speaking Native languages in front of whites, or to do anything that overtly differentiated them from whites. For many urban Native people, this amounted to a permanent, life-long alienation from Native traditions, with high levels of self-policing as a form of protection.

“I can remember one time walking down the road with my brother. We were on our way to school, and I remember, I got really excited and started talking in Cree, some of the words that I’d heard from my cousins up north that summer. My brother, who was four years older than me, said “no no—don’t speak that language here”. So that was the kind of a message that I got. If you tried to do anything Native, you’d get into some kind of trouble. That was the way of life, then.”

The line between maintaining a strategic silence about Native heritage, and internalized racism and shame around Nativeness, is not always clear in the participants’ families. Two of the participants had parents who occupied relatively authoritative roles in remote northern Native communities. Both individuals grew up relatively segregated from the Native children around them; however, they have mixed opinions about their parents’ motives for this. One woman was caught in between worlds—unable to play with the Native children because her white father was a policeman and the community ostracized her, but shunned by white families for being Native. While her mother was on good terms with the Native people in every community they lived in, at home she often appeared to be complicit with her husband’s denial of their Nativeness.

“I grew up believing I wasn’t like Native people and that my mother wasn’t like them. Looking back at it now, it’s all so obvious. But, you

know, when you're in the middle of this dysfunctional family, it's hard to separate things and say 'Dad, you're being racist. Mom, you're being complicit'. When I was in Grade 8 or 9, I had a friend who was always allowed in my house. All my friends were welcome. But I was never allowed to go to his house. And finally one day he told me, "my Dad doesn't like Native people". And I remember being so mortified that I was being identified that way."

Another woman described how her mother kept her apart from other Native children when she taught in northern communities. This individual believes that her mother kept her apart from the Native community not only because she was white-identified, but because she wished to protect her daughter from tuberculosis and other diseases that were prevalent on northern Native reserves at the time.

"When my Mom went to teach in a northern Native community—one of the fly-in communities—we lived in the teacherage. There was a school, close to the church, and there was a little teacherage attached to the school—it had a kitchen with a little living room, and a bedroom upstairs, very small. My mother and I lived there. And the only people we visited would be the Scottish couple who ran the Hudson's Bay post. We would go and stay there on the weekends with them. And they would play cards, and their daughter and I were the same age, so we played. And that was our weekend. She went in there like a white teacher, I suppose—she was teaching the white system.

For the first year we were there, she didn't want me in the classroom with the other kids. I think it was because they had lice, and they were rough. So during the first year, she taught me by correspondence courses. I sat in the teacherage, doing kindergarten by correspondence courses, and she supervised me. I remember her standing in the doorway, sometimes, keeping patrol of the classroom, but also looking to see what I was up to. I'd be sitting in our living quarters, a little room separated by a door from the classroom, and she'd be in the classroom, but standing in the doorway, seeing what the hell I was up to. Because I'd get snoopy and I'd be into all sorts of things. She wouldn't have me sit in the classroom with the other kids. I think I did sit there in the beginning, but something must have happened, and I think she must have separated me after that. I remember being in the classroom at some point, but then I also remember, probably more so, not being in the classroom. So there

must have been a reason. But I don't remember, because you know, I was only five.

We were there together for one year, but then in the second year she put me in a Catholic convent in the nearest city, and I was there for grade one. I had been sick, with earaches, and there was no medication. It was hard for her to deal with that. I suppose if you were seriously ill, they would call the plane. She was concerned too because I had had an x-ray done, and they discovered that there was a haze on my lungs. Now, they said it's kind of common, in some kids—but my Mom was concerned. And I suppose that's the reason she put me in the convent.”

One participant, in describing his family's silence about being Metis, is careful about not always equating silence around Nativeness with shame. He notes that in an everyday sense, many people live their lives paying relatively little attention to their identities:

“We had lots of friends, for example, on one particular reserve that we went to, and they had the same name as us. My mother would always say “they're only a distant relative”. But there was still a lot of intermarrying. Like, my mother's sister married a status Indian. There were still a lot of relationships—but they weren't a big deal. They were just the way we lived, you know? I don't know if my parents wanted to erase our identities, or if it was just neutral, a moot point. I don't know. I want to be kind, you know, because I don't think it was always this big campaign to assimilate. It was just a taken-for-granted, everyday living kind of process. I don't want to ascribe much more to it than that”.

This individual, however, also noted that if the society's norm is to be white, even casual and common-sense ways of living for Native people in white society require adaptation to white ways, whether the individual is ashamed of being Native or not. A heritage of white supremacy, then, continues to assert pressure on Native people to assimilate, even in environments where there is relatively minimal overt racism or shaming over racial identity.

On the other hand, other Western Metis describe complex, angry attitudes within their families around the issue of their Nativeness:

“My grandfather’s sister was in a religious order, the Grey Nuns, all her life. She was one of two very visibly Native women in the order, her and Sister Greyeyes, both of whom worked in residential schools. Sister Greyeyes was raised with a comfort and great love for her people. My aunt wasn’t. Sister Greyeyes loved people, my aunt punished people. She punished people for speaking their language, or for being visibly Native. People who were not so visibly Native—they got more of her attention, she favoured them.

I’m not trying to condone her actions, but I try to understand her. I was with her on her deathbed. She had always been afraid that she would die alone. And she was surrounded by all of the sisters that she’d lived with most of her life—but for her, not dying alone meant dying with family. It was in February or March. There was this Christmas music—she threw the records across the room and she said “I don’t want that music. I want real music—fiddle music. She wanted those things that were real to her, that connected her with her sense of family, to the things that were important to her. And the things at the end that were important to her weren’t necessarily the religious community, it was her family. I asked her “ma Tante—how come you could never live as Metis?” And she just shrugged her shoulders.”

Some participants spoke about their parents’ internalized racism and how it interfered with their attempts to learn about their cultures:

“When I first came back from a pipe ceremony, I was eighteen, and still living at home. It was my first time, going to a pipe ceremony at the Native Centre, and it felt wonderful to me. But my mother made me get down on my knees and beg god for forgiveness for going to a pagan ceremony. And I could have cried, because I knew this was terrible.

Years later, when I was in my mid-thirties, she admitted to me for the first time that my grandma and grandpa used to always go to the sun dances. But of course all I ever heard about, and saw, growing up, was the holy water and everything like that. But yes—they went to sun dances!”

For a handful of participants, particularly the older ones, the manner in which their parents had deliberately separated them from Native environments has contributed to a permanent sense of alienation from their Native identity, even as they subscribe, quite wholeheartedly (in theory) to notions of Native pride. These individuals demonstrated a

profound separation in their minds between how they see themselves, and the “real Indians” that they feel they should be.

“I didn’t know my mother could speak Indian. But I have found since then that she did speak to somebody, as a young adult, in her language, so obviously she knew, and she did remember, but I never heard her say a word. I’m thinking “isn’t that strange!” All I ever heard were English nursery rhymes that she would read to me. I find it very strange.

My father was like that too. He’d talk about the Metis uprising out west, and the injustice of it all. Yet in another conversation, it would be “those goddamned Indians”. It would be kind of schizophrenic. I’m not sure he was aware that he was doing that. When I look back, I think “he’s talking like a white person, about the injustices to the Indians. That’s how he sees himself”. He was very down on Indian people. He hated them. Always admonished me to stay the hell away from those goddamned Indians. And yet his parents were at the Carlisle Indian School.

I think I would have been much more comfortable with my identity if I had grown up on the reserve, or if there had been some acceptance in my family. If they had even said “yes, we’re Native”. But instead, there was this negation of their identity. It was never spoken about. “We don’t acknowledge Nativeness, we don’t take it up, and if it’s mentioned, we reject it, reject it, reject it.” It’s very hard to get over that conditioning as a child, when you’re taught, because it’s your parents’ teachings.”

The individual below was extremely candid about her family’s efforts to separate her from the more negative aspects of being Native. Her words describe her sense of alienation from Nativeness, while at the same time acknowledging a deep connection that in some respects she fears.

“In a very calculated way, we didn’t have a lot of association with our relatives on the reserve. Like, they came to us—they would come over in canoes, or whatever, and catch porpoise, that sort of thing, and take it back. They were free to visit, so long as nobody was drinking. And likewise, when we went to the reserve.

My father didn’t usually come with us, and I think that’s because of him being Japanese, and having to cross the border to visit the reserve, and it being postwar. You know, the forties into the fifties. And so my mother would take us down in the daytime, and we’d never stay past dark. And you know, I still have that feeling. When

my uncle died, I stayed overnight on the reserve. It was the first time in my whole life that I ever stayed overnight—and almost the first time that I stayed after dark. It was just the way it was done—you went home before dark. Because you'd go down on a Sunday and you'd hear about who got stabbed the night before. And, you know, both my uncles were alcoholic. My mother in particular was very selective about which families we could visit. And some families we could only visit as a group. We were probably just as safe there as on the other side. But it was just the liquor. She was death on the liquor, so we stayed away from anybody that had any trouble with the drinking.

And so you grow up ashamed. And you think "why would I ever want to be associated with those drunks in the ditch?" It's a reality. And at the same time—I'm not the same, as them, either. Our experiences ARE different. But some of the distance comes from my parents' attitudes too, when I was growing up. "Stay away from them." Looking back, I'm surprised we even visited there at all. Of course, we had relatives there. But the message was always "don't stay over there. Don't let anybody in the house that's drinking."

The big difficulty for me now is that I don't belong anywhere. You know, I'm perfectly clear about that. I guess I just stay on the outside. I think I would be entirely submerged. I'd probably be out there sitting in a ditch with a bottle, too, if I thought too deeply about which side I really belong on."

Silence, then, as a tactic of invisibility, has been crucial to survival for the families of several of the participants, and in many ways it appears to have deeply shaped urban Native culture. The price of this silence, however, particularly when it has been accompanied by the removal of people from the communities which hold their history, has been the rupturing of many connections with the past, a sense of alienation from other Native people, and in some cases deep levels of shame or discomfort about their Native identity.

It would be a mistake, however, to equate silence with erasure of culture. Two of the participants were siblings, and both had different recollections of what they learned about Nativeness from their father during childhood. One participant was a woman, who has little

recollection of hearing about their Native identity at home. Her brother, on the other hand, who is slightly older, recalls his father telling him “be proud of who you are—you’re a Metis”. This individual, who attended a local school in a working-class area where there were Native students, found it relatively easy to reach out to Native people in his adolescence. His sister, on the other hand, who attended an elite, cosmopolitan high school, where Nativeness was romanticized but there were no Native people present, held on to notions of coming from a “noble but dead” culture until university, when she began to challenge her own assumptions and become involved in the Native community. Other participants have also confirmed the importance of position in family, in particular, in determining how much children learn about their backgrounds from their parents. For a few of the participants, the older members of their parents’ or grandparents’ generation grew up speaking their Native language and associating freely with Native people. The younger members, however, born after the parents began to internalize lessons about the importance of speaking English, or in other ways began to pull away from their Native heritage, had been taught nothing but English, and in some cases identified primarily as non-Native. [My own family showed this kind of variation across my mother’s generation.] It is important, therefore, to consider that the stories told by some individuals about their parents’ silence about Nativeness, and about cultural loss in their family in general, may not accurately express the full range of the family’s experience. Gender, class, age and position in family are only some of the factors that may have influenced what the participants were told about their identities, or learned about their culture.

It is also obvious that the apparent acquiescence to being silenced which several of the participants mentioned in their families was often tactical and usually partial. The parents of the participants had obviously

passed down enough pride in Nativeness to enable their children to take up a Native identity for the next generation—when it became safer to do so. Several of the participants discussed the fact that their parents had passed Native values on to them without overtly naming them as values from a specific culture. Humour, the importance of kindness, habits of avoiding direct questions, attitudes about the importance of family and respect for the sacred—these and other aspects of family behavior were attributed by several participants to the Native values they had learned from their parents, in French or English rather than a Native language, and without having them named as such. One individual describes his understanding of this, below:

“I think for anyone with a Native background who wants to learn about their culture and who hasn’t had access to it—which is most of us, including a lot of people on reserves—there’s some sense of loss. But you know, I don’t think we ever really lost the culture. I remember my grandmother, and different people in the family who were from there, from the Native side—there’s no overt teaching, and there’s no dogma or indoctrination or lesson plan or school to being Native. But I think it was there, from the beginning, from birth. And I think it was just something that is unconscious, and subtle. And yes, a lot of it has been lost—even the values and the ways of behaving and thinking, to a certain extent, that are seen traditionally as, you know, pre-contact Indian behaviour. But a lot of it is still there. No, you don’t have the medicines and what have you. The pipe isn’t coming out at a funeral or anything. But I remember going home once, and it struck me—how different they were, and how the values were different, and the ways of relating were different, and how easy it is for me to be comfortable in any kind of reserve setting. I don’t know traditional life—the language or the ceremonies, or anything. But I don’t feel like I got cheated out of it. Because I think that the people that came before me, they hung on, and they kept their values, and I think they were passed on.”

The impossibility of “losing a culture” was also taken up by some individuals, who challenged the notion that Christianity and residential schools could fundamentally erase who a people are. They conceded that

their heritage could—and had—been irrevocably altered, but saw the notion that it could be “erased” as an example of wishful thinking on the part of the dominant culture.

Some of the participants have related that the silence around Indianness that they remember from their parents was obviously not all that was happening in their parents’ lives. A few individuals have described how their mothers were active in the urban Native community, with organizations such as the North American Indian Club of the 1950’s. These mothers, paradoxically, played a part in sowing the early seeds of the contemporary resurgence of pride in Native identity, even as they were silent about Nativeness at home. Perhaps they were prevented by non-Native husbands from expressing Native identity openly in their home lives. Perhaps they had internalized teachings from residential school not to speak their Native language around non-speakers. In any case, for these mothers, the fledgling urban Native community (which they played a role in developing) provided them with a safe place for expressing themselves as Native people in ways that they apparently could not do at home.

One woman described how her mother had cultivated a network of Native friends in Toronto which formed the core of her social life. This woman attributes her present leadership role in the community to her mother’s influence.

“Even though I grew up in Toronto, there was this very strong Aboriginal influence in my life, socially. My mother’s relatives would visit us from time to time, and we’d go up there, to the reserve, to see them. The other thing was that my mother was active in the North American Indian Club. It was a social club that was the beginning of formal institutions in the Native community, here in Metro Toronto. Basically, it was working people—people who were getting calls at 2 o’clock in the morning from other Native people for all sorts of things. They also just wanted to get together and associate with one another and talk to each other. So they’d have these dances at the Y that used to be on College street, where the police department is now. I remember they would have these little Christmas parties for us, and

there'd be all of twelve kids attending! That was about the size of the population who had families who were connected and were doing this sort of thing. And then I used to get shipped over to my cousins. I used to idolise one of my cousins—she was a very adventurous girl, and we'd have so much fun. And then we'd go to visit my mother's friend over in the beaches. There was another family there—they were all boys. So there was this network of Aboriginal people, even though we didn't all live next door to one another. And if I think about who my influences were in my young life—it was those people. And that's the building of identity.”

Another participant described how her mother would take her and her sister every summer to stay with friends of her father in a nearby Native community, even though it was a very difficult journey to make. She considers these regular visits to be critical to her sense of herself as a Native person, despite attempts by others in her family to disavow their Nativeness.

“When my father died, I was only three years old. But before he died, he made my mother understand that it was important for us to have regular relations with Native people. So my mother made a promise to him that she would take us to be with his Native friends, in their village. My father had been adopted, so he didn't have connections with his own community, but he wanted his daughters to have contact with Native people, to understand their way of living, through his friends. So my mother took us there every year. It was hard for her, because we didn't have a car, so we had to go by public transportation, and we had to walk a lot, and my sister and I were very young. And sometimes my sister was sick, and she had to hold her. It was really hard. But she took us every year, in the summer, for about two or three months, to be with my father's friends in their community. And that was great, because we grew up doing that. They considered us part of the family.”

Three other individuals reported that their sense of their own identity had been strengthened simply by the fact that their fathers did not deny Indianness, even if they did not assert it. These individuals, whose parents were too dark to be taken as anything but Native, received numerous subtle messages throughout their childhood which encouraged

them to challenge dominant culture assumptions, even though their being Native was not openly discussed:

"I remember being four or five, and asking my parents why the cowboys always won. And I remember the feelings in the room. My mother, who was white, answered "well, because they had better weapons". But my Dad's answer was "well, they didn't ALWAYS win!". I think that was one of the first times that I had a conscious awareness that there was Indian background in our family."

8.2 OPEN RESISTANCE:

Some of the participants had very different childhood experiences from those above, of knowing themselves as Indian because their parents were openly Native—often in defiance to intense pressures to silence them. For some of the parents, who waged individual wars to assert their identity, the cost was high.

"My mother is very interesting! She has always identified as a Native woman, always. It didn't matter whether she grew up on the reserve or not—my mother is very proud to be Oneida. It might be a little bit dysfunctional and unhealthy the way that she expresses it. She'll be in relationships with non-Natives, and she calls them "white man". And she wanted to put a blockade up on her driveway when Oka happened. And she can drink any other Indian under the table. She believes that she can put spells on people. She believes in bearwalking. My mother is not afraid of anybody. She grew up as the only Native woman in her school and in her neighbourhood. Somebody only had to throw rocks at her once, she'd fight right back. Her own Dad told her to get the hell out there, don't be coming in here crying—get out there and fight your battles."

One woman whose family had experienced generations of silencing about their Native identity, nevertheless grew up on the family's traditional land—the only remaining members of her band in Canada after the other band members were driven down into the United States. It was because they stayed on their ancestral land that they maintained a sense of themselves as Native people. Their sense of their own identity was strong enough, even after two centuries, to enable them to wage a

seventeen year battle in the courts with a small New Brunswick town, to win legal title to the last remnants of their Aboriginal land holdings.

A few of the younger participants had activist parents who succeeded in changing discriminatory laws and building the institutions which shape the Toronto urban Native community today. While one participant was estranged from her father for most of the time of his political activism, another has described the changes which his mother's activism, around Native women's rights, made to his family:

"We were a very political family, very aware of our rights, very aware of human rights in general, which is what the issue started out as, for our family. It subsequently turned into a focus on Aboriginal women's rights, and I guess largely in part because the Indian Act was discriminatory towards women, very obviously. It was the late sixties, early seventies, it was a time of a lot of activism. But it has changed our lives."

It is impossible to understand the lives of urban Native people without an awareness of the extent to which their families have had to struggle to assert a Native identity in a hostile white environment. Often challenged by reserve Indians for their lack of knowledge of traditions, or for the fact that their families appear to have attempted to assimilate, mixed-race urban Native people must be understood as coming from experiences of diaspora, of being forced to adapt to urban circumstances from positions of relative weakness. Their struggles to build a base for their families in urban settings may have involved apparent acquiescence to the ways of the white society in some ways, combined with covert or open resistance in others. Their experiences, however, must be understood to be *Native* experiences, and the lives they live in the cities to be new hybrids of older ways. The fact that the current generation of urban mixed-race Native people are reclaiming their heritage is testament to the success of their families' survival strategies.

CHAPTER NINE

WHITE FAMILY AND NATIVE HERITAGE

INTRODUCTION:

Mixed race Native people have another parameter to their identity apart from their Native heritage, one that is shaped to a large degree by their non-Native family. This is not often taken into consideration when mixed-race Native people discuss their identities. Particularly for those individuals who by appearance look “all Native”, the presence of white family members is frequently dismissed as if irrelevant to an otherwise Native identity. In this chapter, I will focus specifically on the experiences of the participants with white family members. In general, the participants’ experiences have been extremely varied; however, because of the differential treatment of Native men and women under the *Indian Act*, a distinct set of differences in the participants’ family lives have emerged along lines of gender, with significant implications as to whether Nativeness has been openly included or has been reduced to a covert identity, in the participants’ families.

9.1 RELATIONS WITH WHITE FAMILY MEMBERS:

Four of the participants came from families where both parents were mixed-race. Three of these individuals, however, reported that in their families one parent was more light-skinned and mixed-race than the other, and asserted considerably more pressures than the darker-skinned, “more Native” parent to assimilate to the norm of the dominant culture. The fourth reported that while both of his parents attempted to push this assimilationist agenda in the family, neither were capable of passing for white, and both spoke a heavily Native-inflected French. All other participants had one Native and one white parent, with the exception of one individual whose non-Native parent was Japanese. The participants, whether light-skinned or dark, reported a complex range of experiences

with their white family members, which were nevertheless strongly shaped by gender dynamics. Very different sets of experiences were reported by those with non-Native fathers and those with non-Native mothers.

9.1.1 Families with Non-Native Fathers:

Two individuals had white fathers who left their mothers when they were born. Four others had fathers who were racist and in some cases abusive both to their mothers and to them. In each case, these were white working-class men from England or Ireland, whose social positions and job prospects were generally insecure:

“My father knocked me unconscious when I was four years old. I was doing something that he didn't approve of, and without even thinking, he hauled off and hit me so hard I got knocked out. I woke up in my crib with a cold cloth on my face, and hearing him talk to my brother and saying “maybe we should give her a spanking”. When I thought about that, I realised, at a very early age that there was this thing called force and power, and depending on where a person was coming from—they would use it. My father sexually abused both myself and my brother, and probably other children as well, in my family. He also told my brother that my brother could never be as good as him, because he wasn't a white man.”

“My father's family is from the Orange Society—Presbyterian, from Ireland. My parents were only sixteen or seventeen when they got me. And his parents totally disapproved of their son being with an Indian woman. When my Dad went to jail, my Mum lived in Guelph with them for maybe a weekend or a week. They set my mother up. They gave her money to go out drinking while they were looking after me...all to prove that my Mother was neglecting and abandoning her children, that she was a drunken Indian mother that was unfit to look after the kids. I think they even went as far as calling the police, and Children's Aid.

My parents must have been together off and on for at least six years, to get the three of us kids. My Mom left him because he went after my sister. She wasn't eating some meal, and that pissed him off, and he picked her up and threw her across the room, and knocked her unconscious. That was it. He only did it once, and that's when my

Mom left. My Mom's rule was "you can hit me, but not the kids!" So she left."

Three of these individuals described their fathers as far less competent and resourceful than their mothers, and one described his father as very troubled:

"My father couldn't really keep an occupation. He was an alcoholic, and he was a very mixed-up man. I mean not all whites are mixed up, but he was, he was one of them. Very, very....lost."

For all these participants, a kind of war had raged in their families, between mothers who would not be easily dominated, and insecure fathers who used different kinds of violence, including racism, sexism, and/or physical and sexual assault, in efforts to assert domination, not only over their wives but also over their children.

Two women whose fathers were from non-Anglo backgrounds describe quite different family dynamics from those above. One woman described the ambivalence which her father's Italian working-class family demonstrated towards her Nativeness:

"When my Mum got her status card, my father just assumed he could use it too! He used to take it and bring it to the stores—"that's my wife's....I get tax exempt off." And he gets involved when they go to the gatherings, he comes along. On the Native side of my family, they were very open to the fact that I was Italian and it didn't bother them at all. But on the Italian side—they know I'm Native, but it just doesn't seem to be brought up. They don't think it's fair that Native people can have a separate justice system and stuff like that. There's some resentment, because I got funding to go to school. They ask me to buy stuff for them with my tax card, but when it comes to Native issues, they usually disagree. They're all very fair-skinned. When I was growing up I felt like it mattered, because I was darker. Me and my sister and my Mom are the darkest. I'm not too sure if it's what they said or what they didn't say, or their actions—but that's just how I felt. I don't know how it came, and I don't know why—it's just something I was very conscious of, growing up."

The other woman, whose father was Japanese, described her father's efforts to support her family's land claim, while at the same time encouraging assimilation to the Anglo-Canadian norm. She saw his efforts to promote assimilation as motivated by fears for his children's survival in a hostile white environment.

"After my mother died, the town council informed my father that not only couldn't he stay on the land, because he had no Aboriginal right to it—but he had to move out of town. They didn't even want him in the community. And here he was, with seven kids! That's when he went to the town council, with his old army friend, and some big Indian, and the town council backed right off, and we stayed. After that he did as much investigation as he could, about our land claim. He was virtually uneducated, but he wrote to Diefenbaker, he was in office at the time, and A.M.A. McLean who owned Connors Brothers—he was a member of Parliament. He tried to get some help, or find out how he could get a deed for the land for his kids. He had responses. And there was a Mi'kmaq man that he became associated with in the process—he visited us, and stayed at the house, that sort of thing. But when Dad went to visit with him—we were kept at a distance. He didn't want us mixed in with the "Mickymacs"—he had quite an accent, and that's how he pronounced it. I think it was a matter of survival, for him. Because of his experiences as a Japanese person in Canada, he believed you had to integrate."

Two individuals described very positive relationships with their fathers. In each case, however, the participant's Native identity was something which was not discussed, even if the parent supported their children's efforts:

"I don't know if my father even knows that I'm pursuing my Native heritage, because we never get to that sort of stuff. We just have this relationship, that I'm his daughter and he's my Dad, and we just deal with that. Because when we see each other, we often don't have a lot of time, so we don't get to anything beyond that. We don't really know each other that well. He's never ever said anything bad—you know, he's always stuck up for Native people, tried to educate people to the best of his ability. I don't know...I hope that he would be supportive."

“My Dad is one of the most generous, hardworking, and caring people, in terms of being there for other people. He's always been that way, all his life. But when it comes to these kinds of personal issues, about identity and stuff, I've tried to get him to talk about it, but he never will. When I got married, I made myself a white buckskin dress, with fringe and beadwork. And I had my hair in wraps, and I had a shawl. And we got married in a park which was part of my husband's traditional land base. My husband wore a ribbon shirt, and braids, the whole bit, and his hair was long. My Dad gave me away, and I thought it must look really really odd—here's my Dad, really white, in a suit, and here's me in this outfit. But he was totally cool about it. He wouldn't say what he really thought, but his actions showed that he was fine, that it didn't bother him; he was proud to be there. It's been very strange. He's been totally silent on the issue of our claiming back our Native identity. But from time to time he'll say something that makes me realise that he thinks of it as valid”.

A handful of the participants described this phenomenon—that their relationships with white family members were friendly, but that the terms of this amicable relationship involved silence about Native identity. Demanding this silence from Native children or grandchildren seems to have been a common tactic by white family members who wanted close relationships with their children or grandchildren but could not or would not negotiate racial difference:

My family on the white side are a very proper, upper class white family. English-Irish, with fancy china and proper meals and all of that. The fact that we were Native wasn't something that they talked about. It wasn't something that they avoided—it wasn't something that was not to be talked about. But it's just, you know...they talked about their family. Like, "this was your grandmother..." on their side, you know?

Other than the participant whose father was Japanese, only one other individual had a father who had entered his wife's world, supporting her activism and living near her Native community as her partner. It is important to realize the extent to which the white patriarchal attitudes which lay behind the behavior of most of the white fathers is enforced by

law. The *Indian Act*, which denied Native status to Native women who married white men, also prevented non-Native husbands from living in their wives' communities. The two instances where the husbands were able to enter into their wives' communities were highly anomalous, in that one father was able to live on his wife's traditional land next door to her reserve because the land had not been made part of the reserve, while the other father decided to buy a farm adjacent to his wife's reserve so that their children could be brought up in touch with their mother's community even though they weren't able to live on reserve. The mother of this participant had been active in the struggle to get the *Indian Act* changed, so her husband's supportive role extended to activism as well.

9.1.2 Families with Non-Native Mothers:

The individuals whose fathers were Native and mothers non-Native, on the whole, described entirely different sets of family dynamics. First of all, the same laws that had deprived the Native mothers of their status and forced them to live in their husband's white society enabled the white wives of status Indians to take on Native status and enter Native society. The white society's beliefs around gender which shaped this legislation also shaped the attitudes of most of the white women whether they gained status through their marriages or not. Most of them had been brought up to assume that they would enter the worlds of their husbands.

The notable exceptions to this were the three families where the mothers were from elite Anglo-Canadian backgrounds, where the privileges and ethnocentrism involved in being from Canada's "ruling families" made these women automatically expect that their husbands would adapt to *their* culture. In all three families, the fathers were upwardly mobile Metis men who acquiesced in this process. In all other instances, however, it was far more common for the non-Native mothers to at least attempt to enter into Native life than it was for individuals whose fathers were non-

Native. In this apparent willingness by white women to enter Native environments, however, both positive and negative dynamics ensued.

Some mothers, working-class white women married to heavily-assimilated working-class Native men, saw Native culture far more positively than their husbands did, and encouraged their children to be involved in learning about their culture:

“My mother would tell me: ‘I’m Native and I’ve got to learn my heritage’. She enrolled me in—I believe it was a Friendship Centre—down in Regent Park. They were bringing the Natives back—trying to teach us language, dancing, beadwork, and traditions. I was going to that for quite some time. One day, I was out at a powwow, and I’d been dancing. When I came home, my hair was still down, and I had my outfit over my arm. My father saw it, and he flipped. He told me never to tell anybody that I was Native, and he’d better not catch me in that f—ing stuff again”.

Another participant described how her white mother was more interested in her father’s African Cherokee heritage than he was. While wavering on the brink of being a “cultural tourist”, she wholeheartedly took up an anti-racist agenda, even when it involved stepping out of the picture at times:

“My mother was actually more into my father’s cultural heritage than my father was. I don’t recall my father too much. He was more interested in his family. My mother was more interested in things at an academic or cultural level—I mean, into the notion of “other cultures”, the Other part. But I remember when our schools were first integrated, and we were having all these problems. The Black kids were getting beat up every day. And the school decided that they were going to hire security to patrol the halls for us, right? So they hired these white security guards—and of course, we got our asses kicked, right? I mean, we were always the ones being suspended... So the African community organised a boycott of the school. And so my mother pulled me out of school, and went to organising meetings in the community, with me. But she was barred from attending, because she was white, while I was let in. And it caused me a lot of distress at the time, but it didn’t cause her any. She understood, she supported it, she was cool with it, you know.”

Two mothers, on the other hand, were described as “wannabees”, drawn to appropriating their husband’s cultural background because it was perceived as exotic.

“My mother claims that her mother is half Mohawk and half Scottish, and that her father was German, possibly Jewish. My Dad say's she's lying about being part Mohawk, that she's a wannabe. I don't know what to believe, because I've seen pictures of my parents when they were younger and still together, and she was dressed up in Native regalia, and my father says that she used to sing around the big drum, and that she used to fancy dance at powwows. So on the one hand, he's acknowledging that she was part of Native culture, and then on the other hand he's saying that she's a wannabe, so I don't know what to believe.”

“My birth mum is white, and she's a real wannabe. It was her who first introduced me to the Native community, where she really wanted to be accepted as the mother of a Native child. Then I started meeting people, and that was the extent of our contact, because the Native community's attitude was like “thanks for dropping her off—goodbye!” We had to fight it out about that, and we haven't been the same since.”

Some mothers appeared to be attempting “personal empire building”, making their husband’s Native culture an arena where they could overcome their gender and class subordination in the white culture, and do their life’s work among Native people empowered by their whiteness. One mother groomed herself to become a teacher in her husband’s community, becoming relatively fluent in her husband’s language, until his abusiveness forced them to separate. Another mother attempted to play a strong leadership role in community organizations in her husband’s community; however, she was frequently rejected because of her patronizing assumptions about Native people. In each cases, despite their aspirations to the contrary, these women were forced to “walk the walk” and take on the difficulties of Native life. Below, one woman

describes the issues her French-Canadian mother encountered while living in her Mohawk father's community:

"When my Dad retired, he said "I worked 20 years—it's your turn!" As if my mother hadn't been working. She was going nuts—she had nine kids, and they were all still at home. I was just in Grade Two. I think she tried to work for the band office for awhile, but she wasn't really trusted, and it didn't last too long. Then she started getting into Native crafts. A lot of women would come to this little house in the village—and she would teach them weaving, and try to make money that way. She'd get up at four a.m., and start working on her stuff, when everyone was still sleeping.

Unfortunately she treats Native people a bit like children. And you don't do that with Native people. She didn't understand that. She'd been married to a Native person, had Native kids, been living on a reserve since 1969, and she still didn't get it. She still asks questions like "why don't Native people do this, or Native people do that?" She judges us from a different value system, and I don't think she understands that.

My mother is paradoxical. She has told me that she is separatist. At the same time, during the Oka crisis, she was fighting on our side. She was more or less supporting the Warrior side—there were at least seven sides to be on during the Oka Crisis.

She doesn't live on the reserve anymore. She's decided to move off. She's been through hell and back, and I think it's time for her to have her own life. She definitely gave up and said 'I want to be out on my own, and far from people'".

Two of the participants grew up with white single mothers who had left their abusive Native husbands. One individual reported her mother being quite supportive of her Native identity, while the other, whose mother was attempting a political career, had to negotiate silencing on certain levels from his mother, relating to her not wanting to be publicly identified as the mother of a Native child. Both individuals had to deal with racism from their white grandparents:

"Well my grandparents on my mother's side, who are white, tended to say, whenever I had problems when I was a teenager 'that must be the Indian in her'. They would attribute any negative qualities—gaining weight, having a beer with dinner, anything—with being Native."

Three of the participants had grown up in families where their mothers were of elite Anglo-Canadian backgrounds and their fathers were upwardly mobile, highly successful Metis men who did not assert the importance of Native culture. The two female participants (but not the one male) reported that their attempts to reassert Native identity were being taken up in negative ways by their mothers. Family holidays in particular were sites of conflict, where white mothers saw Native traditions as invading and taking over the space where they were accustomed to enjoying their own rituals.

Both female participants reported having tremendous difficulty in being accepted as Native by their mothers. One woman reported that as the whitest-looking member of her family, her mother tended to minimize her Nativeness, and at times even dismiss her attempts to reclaim a Native identity. Another woman, more visibly Native, recalls being caught between her grandparents' racism and her mother's subtle denials of her Nativeness. The two issues which the female participants struggled with involved their white mothers' difficulty in negotiating racial difference across bonds of gender, combined with the levels of power their mothers were accustomed to enjoying. For white women from wealthy Anglo families, accustomed to taking up space and seeing their values reflected everywhere, having to accept their daughters' participation in cultural traditions they could not share was difficult for them to accept.

As conversations with a number of participants revealed, denials of Nativeness from white family members are frequently highly strategic. Generally, white family members attempt, through the use of common-sense racism, to eliminate what they see as "the threat" of Nativeness, with its potential to de-centre the unspoken authority they claim in their families as whites. One light-skinned Metis man described how his

father's family denied his Nativeness in a clear desire to maintain white authority as a core family value:

My father's sisters just dismiss my Nativeness! They say "aw....we have as much Native blood as you do!" That's their response. And I say "No you don't". Because there's a pride in my life, in being Metis. And they don't want to acknowledge that pride, or validate our heritage, our history, our culture."

Two Native adoptees described at length how threatened their adoptive families were when they began to openly embrace their Native heritage. While both sets of parents had always known that their adoptive children had at least some "Indian blood", their reactions to their children's attempts to claim a Native identity suggest that for these families, Nativeness is only tolerable as a subordinated identity:

"When I was growing up I would talk to my Mom about being part Native, and wanting to find out stuff, and she would say 'Well, you know, there's a reserve about a half-hour's drive from here. Why don't you go to the powwow?' And I remember, clearly, being under sixteen, not having my licence even. And here she is, saying 'well—we're not going to block you if you want to go to the powwow'. And I'm thinking 'You're insane! You want me to just hitchhike that far, to a reserve I've never been to?' So that's just an example of how my Nativeness was taken care of when I was growing up.

And then, after the reunion with my birth family, she starting making little digs about how 'We brought civilisation to you.' She had never talked like this when I was growing up. This was just in reaction and in resistance to what I was starting to learn. I'd go home, and they'd be putting little digs in about Native people, or they would just shut me down. I'd start to talk about something Native, and they'd go 'Oh well, I went shopping the other day...'—they would change the subject. And this went on for awhile. Like, during Oka, I came home for my Dad's fiftieth birthday with an armband on. And it was this big deal from my mother 'Don't you start a fight during your Dad's birthday!' So I said 'I've got the armband on, but I'm not saying anything!'. And then all my aunties wanted to hear about it. But I just said 'Nope. You don't want to wreck my Dad's birthday'. You know, all this stuff was going on. There'd be little conflicts like that, all the time.

I think it was somewhere around '95 or '96 that I finally said 'I'm not going to be able to come home anymore. Most adoptive families

break down, and this one's about to. You're about to lose me.' I had this big meeting with them, it was a pretty big deal. I'd been coping, coping, coping. So after that last big scene, I didn't go home for a year. I told them 'If you want to see me, I'm in Toronto. And not to go to the CN Tower, but to come to Native events. I really fucking mean it. You guys don't have to be Native, but you're going to have to learn that this is a part-Native family, and this is the only way we're going to be able to make it work'. They came to a Native Tae Kwon Do event, and they came to my Native Theatre School graduation. It's always hard, though, because I have to be the one that sets all these conditions. I have to be willing to risk losing them, to get them to meet me half way, and that's really hard. I get really fucking tired. I can eventually make it work—if I'm willing to do all the work. But that's kind of like this core thing with me anyway 'If I can make it work, I'll make it work'. I have to sometimes realise that other people need to do some work too, you know."

This individual also described her mother's paradoxical behaviour as she was reluctantly drawn into defending her daughter's Indianness in the presence of other non-Natives, while still fighting her daughter's manifestations of Nativeness at home.

The other adoptee, however, reported that her adoptive family has never been able to accept her Nativeness, and that her identity will always in some ways be seen as a threat:

"My parents are just really Eurocentric. I've come to understand that they really do see life from inside a bubble. The only thing they know about Indians is what they see on TV. This is my mother's line: 'I am so sick to death of hearing Indian people whine about having a lost culture...you didn't even have a culture in the early sixties! You don't ever hear anything about the good white people that took all of you in!' That's what I had to live with, growing up. And it's only been recently that my mother said to me 'you know, I saw some Indian people on TV the other day, they were really doing something with their lives'. That sort of sums up what they thought about Indian people. They told me I was Native when I was really young—but we never talked about it. I was just the little brown white kid. They were supportive of me finding my birth family—but they sure went through their white guilt when I started claiming a Native identity. They would never talk about it, until I started questioning things and then...oh, you bet, I just felt my mother's anger, and her rage. My mother said to me, five years ago,

that if she had to do it over again, she would never have adopted an Indian. If you can believe that. I was doing all this heavy-duty mother issues stuff in therapy when I heard her say that—‘I would never have adopted an Indian!’ Just what I needed to hear! Thank you! I just don’t think they’re ever going to change. There’s only certain ways that I can say things that they’ll hear it. Or I just won’t talk about it anymore, because they’re just not going to change.”

Many of the participants described a fundamental impasse between themselves and white family members around the subject of their Native identity. While a handful of the individuals had parents who were genuinely supportive, and a few more were “won over” after considerable struggle on the part of the participants, for the most part, white family members demanded silence about Indianness, and a Native identity not subordinated was usually seen as a potential threat to the identities of white family members. It is precisely this “non-negotiable” aspect of Native-white relations—to generalise, the manner in which white Canadian identity *demand*s Native subordination as the only possible form of relationship—that forces many mixed-race Native people either to entirely embrace their Native identity or to leave it behind. The cost of having to maintain such boundaries between their Native and non-Native identities is high, however, particularly for the participants whose white appearance makes the choice of an uncompromising “Indianness” as a racial identity almost inherently contradictory. For mixed-race Native people, who may already be dealing with silence from Native family members about Indianness, and with denials of their Nativeness from the white society in general if they do not fit hegemonic notions of what a Native person is, trying to negotiate family ties with people who may find Nativeness intensely threatening often requires them to live multiple identities between family and community—or to continuously fight to bring the disparate worlds together.

CHAPTER TEN **RECLAIMING A NATIVE HERITAGE**

INTRODUCTION:

Given the histories of oppression and loss which the participants inherited from their Native families, and the frequent denial or subordinating of their Nativeness from white family members, reclaiming a Native heritage has been an extremely important aspect of the participants' lives. Each of these individuals has made a conscious decision to attempt to challenge assimilatory pressures within their families, to learn the traditions of their heritage, and to assert pride in a Native identity.

For about a third of the participants, reclaiming their Native heritage has been a relatively unambiguous process. In some instances, regaining pride in Native identity has required prolonged intervals of healing from abuse, and in overcoming experiences of shaming. On the whole, however, for these individuals, their Aboriginal identity has never been in question. Through being reserve-based, or through their appearance which marks them as Indian, they have seldom felt confusion about their identity, even if they have not always felt pride.

The remaining participants, however, have all had to struggle in some way or other to assert their Native identity in the face of the white society's ideas about what "an Indian" is. For those individuals who are white-looking, or who do not have Native status, or who did not grow up on reserve, negotiating a Native identity in the middle of hegemonic rules about what constitutes Nativeness, rules which often negate their own experiences, has been a difficult task. Below, I will explore some of the experiences of the participants in reclaiming a Native heritage.

10.1 INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INDIAN:

Three of the participants grew up, or lived for many years, in their Native communities of origin. For these individuals, growing up around Native people gave them a relatively uncomplicated sense of their own identity. They knew they were Mohawk or Ojibway or Metis, and that their lineage and heritage was based in that community. Many of the people around them were relatives, and although one individual was teased because he looked white, and one was occasionally called “Frenchy” because her mother was French-Canadian, nobody externalized them from their community because of their appearance or bicultural identity. Everybody knew that they belonged there. Even when they went to school off-reserve among whites, the fact that they were bused in with other Indians, were related to them, associated with them, and shared the same cultural assumptions, meant that they were always treated as Indian by local whites.

These people all faced different contradictions with respect to their identities on leaving their communities. The white-looking individual, in particular, found his Native identity daily being challenged, both by Native people and whites. In general, all three individuals found the changes to the way they were viewed quite difficult to negotiate initially. Ultimately, however, living off-reserve, in a climate of relative Native empowerment, has not seriously shaken their sense of who they are.

Six other individuals, although urban-based from birth, are dark-skinned and Native-looking enough to have always considered themselves Indian. Three of those individuals grew up with positive identities around Nativeness, through involvement in the urban community in Toronto since childhood, and with periodic visits to their mothers’ reserves. While two of these individuals were non-status until 1985 when the Indian Act was changed, their mothers continued to bring

them to their reserves, where they had enough of an extended network of relatives to ground them with a sense of their own identities as Ojibway people of specific communities.

Three of the participants grew up with shame at their Indianness, through their families' alcoholism, or through childhood exposure to racism and other forms of abuse. For these individuals, reclaiming a Native identity has been a long and difficult process, involving intensive self-nurturing, and adopting a traditionalist lifestyle involving sobriety, fasting, ceremonial life, and other aspects of a Native spiritual path. Each has achieved pride in their Nateness through this process.

The fact that these individuals have managed to overcome their sense of shame at being Native does not mean that this is an inevitable outcome for individuals damaged by racism. Two of the individuals struggled for years with substance abuse problems before managing to turn their lives around. A third found herself identifying with Black people, as a way to avoid confronting her own Indianness:

"I didn't want anything to do with Native people for so long, when I was a teenager. I had never gone out with a Native person. The first person I willingly started dating was Black, and after that—from '79 or '80 until I left my ex-husband in 1990, I only dated Black men. Most of my activities were with Black people. I was in their homes most of the time, and surrounded by that culture. That's where I wanted to belong—I felt welcomed by them, and comfortable there. It was a place where I could belong, and it wasn't questioned. I even had my hair in dreadlocks for awhile. I wore a red, gold and green hat, and I went to the Twelve Tribes of Israel meetings. I used to read the bible every day. I never smoked pot, which is part of the Rastafarian culture, but I went out with a few Rastas. It gave me an identity that I felt I could clasp onto for a while, and that helped me. It wasn't until I left my ex-husband and was going through my divorce procedure, that I started asking myself "Who the hell am I?" And I started hanging around the Native Centre, and it started becoming like a home for me. I was there every day for awhile, talking to people and just hanging out. And I'd go and see Elders, and go to women's circles every month. I volunteered, being a helper at the Elder's conferences. I started really

realising that I am a Native person, and I don't have to be ashamed of it. I don't have to try and be Black or white. I can just be me."

Whether the participants had to struggle with internalized racism, grew up proud of their heritage, or simply took Nativeness for granted as intrinsic to their identity, identifying as Native has been relatively less confusing for these individuals than for the other participants. While each reported having experienced some sense of self-doubt at some point in their lives about their identity around issues of status, appearance, or living on reserve, this had ultimately not been serious enough to challenge their sense of themselves as Native people. For most of these participants, reclaiming their culture has involved concerted efforts to learn about their traditions, as well as family and community history.

10.2 THOSE WHO HAVE RECLAIMED A NATIVE IDENTITY:

For about a third of the participants, choosing to identify as Native has been a process which initially required some adaptation, but has still been a relatively straightforward process. These individuals are, for the most part, the children of one Native and one non-Native parent, who grew up off-reserve in environments where their family was silent about their Native identity. There are also two individuals who were adopted and had their Native identities obscured.

Some of these individuals are Native enough in appearance that they always knew or suspected they were Indian, but they were kept so apart from Native communities that this was seen as irrelevant to their identity. Others, however, who look unequivocally white, have overcome what they see as significant contradictions to claim their birthright as Native people. For all of these people, a crucial process in their lives was how they came to understand themselves as Indian.

Some of the individuals who always knew that they were Native have described their alienation from their Native identity as they were

growing up—an alienation made almost inevitable by their white parent's racism:

"My father was one of the most racist people in my life. He loved me more than life itself. But he was very racist. He did not like Native people. When we were living in one northern community, he had a little dog, who he trained to bark at Indians. He'd say "look at the Indians, look at the Indians", and the dog would go up to the window if an Indian was walking by, and bark. That dog was trained to hate Native people. And I remember participating with that, in some respects.

I had a huge group of friends who were very multicultural—French, Italian, German—there were a lot of different nationalities. But I never had any Native friends. A lot of Native kids from further up north used to get taken down to that community to spend the school year. But I never really associated with them. Sometimes some of them would come to the house, because Mom knew them from her work—but I was always really uncomfortable around them. They were just so different from me! These Cree kids, they wouldn't say Boo, they were so quiet, and shy. Here I was...into New Wave, doing my hair up and dying it blue, all kinds of things—and here's these kids coming from up north, who weren't anything like me."

For other participants, alienation had less to do with family attitudes than with the cutting off of cultural knowledge in their family, coupled with stereotypes from the dominant culture:

"I guess when I was a child, nobody pretended my Dad wasn't Native. And it was a source of pride, I guess, because it seemed romantic or heroic. We didn't grow up in an area where there were any Native people, so, I think in the absence of Native people they become very romantic. As long as they've been removed, they are very romantic. If there's a community down the road, or if half your school is a bunch of breeds, they're no longer the romantic noble savage. I grew up in a place where the Noble Savage still existed. In part, I was buying into the exotica of my heritage, as a kid. I didn't feel that there was anything I could connect to, because there was no Native community around. So it was just, sort of, the dead romantic Indian, and we were part of it. That's what we had to claim."

For this individual, beginning to identify as a Native person involved confronting a profound sense of loss and pain, of suddenly realising that all of her life she had been cut off from her own roots, and of beginning to

realise that Native people were *her* people. Most of all, however, the sadness came from feelings that she has been unable to describe in any other way than as ancestral memories:

"I was so sad for my family, my grannies, and my grandfathers, and my great-aunties and my uncles, all those people—they were all there somewhere. All of a sudden I discovered those people. Something came through—all this sadness came out. And for me that's been part of my understanding of what my Native heritage means. Whenever I've felt insecure about claiming my Native heritage, I've always gone back to that sadness, and said "I do have a right to claim myself as a Native person, because I feel so emotionally rooted in that. That's what gives me my right to claim myself as a Native person". And to look at it in more concrete terms, I guess, I can actually look at my father and see the suffering that he's had in his life. I can see it. When he talks about certain times, I can see the suffering that he's had to come through. So it's there, and it's visible, and it's very real."

For some individuals, the transition from a non-Native to a Native identity has been marked by trauma. One extremely fair-skinned, blond-haired individual described her experiences below:

"I always knew my mother was Native, but I never understood that this meant that I was Indian, or part Indian, or "non-status", or whatever. My mother is dark, she has dark hair, she has a very Indian nose, the hook nose, and she always expressed that she was Native. I guess everybody in our neighbourhood knew that my mother was Indian. And when the extended family would visit us from the reserve, I knew that they were all Indians. But to me, that didn't mean that I was Indian. Because if you looked like me, how could you be Indian?"

The changeover, for me, happened overnight. There was this ethnic, cultural day at school, and we invited parents from different countries to come to the school. Now, my principal at the time used to be my mother's teacher, long ago, so he knew my Mum was Native. So he sent a request letter home, inviting my mother to come to the school and give some kind of dialogue or speech about being Indian. So...that night I learned how to make corn soup, my Mum taught me how to make corn soup. She went and got me a deer hide dress from one of my aunts who lived up here in Toronto—with some stupid thing that men actually wear, a bustle, and did my hair in braids. So she had me all dressed up—and I think she smoked up before she went to

school, smoked a couple of joints, probably had a couple of drinks, for courage. And then, in front of the whole school, from kindergarten to Grade 5, everybody was assembled in the auditorium, and my mother came out, to all those kids as an Indian woman. I don't know what the hell she talked about. I can't even remember, it was such a traumatizing day for me.

And so my identity changed overnight. As soon as it got out that my mother was Indian, other kids identified me as being Indian—before I even identified myself as Indian. But they didn't call me Indian, they called me halfbreed, they called me squaw—yeah, those two words were used the most, squaw and halfbreed. They only identified me that way because they saw my mother. So that was my coming out experience. And still, I didn't really feel that I was Native.

I didn't really start identifying that I was Native until I was about seventeen or eighteen. I got into a fight with this other Indian woman, who had come to town. She was probably about 40 years old, and we'd all been drinking, and for some reason, she started calling up our place, and giving us these harassing phone calls. She got on the phone and she said that word "squaw". I said "that's fucking fighting words, man—I'll be right up!". So I went uptown, and marched up the stairs, and banged on the door, and she came out, and came downstairs, and we took it out on the street. My Mum was there with me. My Mum took on one woman, and I took the other woman. I ended up in jail, drunk and disorderly. They kept me in overnight. I'd had all this drink, and the cops slapped me across the face. They told my Mom "we would have let her out hours ago if she would've just shut up".

Up until I was seventeen, there were only those two incidents that identified me as Native. Both of them were totally bizarre and traumatic experiences. To me, it was like saying "this is what it is like to be Indian!"

Adoptees in particular have described how confusing it is to undergo an often disorienting process of understanding themselves as Indian and beginning to work in the Native community as Indians. One participant, whose adopted parents had been told that she was "one-eighth Indian", describes how she first heard from her birth mother, who was white, that she was half Ojibway, a mere two weeks after she first decided to find her birth parents. It was her mother who introduced her to the Native community, at the time of the Oka crisis:

"I first got really involved in the Native community during the Oka crisis, and that was with my birth mum. She took me out to the first protest, and I started meeting people. Oka took over my whole life, and because of that, everything happened so fast. I had my first Native boyfriend who was this asshole, and I ended up homeless. Then I started working at this Native agency, and on my first day, some guy came in and looked at me and said "white people are taking right over", and the Executive Director at the time ran over and said "no, no, that's your sister", and the guy kept apologising to me for about four years after that.

It was awful. It was all too much. I was just this bratty little university student who had thought she was white, and was pretty shut down emotionally, and had been just partying a lot. And I'd had a breakdown just before all this happened. So I'd been through two major life changes—three, if you count Oka—and all within about two years. I think I'd already been dissociating slightly, and I just started splitting off more, to fit all these new roles. I think that's how I handled it. I probably would have taken it a bit more slowly, if it hadn't been for Oka, but that just overwhelmed me."

A significant aspect of "coming home" for this woman happened two years later, when she finally managed to find her father's band and get in touch with his family.

For another adoptee, getting in touch with her birth family brought her first sense of belonging as a Native person. However, she still found entering the Native community to be a traumatic process, although absolutely necessary for her own identity:

Throughout my life, I'd mostly worked in social services. Non-Native people would say to me "how come you don't work with Indian people?" And I'd always say to them. "Oh, you know, some day". I was afraid, you know, because I honestly believed I would not belong within my own community. And then I worked for a Native agency. I worked front-line, and I had culture shock like you would not believe. And people were mean, you know—they were saying "you fucking white woman!" It was really hard, and I made a vow to myself, after a year at that agency, that no matter how long it took, nobody would ever fucking call me a white woman again. It wasn't about appearance, it was about experience. I was brought up very white, very trained in that system, and that's what people were reacting to. But then, at the Christmas party they did a drum ceremony for me.

There were 150 people there, and I was just blown out of the water. They welcomed me back into the community. I had this migraine headache going into the Christmas party, and after the 150 handshakes and hugs—this is the power of touch—the migraine was gone. There was this very special honouring ceremony for me when I left. And I got a note in my box once that said "welcome home to your community, back to your own people". The learning for me was that all my life, I didn't think I was going to belong. But all my life, the people always saw me as a sister, as one of them. But I didn't know that. I didn't discover that until I put my foot into the community."

In general, while taking up a Native identity has been difficult for the participants who never knew they were Indian, the individuals who knew they were of Native background but whose Native identity had never been valued have described their experiences in the community as a process of being welcomed home:

I didn't have great marks in high school, so the only way I could get into university was through the Native studies diploma program at Trent. And I thought 'okay, well, I can spend a couple of years doing a couple of Native studies courses, and I'll just blow that, and continue on with what I love, English literature'. Well—surprise, surprise—that didn't happen. I ended up one credit short of getting my honours degree in Native studies and community development. So there was a real shift in my life at that point. I took Ojibway, and was taught by the elder that I was really something special and that part of me needed to be nurtured and loved. I shouldn't try to pretend my Nateness wasn't there, because it wasn't gonna go away. So I got more into it, and more into it. And then, you know, I left university realizing that I wanted to focus my career on working in my community, with the women in my community. I moved to Toronto, and got my first job at one of the Native agencies within a week of moving here. I've been working in my community every since—that's six years ago.

Perhaps it is this welcoming which is crucial—for most of the individuals referred to above have reported that they now feel extremely positive about their identities, and feel very much at home in the urban Native community.

10.3 CONTRADICTORY AND HYBRID NATIVE IDENTITIES:

For about a third of the participants, however, there has been no magic “resolution” into Nativeness from a childhood alienated from Native contexts. While all of these individuals identify as Native, some of them do not feel that they will ever really be accepted or at home in the community, because of the profound silencing and separation from their Native identities which they experienced growing up, or because they come from families with more than one generation of intermarriage and assimilation. Other individuals claim hybrid Native identities because their ancestry is multi-racial, or in other ways is too complex to be reduced to a straightforward “Indian” identity.

One woman, raised by her white mother, has described the difficulties in having connections to her heritage in the face of her Native father’s abuse:

“My mother had always been very positive about encouraging me to relate as Native, and been very positive about my father—actually to the point where that was probably an additional factor in me not mentioning the abuse for such a long period of time, because she was so positive, you know, that he was a really good person, which certainly in ways he is. But I think, over time, I had so many difficulties, largely as a result of the experiences that I had with my father, that worrying about whether I identified as Native or not became less of an issue. The most important thing for my mother was that I was okay, and that I stayed in school. Education has always been extremely important for her. So I think we had to give up on some things, because I had a really rocky time as a teenager. I was running away all the time, and survival was more of an issue, basically.

I tried to spend a summer in my father’s community when I was twenty-four, just before I entered my master’s program. But my father was living in the community at the time, and it was a very difficult summer. I realized that I wasn’t going to be able to have a father-daughter relationship with my father. If anything was going to develop in the future it would have to be on terms as adults, and in a completely different setting.

I have very little connection with any Native community at all. So if anything, I just feel a complete absence. You know, seeing a Native person is supposed to be a positive thing, if you're at an event or something, its supposed to give you strength, even if you don't talk to them. Whereas for me, when I see a Native person, I don't necessarily feel that connection. I'm not always recognized by them as a Native person, and that's a problem, and I'm also not comfortable just walking up and talking to anyone under most circumstances, since I'm usually fairly shy, so that doesn't help. But the fact remains—I don't feel that connection."

Two other individuals who grew up during the post-war years when assimilation was the socially expected norm, and who did not develop a strong awareness of, or pride in, their Native identities until they were approaching their fifties, have described how a lifetime spent in ignorance, or silence, about their Native heritage, combined with growing up off-reserve, or not looking Native enough has made it difficult for them to feel at home anywhere:

"I don't belong anywhere. I don't know much about my Native background. And with my appearance, I have great difficulty wearing any jewelry, or anything Native like that. Every time I do, I feel like a wannabee. And they make sure you don't speak the language. Our language was almost lost. When my uncle died a year and a half ago, nobody was prepared well enough to chant for him."

"I don't feel totally comfortable with identifying as Native—its like taking up a burden. And there are times when I just want to be me. And me is not an Indian person, the me that I know. I'm working through this, and it seems that my identity is not as a Native person, it never was—its an artificial thing that I'm taking up now. And even though I'm conscious and working on it, I still feel false with this. I'm not saying "oh, I don't have Native ancestry", you know—I acknowledge that—but just because you have physical or genetic connections, the culture doesn't come along as a particular gene or chromosome, you know?"

And I do feel the tension. Once I say I'm Native, I feel a tension from white people. However, if I'm in a Native group, when people find out

I'm not from a reserve, then I also feel a tension. So I don't feel comfortable within either group."

Further discussion with both individuals in fact revealed complex and contradictory ties *both* to Nativeness and whiteness. The problem for these individuals is less a matter of not belonging anywhere, than living in a polarized society where whiteness and Nativeness are not admitted as existing in the same person. One person discussed some aspects of her "double identity" below:

"I was so angry, going to Ottawa, and listening to the tourist spiel. I figure all the visitors coming to Canada hear about how the Native peoples are some...motif in the corner. You know—the lies, the glossing over. I remember going through the parliament buildings, this great stone edifice, and the carving, and the architecture, and everything—this huge monolith sitting there....squashing Native people. You know what I mean? You just want to bomb it! That really hit home. I thought "This is the enemy". Its like at that point I stopped being a Canadian, you know? Seeing this righteous edifice, with these giant oil portraits of all these white people who have been members of parliament, and all that—it's just this mecca for whiteness!

And yet, at the same time, I see myself as white-identified! I can't get rid of it—I can't take that off! And I'm not pushing myself anymore—because I figure, I'll get myself all traumatised here. I can't deny or rewrite who I was. Because I still am that person. With a new awareness, and a claiming of identity—but I know I won't make a full transition. You'll never see me walking around wearing feathers and beads. Although I have this idea that I will make a Native dress, with the beadwork and all that, one day. Whether I ever get to do it—and if I do, whether I actually wear it—who knows?"

Some of these individuals have made it clear that they continue to see themselves as Native—they simply do not feel at home either in the Toronto urban community or at their home reserve. Others are more ambivalent—they acknowledge that they come from Native families, but deep down inside they do not *feel* that they are Native.

Two of the individuals who are very white-looking have Native parents who were removed from their communities through being

fostered out or sold. A third was not told anything about her Native background by her Native parent (who is now deceased). Of the three individuals, one knows what community his grandmother came from, while the other two have no idea. For all three, the “double whammy” of having their knowledge of family history cut off at their parents’ generation, combined with their own white appearance, has resulted in a clear sense of being outsiders. While all three of them need to be involved in the Native community to affirm their identities, they also find it stressful to be around urban Native people because of the way in which they are usually taken for white, and viewed with distrust in Native environments. All three of them have managed to assert some control over how they are treated by functioning only in carefully-delineated spaces within the urban Native community—at specific agencies for example—where they have already been accepted as Native. Each, however, mourns in different ways the fact that they have been separated from their home communities:

“I miss the fact that I don’t have connections from what I call the “home group”, the Dine. I don’t have any family—I don’t even know anybody who’s from the same clan as I’m from. Its very isolating. Part of the reason why I keep going back to the south west, is that I keep hoping that eventually I’ll have the nerve to actually find out where I come from, to go there, and see who the people are, face to face. But I’m really scared, because I’m afraid they might reject me. Here, if I’m rejected by people I can always say “yeah, they reject me because I’m Navajo, what do they know?” But to go back there and have them reject me, that would be hard. And I’ve heard, from some of the people that I know from here who’ve travelled down there, that Navajo people sometimes challenge them “How can you be Native, you’re too light”. Because Native people from up here are lighter than people in the south west. Now that’s hair-raising for me, because if those people are too light to be accepted, what are they going to think about me? All I can do is hope that there is somebody around who’s enlightened enough not to judge on the basis of skin. There’s been so many wannabees that they’ve kind of ruined it for people like me. It tends to

keep us quiet. I can't understand why there are wannabees. Who would want the pain?"

"Things are kind of strained between my father and I, but I still see him. I have two aunts here in Toronto—one's a sister of my Dad, and one's a half-sister, I guess. They do go back up north quite a bit, to Temagami. And I guess my Dad has one aunt that's up there, who's quite old now. But I've never been up there. There's no connection. What am I supposed to do, show up there and say "Hi! How you doing?" I can just see it, them saying "who's this white guy?"

"I grew up in a middle-class white neighbourhood in Edmonton. We don't know what reserve my father's mother came from. We think she had a little bit of Irish blood in her, but she had status, and she lived on a reserve, and she went to a residential school. And I know my father had stories about going to the reserve when he was a child. On his father's side, they're Metis but very assimilated. He rarely told us about his early life. We were aware of our Native identity, but we just weren't told anything about our culture. We were told "Be proud of being Native" but then they didn't teach us anything about BEING Native, you know? I think the thing for me is—most of the time I'm trying to become comfortable with Native people. I know this sounds ridiculous to a lot of people, but when you are surrounded your whole life by whites, you understand the white world very well—but understanding the Native world is a different thing."

One white-looking, non-status woman has found a niche for herself in the urban Native community by following urban traditional teachings, offered through a number of Native community organizations. This individual is from a family which has been on their land for over a century, but off-reserve. She speaks longingly of how much easier it would be for her to be accepted as Native in the region where her family comes from, where her family is well known in Native circles.

The above-mentioned individuals have all managed to negotiate Native identities in contexts where they do not entirely fit primarily by enduring the contradictions in silence. A handful of the participants, however, insist on more complex notions of what constitutes Nativeness, and understand their Native identities as being hybrid. These individuals tend to be those who have higher levels of education, who have been able to engage with identity politics and who claim the right to be free to step back at times from the demands of the Native community, in order to be able to define themselves more fluidly—in a sense, more accurately—than in dualistic ways. For the remaining participants, however, particularly those who lack a high school education, the only way to manage the contradictions of a having a mixed-race identity that is something “in between” the rigid poles of “Indian” and “white” has been to force-fit their lives into the categories available, and to use brutal clarity, silence, denial and humour to deal with the ways in which they do not fit these categories.

10.4 CLASS AND NATIVE IDENTITY:

It is important to consider other aspects of how the participants’ class backgrounds affect their sense of their Native identity. First of all, however, I will describe some of the ways in which race and gender intersect with class when examining the participants’ lives.

One of the central issues to consider when looking at mixed-race Native identity is the extent to which being mixed-race provides the participants with economic privileges. In examining the participants’ economic circumstances, it appears that two trends are happening at the same time in the Native community. On the one hand, individuals who grew up with white family members or in white adoptive families demonstrated clear access to economic privilege growing up that those who grew up with Native family members did not have. On the other hand,

the struggles of the past generation of activists have resulted in increased treaty benefits, particularly in the field of education, which have created an emergent Native middle class whose primary field of employment is within the Native community. For these individuals, looking Native can occasionally be an asset in terms of employment. Because of the higher-than-average education level of the participants, many of the darker-skinned individuals were of this class, and as a result, among the participants in this group, there was little present correlation between skin colour and economic privilege.

It is impossible to look at the relationship between class and skin colour without taking gender into account, however. The dark-skinned Native women who achieved middle-class positions did so primarily through their years of work within the Native community, while the men, dark-skinned or light, seemed better able to thrive within the white society as well as in the Native community. Only one of the dark-skinned woman had attained a successful career in the business sector; however, she had given up her mid-level banking position to work within the Native community.

For the most part, the dark-skinned women involved in the Native community had undergraduate degrees as well as masters degrees, as did the one dark-skinned male who held a comparable position in the Native community. By comparison, the three female participants who were working on Ph.D. degrees were all light-skinned, and all reported a degree of alienation from the Native community. It was clear that these women were building careers within academia rather than the Native community, not only because their light-skin privilege enabled them to do so, but because they felt their identities would be too continuously challenged in the Native community. Two of the women stated that they hoped to function as cultural “bridges” within academia, to challenge the exclusion

of Native people within academia and to encourage darker Native people to complete Ph.D's.

Because six out of the eight males were light-skinned (three of whom looked entirely white), and both dark-skinned men were economically successful, it was difficult to draw many conclusions about race and privilege with the men, except to note the extent to which they seemed to be able to thrive not only in the Native community but in white-dominated organizations. Even the darkest individual, an older man who had grown up within the intense apartheid framework which characterized all aspects of Native life until relatively recently, was a highly successful individual who had worked overseas in engineering for years. In this respect, it appears that gender privilege has played a significant role in the economic empowerment of the men. It was also obvious, throughout the interviews, that the light-skinned males appeared to have less problems, in terms of facing challenges to their Nativeness, in building careers within the Native community, although all of them talked about the difficulties they had initially faced being accepted as Native people. Two of the six light-skinned individuals had held leadership positions in Native organizations. One of the younger men, a graduate student whose appearance was ambiguous, clearly expected that he would make his living through Native organizations as he grew older. One of the white-looking individuals was a lawyer, while another was a relatively well-known playwright and author. The sixth individual, whose appearance was somewhat ambiguous, had a Grade Six education, but nevertheless was a well-known local artist and entrepreneur. Unlike light-skinned women, for whom challenges to their Nativeness were continuous, the light-skinned men were initially challenged, but ultimately were accepted as Native. Being female was clearly a liability for the light-skinned participants.

There was also considerable contrast between the options available for male and female participants at the lower end of the economic spectrum. The light-skinned man with a Grade six education was able to thrive as an artist and entrepreneur, despite his prison record and a history of drug addiction. The three women, however, two of whom looked white, were all on welfare. Clearly it is impossible to consider the relationship between light-skin privilege and economic privilege without taking gender into account.

In considering how class background or class position affected the participant's sense of their Native identity, it is important to consider the weight of the stereotype that permeates Canadian society, which links Nateness to poverty, and lack of education. This stereotype seemed to occasionally be operating among the lighter-skinned participants, or those who had grown up in white families; however, some of the less educated dark-skinned people also demonstrated the sense that Nateness was automatically associated with poverty. While this issue will be taken up more closely later, when exploring internalized oppression, one issue that I will consider here are the differences in the attitudes of those individuals who saw their class positions within the Native community as the results of the work of a generation of activists who came before them, and those who saw their class privilege as coming primarily through association with white family members.

For the individuals who saw their education as the fruits of a generation of Native struggle which had preceded them, work in Native organizations was a natural progression for them. They saw themselves as having been groomed for these roles *by* the Native community, and saw their empowerment as being inseparable from Native empowerment generally. On the other hand, the participants who saw their class privilege as coming primarily through association with white people—

individuals who had been raised by their white parents rather than their Native parents, or who had been adopted in white families—saw their class privilege as being at odds to a Native identity that they associated strongly with poverty. They felt that their class privilege separated them from the Native community, largely because it was associated with a “white” lifestyle. While all of these individuals were working at some aspect of Native empowerment, for many of them their work was generally being done at some distance from the Native community, and it was clear that these individuals did not feel capable of taking leadership roles, as compared to those individuals who saw their growing class privilege as coming from their treaty rights as status Indians.

Two of the participants described their sense that class separated them from the Native community in definitive ways. One woman saw her own class privilege as separating her from a lower-class Native “norm”:

“Class is a big factor. People won't accept that, because with a lot of Native people, they're coming from a lower-class background. I'm not from a high class, or even a high middle class background, but there is a certain class difference. Like, I don't like country western music. I play classical—not because I'm a snob, but because it's the only thing I feel calm with.

We were sort of “upwardly-mobile working class aspiring to the middle class”, you know. The clothes had to be just so, and it had to be quality. Being a single child had a lot to do with it—how many Native people are single children? I never had to share anything. My room was my domain. I had the tap-dancing, the ballet lessons, the acrobat training, piano lessons, art lessons. I was put through all this...and I just grew up thinking the world was my oyster, you know. I had no problems. I chummed with white kids.

I always say that class sometimes makes more difference than race. Because class recognises class. If I hear somebody talking, and they look brown or black, but they're talking my language, with my accent, I think “you and I understand each other—we come from the same place. We talk the same language.”

The other individual, who was from a Native culture that had always been strongly class-based, did not automatically associate Nativeness with

poverty. What she found, however, was that the everyday dissonance between a middle-class academic life where there were virtually no Native people present, and everyday encounters with Native people who almost invariably seemed to be on the street meant that class-based divisions represented an almost impossible barrier between her and other Native people, in an everyday sense:

“When I was younger, and I fit more into street life, I would spend time with Native people on the streets. And they had a lot to offer. I mean, there were definite problems, and it's not an approach that I'd try again, in terms of living or anything like that, but some of them were really good people. I don't feel ashamed around street people, but I feel a great deal of pain when I see our people on the street. And in that respect I'm very uncomfortable with my own position. When I was younger, in my early twenties, I would always try and give money, and talk to people. Now I'm reaching a stage where I really need to do something more concrete than what I'm doing. But at the same time, I don't think I could go work in a shelter and be accepted easily. I think that the perceived class difference would separate me from people there. I was recently at a talk given by Howard Adams and he described educated Indians as “bourgeois Indians”.

It becomes very difficult, I mean, if I'm walking down the street with white academic friends, and I see a street person there, and I can see their discomfort, and there's sort of a real pull, in that sense. How do I act, what should I do? Do I try to make my white friends feel comfortable, or what?”

In discussing class issues with the participants, it is clear that on the one hand, class issues are linked to some of the participants' sense of the viability of their own Native identity, because of stereotypes rooted in the dominant culture which link Nateness to poverty and lack of education. On the other hand, it is also clear that even individuals who are aware of these stereotypes and do not subscribe to them find that because of the sheer overrepresentation of Native people at the bottom of Canadian society, and the relative rarity of Native people in academic circles, their lives within academia feel extremely disconnected from the realities of most Native people.

One of the adoptees spoke about the stereotype she had encountered within the Native community, which suggested that high achievement was “a white thing”. She spoke of her experience in re-entering the Native community, of feeling that she should stay silent about her relatively high levels of achievement at school or risk being told she was “too white”:

“I came from a very goal-oriented group of people, and yet I encountered expectations from the Native community that I should just reject all that in order to be Native. I had a big talk with Chrystos when she was in town, and I said “I was listening to something really clever that you said, and I started to cry because I realised I’ve been dumbing myself down all the time so that people aren’t gonna say that I’m too white”. And I was just weeping in the car with her. I told her “I came from a really fucking smart school, and I’m very smart! And in trying not to look white, I’ve really suppressed all that. I’ve been trying to play it down, so that Native people don’t criticise me. And now I’m just getting to the point that I can sometimes really resent and hate the Native community for doing that.”

As the participants struggle to maintain and manage their Native identities, it is clear that each individual has had to negotiate a series of internal assumptions around what Native identity is—about what constitutes Nativeness, about the effect of racist stereotyping and the relative importance of status, blood quantum, appearance, and being reserve-based. These issues will be taken up in the next section.

SECTION TWO:

**WHO IS ENTITLED
TO CALL THEMSELVES NATIVE?**

**APPEARANCE, STATUS, AND URBANITY
IN THE LIVES OF
MIXED-RACE NATIVE PEOPLE**

INTRODUCTION:

“What does being Native really mean? What does being mixed-race mean? What does “not Indian enough” mean? All of those things have always affected me because, more often than not, Native people will say that about me, or other people. And I wonder about this when I catch myself doing it. What is it about my insecurities, about my own culture and background, when I pull that on someone else?”

As the last section demonstrated, over a century of segregation in reserve communities, coupled with intense racism in off-reserve settings, has created a relatively narrow, powerful and cohesive sense of Native identity. While reserve experiences fluctuated tremendously depending on the region, until relatively recently most of these environments were characterized by the fact that Native languages were spoken there, that individuals were capable of acquiring at least part of their livelihood on the land, and that some knowledge of the oral traditions was passed on despite significant suppression. The fact of relatedness—of being maintained in a social circle by ties of kinship—was probably the most sustaining feature of these environments. The apartheid nature of the society that Native people faced off-reserve also contributed to a visceral sense of “Indianness” for people who lived within the mainstream. For the participants of this study, all diasporic individuals living in non-Native environments, their sense of their own Nativeness is tied to the fact that their families have been shaped by the highly particular sets of circumstances that Native people have been forced to deal with.

Contemporary ways of conceptualizing “Indianness” may originate with these relatively coherent experiences of shared circumstances; however, as Joan Scott notes, our experiences are *mediated* through

language (Scott, 1992).¹ Our ways of understanding our experiences, and indeed, who we are, are facilitated by selective memory, by “active remembrance and zealous amnesias” (Nixon, 1995:160) which create a sense of shared identity in which certain “Others” are almost inevitably excluded. Particularly in communities which have been profoundly affected by colonization, identity is almost inevitably shaped to different extents by this process of exclusion, by what Rob Nixon calls “the violence from which wholeness, sameness, origins, shared extraction, and assurances of rooted community are born” (Nixon, 1995:161). In this respect, the family histories and contemporary identities of some of the participants have been profoundly “Othered” by commonsense notions of what constitutes Native identity in contemporary Native circles. While other participants lives’ have been more in conformity with this sense of a cohesive Native identity, all of the participants, in one way or another, have had to deal with the fact that at least some aspect of their identities violates common-sense notions of what constitutes “real” Indianness. This section, therefore, focuses on how hegemonic images and definitions of Indianness impact on the lives of the participants—on their understanding of their own identities as Native people, and on how they evaluate the identity claims of other Native people. Most profoundly it is about struggles over entitlement to Indianness which are waged *within* and *between* Native communities—how individuals take up the rules and images created by the colonizer, and use them to measure their own and others’ Indianness—and how individuals and groups within these communities undertake ways of subverting these rules. Three sets of issues considered in this section are appearance, status, and urban/reserve distinctions—

¹ In focusing on how our identities are *constructed*, I do not wish to suggest that other ways of understanding identity, such as blood memory, or other aspects of *embodied* identity, are invalid. Arguments against essentialism, against “naturalizing” difference,

how divisions between Native people along these lines are maintained and challenged.

Appearance:

Urban Native people live almost entirely surrounded by and interacting with white people and eurocentric institutions, where the tendency to fragment and objectify Native identity—to place the whole weight of who a person is on how “Indian” they look—is the norm, and where there is a high premium placed on white notions of Native “authenticity”. Embedded in this colonial context is an urban Native society, which, although highly influenced by the white society, also operates with an entirely different set of assumptions around what constitutes Indianness, depending to a far greater extent on whether the individual has Native status and grew up in a Native community, but where appearance also counts, albeit for completely different reasons than the white society’s obsession with “authenticity”.

The tremendous edifice of racist imagery about Native people circulating within the dominant society has significantly affected how Native people see themselves, in terms of skin colour, and heightens the different issues which light-skinned and dark-skinned individuals have to face. For a little less than half of the participants, the primary problem around “race” that they face is everyday racism, and the disempowerment and denial of their humanity that it represents. For the other participants, however, their primarily problem around “race” is the dismemberment and objectification of their identities in the white society—the persistent and overwhelming denials of Indianness which they have to negotiate from non-Natives, and the painful reflection of this which they sometimes find within the Native community. The first and

are effective ways of challenging oppression; however, I do not at present believe that anti-essentialism is the “final word” on how individuals live in the world.

and second chapters of this section, Chapters Eleven and Twelve, focus on the relationship between appearance and Native identity, and the different ways in which this issue affects dark-skinned and light-skinned individuals.

Status:

Unlike any other racial group in Canada, Aboriginal people have had their identities legally defined by the federal government. When the Canadian government took upon itself the right to define who is a Native person, it usurped the rights of Aboriginal peoples to define themselves and imposed a racially-based category—"the Indian"—to define the identities of dozens of different peoples who are extremely diverse, culturally and linguistically. The legacy of this colonial violation of Native sovereignty are the numerous contemporary conflicts around the issue of Native status—its importance, the difficulties in acquiring it or having it reinstated, its divisiveness, and the extent to which Native people have accepted and even endorsed having an external standard to determine their Indianness—which lie at the heart of Native identity issues in Canada today. The third chapter of this section, Chapter Thirteen, focuses on the participants' experiences with respect to Indian status.

Relationship to Land:

While the participants' opinions about the importance of Native status vary widely, the fact remains that Indian status currently controls who actually has access to Indian land. The crucial issues of who gets to have reserves and who does not, and of who gets to *live* on those reserves and who does not, based on the racist and patriarchal logic of the *Indian Act*, resonates with all the identity contradictions of how status has historically been determined, and who has been externalized in the process. On the other hand, given the virtually landless condition of contemporary Metis people and non-status Indians, we also have to

consider the role which colonial regulation of Indianness has played in enabling contemporary status Indians to protect the special status of Indian land, to ensure that the last fragments of this land do not pass out of Indian hands. From this perspective, the divisions among Native people between those externalized by the *Indian Act* and those controlled by it is simply the price which must be paid to keep some land in Indian hands. These divisions are lived as struggles over authenticity *between* Native communities—where notions of who is “more” or “less” Indian hinge on who grew up on Indian land and who did not.

Issues of entitlement are not simply a matter of Native people internalizing colonial categories, however. Because land is linked to the physical survival of Indigenous peoples, the biggest issue driving struggles over entitlement, over who should legitimately be considered Native, is the very real need to assert *some* form of viable boundary maintenance between all members of Native societies, however defined, and members of the dominant culture, to ensure that those who possess Native land are actually Native people. The colonial project, of fragmenting Native identity to control and limit entitlement to Native land, thus remains a central issue in this era of decolonization, as Native peoples struggle to undo colonial categories and revive traditional forms of boundary maintenance between nations.

On the other hand, from traditional directions, we can see that there is another story to land altogether. Within Indigenous traditions, land is central to the survival of the people *as* peoples, and this is just as important to emergent urban Native identity as colonial definitions have been. For most of the Indigenous nations, their languages are intricately linked to the land itself. Below, Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong describes the relationship between land, identity, and her N’silxchn language:

As I understand it from my Okanagan ancestors, language was given to us by the land we live within...I have heard elders explain that the language changed as we moved and spread over the land through time. My own father told me that it was the land that changed the language because there is special knowledge in each different place. All my elders say that it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher. It is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks. It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die. We survived and thrived by listening intently to its teachings—to its language—and then inventing human words to retell its stories to our succeeding generations. It is the land that speaks N'silxchn through the generations of our ancestors to us. It is N'silxchn, the old land/mother spirit of the Okanagan People, which surrounds me in its primal wordless state (Armstrong, 1998:175-176).

Anna Lee Walters, in describing the teachings of her Pawnee and Otoe-Missouria family, has told a story in which an Elder speaks of his language as being the language of the land, springing from specific territories, and how it is the language of all living things in that territory:

He said, "It is important and curious to remember that everything we two-leggeds know about being human, we learned from the four-leggeds, the animals and birds, and everything else in the universe. None of this knowledge is solely our own." He laughed at what he had just said, and a night hawk answered him... "Everything we are was taught us, you see? This is what the stories are, the teachings of who we are...That is why we need the stories. Without them, we grieve. For ourselves, for direction, for meaning...All these creatures and beings out here talk", the old man said, and motioned to the forest. "Even today. They told our elders a lot"...He continued talking Indian. "I speak the language of the universe. This is the same language spoken out there" (Walters, 1992:30-31).

From the traditional teachings of many nations, we see that the need to protect *specific* lands and maintain them as Indigenous territories is crucial for the cultural survival of the Native peoples for whom they are a homeland. This is why the colonial acts of mapping and renaming the land are deliberate acts of aggression, part of a long-

standing attempt on the part of the colonizer to render meaningless the ancient and intricate belief systems of the Americas and supplant them with a colonial culture, and why remapping the land to its Indigenous contours, its traditional names and uses, is vital to cultural regeneration.

Ultimately, struggles over entitlement do not stop at urban/reserve boundaries. The fact that resistance to land encroachment, or struggles to regain appropriated land, are often led by elders and traditional leaders who may have nothing to do with the bureaucracy who administer contemporary First Nations (or who may even be marginalized and have their legitimacy denied by that bureaucracy), suggests that divisions around issues of entitlement, created by the *Indian Act*, go even deeper than on reserve/off reserve divisions, to the heart of Native identity on the reserves. However, in the context of this study, urban/reserve divisions, and the implications of landlessness for urban mixed-race Native people are the main issues we need to consider. The final chapter of this section, Chapter Fourteen, will focus on band membership, and urbanity in the lives of the participants.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

RACIAL IDENTITY IN WHITE SOCIETY

I understand the colonial process in theory...but how does it really impact on us? The steady thrust of colonial pillage, what does it do to a man's mind? The construction of images always coloured by hues of derogation, denigration of dark colours, the elevation of white and fair and light, how does this affect our hearts? The steady encroachment, how does this affect our perception of each other? When we walk down the street and recognize or refuse to recognize each other, how much of what we feel is enmeshed in the orchestrated symphony of colonial conquest? How much of what we forgive and don't forgive in each other is laced to the external images of our race?

- Lee Maracle¹

Introduction:

Racial identity, as it is commonly understood, is the complex of factors which in a racist society is instrumental in how you learn to identify yourself, and how you are seen by others. Thompson and Tyagi have written:

Race is about everything—historical, political, personal—and race is about nothing—a construct, an invention that has changed dramatically over time and historical circumstances. From the smallest of gestures—what is packed in a child's lunch box or passed on in a smile or a frown—to the largest of historical statements...race has been, and continues to be, encoded in all of our lives. And yet, the fact that race operates on so many different levels is partly what makes talking about peoples' racial identities so difficult. This paradox, when coupled with race's plasticity when gender, sexuality, nationality, age, and religion are accounted for, makes for a conundrum—a puzzle admitting no easy or singular solution to how it is established and how it is enforced...key components of racial identity [include] what names [people] use to define themselves, what they were taught about race as children and teenagers...and how they talk about and negotiate amid multiple identifications... (Thompson and Tyagi, 1996:ix-x).

¹ Maracle, Lee, 1992. *Sundogs*. Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, p. 155.

Aboriginal peoples' racial identities are fraught with complexities hinging on legal definitions of Indianness, cultural knowledge, and connection to Indigenous landbase. In everyday terms, however, "Nativity" also depends on how you are defined by others—which, in the white society, depends to a phenomenal extent on how you are seen. In this respect, light-skinned urban Native people occupy highly contradictory locations.

The white society has had a profound influence on the identities of the participants. Of the light-skinned individuals, only the handful of them who had spent significant amounts of time in Native communities as they were growing up had an undivided sense of their identities as Native people. For the remaining light-skinned participants, all had been strongly affected, one way or another, by the white society's objectification and fragmentation of Native identity which impinged on how they saw themselves as Native people.

For dark-skinned urban Indians, meanwhile, racial identity in a white supremacist society is so over-determined that no "choice" of identities is possible. The hard reality of racial oppression has been, and continues to be, almost intrinsic to lived experiences of Indianness for many of the participants in such powerful common-sense ways that from this perspective, the existence of light-skinned or white looking Native people is almost inherently contradictory. White supremacist values must therefore be seen as "working" in numerous ways on the identities of the participants: devaluing the humanity and narrowing the options of the dark-skinned individuals, and rendering "inauthentic" the Indianness of those with light skin.

11.1 APPEARANCE AND IDENTITY:

Many individuals (light and dark) in the urban Native community appear to be attempting to minimize the importance of appearance to Native identity, in order to reassert Native sovereignty based on values more intrinsic to Native society. This approach comes from a number of directions. First of all, while racism is a central aspect of Native life in Toronto, anti-racist activism in this city is generally approached from the perspectives of peoples of colour, where the struggle against racism has been separated from the issues of land and sovereignty, in a manner which is highly irrelevant to the needs of Native people. Secondly, urban Native people live within a white society which intensively objectifies Native people and demands a high degree of racial “authenticity” of individuals if they are to be recognized as Native. In this context, a form of resistance for Native people is to look at identity solely from the framework of Indigenous nationhood, stating that appearance and blood quantum are irrelevant, and leaving it at that. This amounts to an attempt to decouple Native identity from skin colour and blood quantum and to re-assert Nativeness as a cultural, not a racial identity. While this perspective challenges contemporary racist dismemberment of Native identity to a tremendous extent, it leaves little space for examination of light-skin privilege. And while the anti-racism movement may ignore issues of sovereignty and land, the fact remains that racism shapes and defines the lives of dark-skinned Native people on a daily basis.

The biggest reason for Native people to attempt to ignore the relationship between Native appearance and Native identity, however, is pragmatism. In urban centres such as Toronto, there are such high levels of intermarriage that many “Native-looking” people have had children who identify as Native, but who look white, or Black, or anything *but* Native. For the parents, the manner in which the dominant culture quantifies and

denies the Indianness of their children is enough to make them firmly insist that Nativeness has nothing to do with appearance. The fact that intermarriage continues to be a fact of life in urban settings suggests that flexibility around appearance will continue to be maintained in the future—if urban communities wish to survive as Native communities. Pragmatism thus suggests that the best option for the urban Native community is to strategically disregard the relevance of appearance to Native identity.

In this respect, the urban Native community in Toronto appears to be following a time-honoured tradition of recasting a situation where “the Indian” as defined strictly by blood and appearance seems (yet again) about to vanish, into a situation where survival is ensured. In urban communities, Nativeness is alive and well, if one simply adopts a flexibility around the relationship between “race” and Nativeness. Below, Georges Sioui describes a Huron perspective on this issue:

In the middle of the seventeenth century, when we became drastically depopulated through epidemics and wars, often caused by missionary interference, we were saved from complete extinction principally because we had matricentrist socio-political traditions...Our wars, which we did wage just as cruelly as anyone, had as their primary purpose the replacement of lost members through capture of enemies. We used our alliance to the French to go and attack the English colonies to the south with the primary intent of capturing people, especially young and female, and ritually, through adoption, giving them a new life in our Nations. As it was, clanmothers and matriarchs had the principal say in these military undertakings; they had the primary responsibility of maintaining and restoring the integrity and composition of the societies which, as woman-leaders, they headed. White, and other, captives were given over to clanmothers who had organized war expeditions through approaching and commissioning war chiefs. The captives were then ritually and factually nationalized and, thence, brought up and treated as full members of their adopted social communities...

In this manner, we, the Huron, became genetically mixed with the English and others in the British colonies, who, unlike the French or the Spanish, almost never showed an inclination to mix with the Native people they colonized...Some of our Aboriginal Nations survived almost only because of our traditional mother-centered thinking. Had we, at that time, had leaders formed in patriarchal colonial institutions, as is so often the case nowadays, many of our nations would simply not have survived beyond the eighteenth century. Seeing those young captives, patricentrist leaders would have said, as they often say today about some of their own people: "We have no use for these children: they are white, they are black, they are not Indian. They do not have a proper quantum of Indian blood." And we and other very weakened, vulnerable nations would have soon disappeared. But as I am implying, our good fortune was that we lived within a matricentrist, circular system, where people and other species are not disqualified and destroyed because of not being what they are not (Sioui, 1997:55-56).

This attempt to be strategically flexible about appearance in the interests of rejecting the white society's perspectives, however, runs headlong into the intensely white supremacist nature of Canadian society, where power and privilege are organized along lines of skin colour, and where light-skinned Native identity continues to be dismembered and objectified as "not really Indian". In view of the "staying power" of racial oppression in Canada, how it gets refigured and reborn with each generation, it is worthwhile to consider how well the strategic flexibility which many urban Native people are attempting to exercise around skin colour actually works. Most of the darker-skinned participants, for example, manifested contradictory attitudes around the issue of appearance. While almost all of the individuals interviewed embraced the notion that "appearance really shouldn't matter", several made comments which revealed how important it was to them, on a gut level, to be able to communicate with other Native people in the street—to have the acknowledgement of other people who looked like them, as they went about their daily lives. From their remarks, it is obvious that on

certain fundamental levels, particularly in urban centres, in the face of a history of being subordinated, culturally diminished and outnumbered by whites, Nativeness and darkness are inseparable, and signify safety, a shared history of racial oppression, and a shared understanding of community:

“When I was younger, I looked a lot more Aboriginal, so I was called some names. But I don’t remember being particularly hurt by them. I remember thinking ‘What is this “breed” shit?’ I didn’t lose any sleep over it. That’s about it, being called names as a child, because I looked Native. And being called ‘Kelijah’, from that Hank Williams song that was a hit when I was a kid. He was an Indian—a wooden Indian. ‘Kelijah was an Indian, standing by the door. He fell in love with an Indian maid, over by the antique store. Kelijah...He never made a sound because his heart was made of knotty pine’. Well guess who got the name ‘Kelijah’ in the neighbourhood—me. I actually liked the song! So I didn’t feel all that jarred by it.

I think appearance counts a lot. If you’re a Metis and you look in the mirror and see some blue eyes, I think you have more problems than if you’re Metis and you look in the mirror and see brown eyes, and dark skin. I always felt fairly comfortable with the affinity, once I had the consciousness. And that probably comes from an early age, being called “breed”, and being nicknamed ‘Kelijah’.”

“I’ve always felt that I could walk up to any Native person that I saw anywhere in Canada, and say “Hi”, maybe, you know, bum a cigarette, or have them bum a cigarette off me, or bus fare.”

“I never thought of it much, but it does seem that Native people in the street usually talk to me, and I end up having lots of conversations with them. If only non-Natives are around, you can spend hours and hours with nobody talking to you, but if a Native person walks by, we start talking.”

“For me, physical appearance shouldn’t matter, but I think sometimes it does. If you look more Native, you can be more proud. Maybe its

following the stereotypes, but I think you can sort of blend in more with everything. You know, if you say "I'm Native", the fact that you look Native sort of ...encompasses it."

The manner in which Native identity and dark-skinned oppression have been almost inextricably fused in deeply common-sense ways for many of the darker participants only reinforces the white society's reduction of Nativeness to appearance. In some respects, an emotional investment in looking Indian appears to have affected all of the participants, no matter what their appearance.

11.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF LOOKING INDIAN:

"I still have really low self-esteem about whether I look Indian or not. I'm 37 years old and I still ask people "do you think I look Indian?" It's important for me because of my need to belong. So that's a bit skewed, and I recognize that."

Looking Native is probably most important to urban individuals, whose cultural identities are most at risk from the constant imposition of the dominant culture's social values in schools and other institutions, and who are bombarded by white people's perspectives and values on a daily basis. In such a context, the more Indian one looks, the easier it is to know in a fairly unmediated manner where the white society ends and where you begin.² The importance of looking Native, particularly when you have grown up with a sense of unbelonging in white society, was perhaps best expressed by one adoptee, who described what it meant to her to have Native people recognize her as Native on the street:

² This is not to deny the reality that many individuals have been brought up to think of themselves as "brown white people", and that numerous other issues such as gender, sexual orientation, age, class, and upbringing—in particular whether a person has been raised in a white family—all influence the extent to which a nonwhite person—particularly a mixed-race person—identifies themselves as part of the mainstream in a white society or not. However, for those who are searching for clues as to how to resist oppression, not looking like the oppressor makes it relatively easier to establish some psychic distance from white people, in many circumstances.

“When I’m out in the street, every Indian person looks at me and greets me like they know me. It happens all the time, and it totally makes my day.”

This individual also compared the pleasure she felt when Native people identified her as Indian with her very different feelings when whites identify her as Native:

“But you know what’s interesting? I was at a progressive bookstore, and when they saw that I was Indian, they took tax off for me, even though I don’t have a status card. And I felt totally embarrassed. I was really shy about it. I broke out into this sweat! I guess it is about being singled out like that.”

Many of the participants noted, like the individual above, that desiring a Native appearance was a double-edged sword, highly dependent on where they lived, and on the presence or absence of whites. One individual, for example, described how at times, on his reserve, he wished that he looked more Indian so that he could avoid the teasing he received from other boys. Going to high school in the city, however, he had initially wished to look more white so that he could fit in among whites better. Later, in university, faced with “Indian experts” who undermined his sense of his own Indianness, he did his best to emphasise his Native appearance, to assert his own “authority” on Indianness. Having a strong sense of identity from his Native family on-reserve ultimately provided him with the tools to negotiate conflicting demands, and to deal with being “too white” on reserve and “too Native” off-reserve.

All of the light-looking individuals were asked if they had ever wanted to look “more Indian”. The responses were varied. One woman conceded that she wished she had darker skin but felt that her body type as well as her internal spiritual growth made her look more Native:

“I guess at times I have wanted to look more Native. Because I love that tanned look. But you know, I can’t go sit out in the sun, because I do have that fair European skin. And my grandmother, her skin is like

tissue paper now, so I do have to be very careful. But at other times—no, I think I'm satisfied, because I look in the mirror and I have to stop and take another look. It's like I see this beautiful Native woman! It's kind of like the more I'm learning, the more Native I'm looking, and I think it's just coming from within. I might not have that skin colour but my body is Native, and my heart is, and my spirit is."

Another described her anger at the manner in which people choose to intermarry without any thought about the repercussions for the children having to negotiate a Native identity with a white appearance and orientation:

"I still do crave to look more Native sometimes. I think part of that's the bitterness towards my Mum sometimes, or my parents. It comes out whenever I get little comments from Native people. Like for example, when I showed my friends' wedding pictures to my auntie, she said "Wow, they look like pretty white Indians!" And I thought "my aunt, my uncle, and my Dad all married white people. How the fuck do they get off criticising people for looking too white? Are they gonna turn around and do that to their own kids?" And that's been my bottom line with everybody. "No, don't ever criticise anybody for looking too white—look at you, you're snagging a white woman!" This is a big beef with me, so people will say to me when I have these issues around intermarriage, "well, you're part white". And I tell them "That's exactly my point". I went through a whole big phase, with things like "I'm supposed to be the bridge between two cultures"—that's bullshit. Or "I'm supposed to have the best of both worlds, or something like that—Fuck that". I'm thinking, "No, my parents didn't do this because they wanted to have a child who's going to have the best of both worlds. They were into the groovy sixties, and how groovy it's going to be to have a Native man in your life, and to have a beautiful little Native child and all this. They weren't doing that for me. That was their ego shit, and they were just getting laid—they weren't thinking of children at all."

Some of the participants asserted that they felt ashamed to admit that at one time or another they had desperately wished to look more Native, because at the time they knew so little about their culture that to them looking Native was the ultimate indicator of a Native identity. With a deeper understanding of their heritage they rejected the idea that they could "possess Indianness" by looking Indian. Most stated that they were

now content to look non-Native—especially since they knew how their dark-skinned family members had suffered because of looking Native. To these individuals, it seemed trivializing to shallowly wish for the very thing that had caused their parents so much suffering.

In asking the darker-skinned Native people about their attitudes towards light-skinned Native people, a handful spoke openly about feelings of anger towards light-skinned Native people who seemed to be acting as arrogant as whites sometimes did around them. Others mentioned their suspicions that these individuals were really white wannabees. One individual described how, in the face of the racism she and her mother had experienced, she found it amusing that light-skinned people should desire to look Indian:

“It’s so ironic, because when I was growing up, to look white was so desirable. It started to change when I was a teenager. What we’ve been dealing with is the influence of the residential schools on our parents—that the more their children look like white people, the better chances they’re gonna have with this world. Light skinned people were treated better.”

A few individuals, light-skinned or dark, described how when a light-skinned person was fluent in their language and grounded in their culture, the relative importance of appearance diminished:

“In Beauval, there’s a lot of blond hair and blue eyes. There’s one woman in particular—she’s totally fair. If she was away from Beauval, you’d think she was white. But then her accent is exactly like mine. And because she speaks Cree all the time, I don’t even think twice that she’s Native, even though she’s blond and has blue eyes.”

This participant’s words highlighted the extent to which many urban Native people, whether they are mixed-race or not, are insecure about their identities because of loss of language and culture. In this context, policing the boundaries of Indianness by constantly judging who looks Indian enough and who does not is an effective way of establishing one’s

own “in-group” status, by externalizing somebody else for not looking Indian enough. Although this process in some ways simply replicates the dominant culture’s reduction of Indianness to appearance, it also represents a way of centering dark-skinned Native people within urban Native society, and enables them to assert pride in Nativeness despite the dominant society’s intense racism.

11.3 RACISM AND RACIAL IDENTITY:

While urban Native identity is in many ways shaped by the oppression which dark-skinned individuals face, this reality is mediated by a number of factors, particularly geographic location and class. Meanwhile, Paul Gilroy’s (1993:85) observation that “gender is the modality in which race is lived” suggests that we should also take into consideration how experiences of racism are shaped by gender for the participants. Below, I will briefly explore the participants’ words as they describe experiences of racism, and how this intersects with class, gender, and location.

11.3.1 Geographies of Racism:

“The tension between Natives and non-Natives in any small community is really overt. You could cut it with a knife, it’s so overt.”

For the participants, experiences of racism were highly dependent on location. In Toronto, where Native people are relatively invisible as a group, most of the participants reported that they do not typically face the same kind of denigration and open resentment from whites that Native people frequently encounter in small towns adjacent to reserves, or in Western Canada where Native people are highly visible. Below, some of the participants describe the regional nature of the racism they experience:

“I find in small towns up north I get targeted a lot more. When I went to Little Current about four years ago, I went to look in the department store, in the clothing section, and I got followed around by a white

sales woman. They do that to all the Native people there. They treat them like they're going to shoplift."

"Up north, you go into a restaurant, and they won't serve you because you're Indian. Then you have to go down the road to the next honky-tonk place to see if they'll serve you. I hate going in to rural areas. Rural Alberta is the worst. Or up north, Thunder Bay way. I hate it! It affects you because you're walking around kind of paranoid sometimes. And you're wondering if the people see you as an Indian, and how you're going to get treated."

As one woman described, however, experiences of everyday racism are also a daily aspect of life in Toronto:

"One day, after I had been to the doctor and discovered that I had this abnormality in my eye, I went into the local food store. I was feeling very sad—in fact, I'd been crying, and so I kept my sunglasses on, because my eyes were kind of red. I had a book in my hand, which I had bought some place else. When I got to the cash, this huge white woman was standing there, looming at me, saying "did you get that book here?" I said "no", and didn't think anything of it, at the time. But when I handed her my status card, she said to me, in a very bullying way "Could you take those sunglasses off so I can see it's really you." I went ballistic. I just lost it. I said to her "listen, lady—I've had a very hard day. I'm not prepared to put up with you. You get the manager over here right now!" And I got the manager over, and asked for an apology. I said "this woman was rude, and she had no reason to treat me this way". And I haven't been back there—I sent them a letter to make my point."

This individual pointed out how occupying a position of leadership in the Native community suddenly became irrelevant, in the face of a white cashier who saw a Native face and assumed untrustworthiness. On the other hand, the participant's ability to resist the cashier's racism was linked to her sense of entitlement as a person with a university education who was accustomed to asserting leadership. Below, the participants' experiences of how class mediates experiences of racism will be explored.

11.3.2 Class and Racism:

Aboriginal people in Canada have for centuries faced a kind of racially-organised class oppression. While immigrants of colour in Canada have historically occupied highly circumscribed, segregated and demeaning niches within the dominant culture, Native people have, in most settings, been simply externalised—excluded from the settler culture either by force or by legislation, up until very recently. Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan), while talking about the publishing industry, has succinctly described this confluence of racism and classism:

When I think about the idea of classism...I think of whiteness; not as a racist term but as a classist term. A term about class which describes the oppression and disparity between privilege and deprivation (Armstrong, 1995:50).

At the same time as whites have used every means to exclude Native people from any access to wealth, stereotypes which link Native identity with poverty and dysfunction have been rampant throughout Canadian society. As a result, the dark-skinned participants have all found that class has mediated their experiences of racism.

One of the participants, a dark-skinned man with “Native” features who by appearance could not be taken for anything else but Native, described how certain of his experiences of racism—pertaining especially to the issue of whether or not he is served alcohol—have been mediated by class, to the extent that it determines whether or not he has even been *seen* as Native in certain contexts. This man, who had been constantly refused alcohol in prairie drinking establishments in his youth, described how he was served in eastern Canada bars during the 1960’s. He attributed this to his being seen as a person of colour rather than a Native person, which appears to be a distinctly class-related phenomenon—given that to “look Native” in Canada has historically been related not only to skin colour but to poverty and oppression. This man constantly

encountered the assumption that a dark-skinned Native-looking man with an education and a good income could not be “an Indian”, but rather, was probably a middle-class immigrant of colour.

“When I left Manitoba, and went to Ottawa, I found that I could order alcohol and be served without any problem, in any of the drinking places. But then again—maybe they thought I was from another country. You know what I mean? Because there’s a lot of people from Africa and Asia in Ottawa, and they may have just thought “well, he’s not a Native person”—because at that time you didn’t see very many Native people in Ottawa, very few. And the same thing in Quebec.

I remember working in the bush in Sept Iles—there was one Native guy that came in with us into one of the bars. There was him, myself, and a bunch of white people there. They wouldn’t serve him, but they served me! I couldn’t understand that. I was darker than he was. Now—I don’t know if it was that they didn’t think I was Native, because I was working with the engineers and he was one of the labourers? I don’t know—its a hard thing to say why they didn’t serve him but served me. Maybe they thought I was from some other country. And he had a Native look about him, and not any education.”

One of the women described how in everyday terms, the manner in which white people have linked Nativeness to poverty and degradation affects her own self-image:

“I find that the times when I get self-conscious because of racism is when I’m passing Simcoe Street, on the Queen streetcar. There’s some homeless Native people who sit there, and they drink sometimes. And I’m self-conscious of people looking at them, and then looking at me. So I look away from them, because I don’t want to be connected with them in people’s minds, or to have them think that I drink. Because they see them drinking. I don’t want them to say in their heads “See, all Indians are drinkers”. I start thinking “I wonder if the passengers on the streetcar think I’m like them because they see them on the street drinking.” And I don’t want them to have that question in their head. That’s internalised racism on my part, you know. I have the fear of being connected with being a drinker because I’m Native. Like, when I’m walking by Spadina and Bloor, and see the homeless Native people on the corner, I often wonder if the non-Native people walking behind me are thinking that I’m like them, that I’m homeless.”

Another woman described how many white people cannot see her as the successful career woman she is, because of the association between Nativeness, dysfunction and poverty in their minds.

"A number of staff members from my agency came with me one day to do an internship on a special committee. When I was first getting in there, people didn't know who I was. One person began to talk to me as if I was a parent of an abused child, and obviously didn't know anything. She was talking away to me, and suddenly, she stopped and asked me "what do you do", because I think she suddenly saw that she was assuming a lot. And I said "well, I run one of the Native agencies...". Well, her eyes got real big, and her mouth got real small, and her demeanour totally changed. It was like "oh, you're a real person!"

If I'm dressed in ordinary clothes, with my face, there's all kinds of assumptions made about me and my social status. But if I go down the street dressed up in all my nice clothes, it's like people open doors for me—suddenly I could be anybody. Especially if I put my hair up, my Nativeness suddenly vanishes—the long hair is really an association with Nativeness, for most people."

Another way in which racism for Aboriginal people is frequently mediated by class involves the different ways that Native people are treated depending on which social circles they inhabit in the white society. One of the female participants, who grew up in a middle-class family, described the range of responses which middle class men and women have to her Nativeness—where it is usually seen as something exciting or exotic to consume, rather than something inferior to denigrate her with:

"The men I've been with, often they're trying to consume the colonial exotica. I've had my share of that. I had somebody who once called me "My little Indian"—he was really excited about being with somebody who was of Native ancestry. That's what's so refreshing about being with my partner—because it wasn't something that was repulsive to him, but neither was it something that made me more interesting to him! I'm absolutely sure of that—that it wasn't like, some kind of a bonus, because I was Native. It wasn't the sweetening of the deal, which it has been with other people that I've been with.

I've also had people sort of preying on you when they find out you're Native—like, they want a piece of you. I remember once, when I

was working for a youth organisation, a very white organisation. Somebody raised the issue that there weren't people of colour working in the organisation. And there was me and the token black, sitting in a circle of about 32 people—and all of a sudden—I felt the heat of the gaze, of all of them looking at us. And it was too much for me, I was overwhelmed, and I just started crying. But what was more difficult after that, was the way everybody was coming up and wanting to console me. They all wanted to be my best friend. It was kind of like vultures descending on you.

And then there's the way, in a classroom or something, when you're the only Native person, and you feel this expectation that every time you speak everybody's pricking up their ears because they're listening to 'the voice of Native people' speaking".

Another woman, of working-class background but accustomed to crossing class boundaries through her activities within the feminist movement, described how racism from middle-class white women was very different from the more overt racism she had been accustomed to receiving as a child:

"I don't openly get any anti-Native remarks. But I find what I do get is more covert stuff. Like being condescended to by white women in the feminist community. I find I get talked down to by some of them, and have my experiences invalidated. It's not the overt stuff of the older days, in the seventies and sixties when people would throw rocks at you for being of colour."

A few individuals saw their economic privilege as protecting them from some aspects of racism, in some contexts. This could not be depended on, however, for as one woman related, in certain areas her appearance accorded her treatment that no amount of class privilege could overcome:

"I think experiences of racism are influenced by class and location. Like—I don't have to be confronting people at social services in the circles that I'm moving in, or the way that I am able to conduct myself through my day. I don't run into those instances of overt racism. The only kind of racism that I ever have to encounter is from people that want to "eat the other"—that's the kind of racism that I have to deal with. But I don't have the overt racism. Now, I have had incidences of

overt racism, in Manitoba. And I was shocked, right? For example, I was with an Elder, in a restaurant, and there was a hair in her salad. The waitress just treated us like crap, and basically inferred that we'd put it in there, so we could get a meal for free and all this kind of thing. Now where I was coming from, it had always been the situation where the customer's always right. But in this case, it was a question of "who's the right customer?" I had always been the right customer, before that, and had always been able to assert myself—but no amount of assertion in this case would get me anywhere. And I couldn't quite figure out how this was happening—and then all of a sudden, I realised. "Oh! They're doing this because we're Indians!" And it was really shocking to me".

The participants who were students frequently referred to the barrage of colonial representations of Indianness which they encountered in universities. One of the participants described how his exposure to the authoritative voice of "Indian experts" at university confused and undermined his sense of his own identity:

"When I went to university I was confronted with these various definitions of what an Indian is. "This is an Indian" according to anthropology. "This is an Indian" according to Environmental Studies. "This is an Indian" in terms of Social Work. "This is an Indian" in terms of Political Science. "This is an Indian" in terms of Law. All these various concepts of Indianness kept hitting me. And I found myself reading these books, learning this stuff—and constantly spewing it back out to people whenever I had the opportunity—making corrections, and trying to prove to everybody around me that I was the authority on all things Indian. Because I was made to feel that I had to be the authority on Indians in order to prove that I was Indian at all. It got to the point where I knew, deep down, that I was putting on a show, right? I knew that I was putting on a show—"I'm the most Indian Indian", you know? And then, one day I found myself saying to myself. "Hey! I AM just like an Indian!" You know? Sort of...all happy about it. Like I'd been so twisted around in my own head, that all of a sudden I was looking at myself and thinking "you know, geez, I'm just like the Indians!" Right?

That's when I realised "What am I doing? This is absolutely ridiculous. I AM Indian. I'm from an Indian family! Open your eyes! Look at it! And it's only once I realised that, you know, that I stopped wearing the feathers to class, and I stopped being the expert in the class. Someone wants to say something about some Indians out west?

Good! Say it. And then, you know, when the class looks at me and says "Well, is that true?" I'll say "I don't know!" I don't know. I can tell you what I know about my own family."

The circumstances which Native students face also reveal the peculiar double standard which white Canadians assert towards Native people around the issue of poverty and social class—dismissing “Indians” as impoverished and dissolute, while at the same time demonstrating anger at those with Native status who are funded by their bands, for the so-called “unfair benefits” which Native status provides them with:

“The only racism that I’ve experienced in university has been around funding or affirmative action. People saying things like “that’s not fair that you have your funding paid for” or, “maybe they only let you in because you’re an Indian”. I guess it’s because of those comments that I’ve never applied for any scholarships. With the amount of money that I earn teaching, and my funding from the band, its as much as if I was on a SSHRC, and I think if I applied for something like that then that it would only encourage the racism of white students. Although nowadays I’m thinking “what the hell, they’d do it to me!” But up until this point, I’ve thought, that, rather than pushing the funding issue, I simply I wouldn’t apply for anything extra. But of course it looks so damned good on a resume, to say that you’ve had a SSHRC or something.”

Up until this point, I have reported on individuals’ experiences of racism as if they were gender-neutral. Below, I will briefly explore the participants’ understandings of how gender affects racial identity.

11.3.3 Gender and Racism:

“To me, that acknowledgement in the street, from other Native people, has always been like an affirmation of my identity, and a recognition that I really am not the stereotype thing that people say about Indian women.”

Avtar Brah has described, in her work, how racism is always a gendered phenomenon, that racism constructs the female gender differently from the male gender, and that racism is also experienced

differently by men and women. She notes in particular that racism *encodes* gender differentiation between colonized men and women, while seeming to subsume them (Brah, 1993:12). The manner in which racism shapes the participants' identities in gendered ways has been obvious throughout the interviews. It is clear, for example, that attitudes to Native men as inherently violent affected white people's attitudes to Native men and alcohol long after restrictions on Native people drinking in public were removed from the *Indian Act*.

"On the prairies, I remember, I couldn't go into any drinking establishments. And I remember one point in time—a couple of friends and I tried to go in and have a beer, and they said "no", they wouldn't serve me, but they'd serve my friends. And they were two Polish guys, and they said "no—if you're not serving him, you're not serving us" and then we left. And so we went back to my place, and my Dad got very angry, and he said "no, they're not going to do that to you". And he was a big man, and I guess, had got in a few...ruckuses here and there. So he took the three of us and we went there, and we sat down. And I remember the first time we went in there, and the guy said "no, Jim, I can't serve that boy". And he said "what do you mean?" And he said "well you know—he's Indian". And he said "That's my son. And you'll bloody well serve him!" So the guy served me—reluctantly. Then we went around, probably to every place in town, I guess—and had one beer in every place in town."

Meanwhile, racist images of Native women as overtly sexual and sexually degradable continue to resonate for many of the participants:

"When I was growing up, the only Native women I'd ever seen in my life were alcoholics and prostitutes on 97th street. The whole time I was growing up, I'd see physically beautiful Native women, very young, arm in arm with drunk old white men. You're talking 18 year olds with 45 year old men. It was so common, and I found it really offensive. Because if they had been white, and that attractive, they would not be going out with a 45 year old drunken white man. And I found that I was constantly, throughout my life, pestered by older men who were drunk, feeling like they had a chance with me. I found this really insulting. I mean, I'm well-educated, I'm hard-working, I've got a lot of positive things going for me, and I feel that I should have men who are at least my equal coming after me. And I've found throughout

my life that I have not had that. I have them coming up for one night stands. They don't want a relationship with me, they just want sex. And so this is really quite upsetting."

"I can't stand at night in any place by myself because men think that I am trying to pick them up. It doesn't matter what part of the city I'm in—whether its a poor area, or a rich area. They think that Native women are just there to have sex with them."

"I was in Fort Frances, and coming out of a motel room one day, about ten o'clock in the morning, and this white guy came right up to me and grabbed my breast, and assumed that he was just going to waltz me right back into the room—you know, a total stranger. I got mad! I slapped him right across the face. When I told people about it, nobody reacted. It was nothing new to the women around me. They just shrugged, like "oh yeah".

Racial identity is shaped through gender in more subtle ways as well. One dark-looking woman, who had for most of her life been comfortable in her Native identity, described incidents as a teenager where white images of beauty affected her self-esteem:

"I think I went through a period where I decided that it was no fun being Indian. I was about 14 years old. I think there was a significant episode, the last time I went up to the reserve for a long time. What happened was—a group of us from the reserve used to hang around this farm where they were breeding ponies. A lot of French kids would go there too. We couldn't speak French, and they couldn't speak English, and we all wanted this one thing—to get the ponies and ride them. But we were used to these kids. One day when I was uptown, I saw one of the French kids. But when I said hello to him, he wouldn't speak to me. He really cut me, socially. It was very clear to me, you know—it was about being Indian. I was really upset about it. Because suddenly, when you're a teenager, you come face to face with all kinds of realities that you can ignore quite happily when you're a child. And those dimensions come in then, particularly around race and sex and everything else. I was convinced that if I was 5'2, eyes of blue, and blond-haired, then the world would be a lot better for me. "

This individual also described her mother's experiences of having her beauty devalued because of her darkness:

"I think of my mother, who was dark—she was the darkest in my family, and the brightest—she really got the dirty end of the stick, because she was told, more or less, that she was not lovely. That she was not a beautiful woman. Because she didn't have a light skin, or light hair. And the other girls in the family who did were definitely regarded as the beauties."

Further conversation with this individual made it clear how important it is for Native girls to have Native standards of beauty affirmed:

"I remember when I was a teenager, a group of us would go down to the border crossing to celebrate the Jay treaty. Of course, we were meeting people from all over the United States. And sometimes the older people would let us stay for the dance at night. I remember one time, this young man came buzzing up to us. And I was with a couple of white-looking girls that I knew, who basically thought they were pretty hot stuff. But when this young guy came over and was talking to them, and they said "yeah, we're Indian. I know we don't look it, but we are", he just looked at them and said "that wasn't what I was going to say" and walked off. And then he started talking to me. So that was really funny. Its when I finally realised that boys liked me as I was that I stopped wanting to look white. I realised that I was okay just the way I was—they liked me."

One participant described how the brutal violence which Aboriginal women face from the white society affected her female cousins, who did their best to integrate into the white society after the murder of their mother:

"One of my Mom's other sisters passed away under really terrible circumstances when she was only in her thirties. She had four kids—three girls and a boy—and they all ended up in Children's Aid. Those are my cousins. The girls all married white farmers, and they've integrated completely into the community, even though they're a little bit dark, you know. Nobody ever really talks about it."

It is clear that the extreme levels of sexual violence which Native women are subjected to affect the racial identities of Aboriginal women in highly

distinct ways. One woman spoke of her understanding of how feelings of vulnerability would affect her ability to express a Native identity:

“If I had to regularly go through situations like having to walk through a scary, redneck part of Regina or something at night—maybe I would adopt a different persona, such as not wearing my hair in a long braid, to make myself less overtly Native-looking, just to protect myself.”

The experiences of the participants demonstrate that we cannot separate racism from considerations of class and gender. It is these parameters—along with location—which determine how Native people are seen, and how they will be treated.

From some of the anecdotes above, it is also clear that light-skinned people are not immune from everyday racism. The racism that other, darker family members are exposed to has implications for light-skinned family members, as one individual described below:

“Some members of my family endured racism—such as my sister being called “a fucking Native bitch”. Or “get out of my face, you fucking squaw”. These are some examples of the unsolicited violence that she has had to endure. When that woman was murdered in Regina two years ago, by three white university kids—picked up, beaten to death and left to die—that could have been my sister. There’s a real threat of violence that impacts on my life. It might not impact on me directly, because of my skin colour, my hair colour, my eye colour, but it impacts people that I love and are very close to me. And because of that, it really affects me. It has implications for me, in my life.”

Most of the white-looking individuals have also had to frequently deal with racist talk about Native people being spoken openly in their presence under the assumption that they were white. These individuals discover when they make anti-racist interventions that white hostility will be directed at them as well as at darker people, if they are open about being Indian. Finally, one white-looking individual described how local individuals that she’d considered to be friends treated her in a racist manner because of her family’s court case to win title to their Aboriginal

land holdings. Racism, then, is also directed at light-skinned Native people when they insist on their rights as Aboriginal people.

“Some people will always be ignorant. Like, during our land claim, the lawyer for the town—although he’s played golf with me and other members of my family, in court he referred to more than once as “those people”. So...it’s okay to play golf with somebody, but when push comes to shove, they’re not really people...I mean, he was looking straight at me when he said that.”

11.4 SUMMARY:

As this chapter has demonstrated, experiences of racism have been central to the Native identities of the darker participants. To a lesser extent, the racism which dark-skinned Native people experience also affects the identities of the lighter participants as well. However, for the lighter participants, a far greater problem is the manner in which they are surrounded by white people who fragment and dismember their identities to measure their “Indianness”. The war of images which negates the humanity of the darker participants thus serves to negate the Nativeness of the lighter ones, in ways which are highly confusing for light-skinned peoples’ sense of their Native identity. This issue will be pursued in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NEGOTIATING DENIALS OF INDIANNESS

“I think that a light Native carries a pain with them that no dark Native could ever understand, because a light Native has a foot in both cultures and belongs in neither, really... I think in some ways—as painful as it is to be harassed by the police and discriminated against because you’re dark—there’s a pain, a loneliness, that you can’t ever really describe, from being light. Knowing that it’s extremely likely that if you walk into a room full of Native people, you’re going to be the one who has to prove yourself.”

INTRODUCTION:

Light-looking mixed-race Native people, unlike dark people, have the choice to accept or reject a Native identity. Most of the lighter-looking participants have found, however, through their experiences within their own family, that there is no middle ground—they can either “make an issue” (as whites see it) out of their Nativeness or it will be minimized or denied. Since white Canadian identity has been shaped by the obliteration of a viable Native identity, white family members as a rule cannot wholeheartedly accept and embrace Nativeness as *part* of a mixed-race person’s identity. The message is clear: Nativeness has no currency in white-identified families.

The mixed-race people who can pass as white who decide that they do not want to participate in the obliteration of their Native heritage are thus forced to declare themselves as Native, regardless of their appearance. In doing this, they are bucking the tide of common-sense racial classification, one of the foundational aspects of a white supremacist society. This can be extremely difficult, particularly if they have been brought up to consider themselves white—either because of silence around Indianness in their family, because of extremely white appearance, or

because they were adopted. One woman in her mid-fifties, brought up with two light-skinned mixed-race parents who taught her to identify as white, has described her disorientation when, after researching her Native heritage, her status card arrived in the mail, and she realized that she was now legally classified as “Indian” in a context where she had thought of herself in common-sense ways as white for most of her entire life:

“I knew my Native heritage was there, but it was something that I never really had to deal with, or never really thought about. Of course, I would say “yeah, I got a grandmother back there somewhere”. But when I got my Native status card, I opened it up, and looked at it, and I thought “well, this is how it is, we have these different classifications of peoples. I used to be in this classification, but now, technically, I’m over there in that classification. But what does that really mean about me and my background?”

One adoptee who was brought up to think of herself as white described her feelings about having taken up a Native identity in her twenties after her reunion with her Native family:

“I’m just starting to relax now, in the last couple of years in the Native community. Like, I can still split off, and go a little bit dissociative, and it will just happen. And I have to take care of it while I’m in the middle of talking to somebody, or, you know, in the middle of an event. But for the most part I feel kind of okay. I just get an unreal feeling sometimes. Like I can still get a feeling, like “but I’m NOT really Native” you know? So that’s been there all the time. When I first started out, I thought “I can still choose not to do this”. I had this whole white liberal kind of feeling of, like “I feel so sorry for everybody because they can’t choose to leave! But I can go back anytime”. Which isn’t so true! Because you start to realise ‘It really is who I am’. And that’s pretty much something that I recognise and feel. But every once in a while, it still doesn’t feel real.”

Declaring themselves as Native, for these individuals has meant challenging the racial identity they grew up with—a deeply disorienting process which some of the participants nevertheless have undertaken in order to reach a self-definition that more accurately describes who they are—or at least one that is not premised on the denial of part of who they

are. All of these individuals face the reality that the Canadian society expects them to conform to their image of what a Native person is. Furthermore, they have to negotiate their identities within the Native community where entirely different sets of rules apply, and where some individuals reject them, others welcome them wholeheartedly, and others zealously police the boundaries of Indianness, carefully noting transgressions. As a result, it is not uncommon for light-skinned urban Native people to negotiate multiple experiences of acceptance and denial of their Nativeness in a single day. Below, I will present some of the participants' experiences of contradictory Nativeness.

12.1 NEGOTIATING A CONTRADICTORY IDENTITY:

Some of the participants had appearances which were genuinely ambiguous, where they were sometimes taken for Native, and sometimes for white. These individuals, for the most part, raised the issue of how this ambiguity made it difficult for them to feel entirely comfortable when entering Native environments, because they never knew how they would be taken. This is only highlighted by the variety of responses about their identity that they receive from whites, as the participants below described:

"I have such a variety of responses from people that I'm never sure how I'm being taken. I remember teaching a class over at U of T, one night. And one kid came up and said "you don't look Native! You look normal!" And then I'm thinking "so what is 'normal', and what is Native?" And then other times somebody would say "oh—you're Native". But you never know where it's going to come from, or when."

"I think very often Native people think of me as a wannabee, when I wear traditional jewelry. One thing that does affect how I'm seen for sure is weight—when I'm twenty or thirty pounds lighter, nobody ever says anything about me being Native. But I think with a fuller face, you can definitely see—like, if I was to bring out family pictures—you

can see the resemblance, the big smile. There was one time, when I was running away from home and I was trying to cross the border and couldn't because I only had twenty-five dollars on me. The guy said to me "are you Native?" And no one had said that to me before. I said "yes", and he said "who's Native—father or mother?" I said "Father" and he said "she's status—let her go through!" That was too weird. But then again—in that situation I had a sort of stoic look on my face, trying to stop myself from crying. So who knows if that had anything to do with it, right?"

Others have described how, before they knew much about their Native identity, they saw themselves as white-looking, but that this changed as they learned more about their Native identity:

"When I look at pictures of myself now, from a Native perspective, I definitely see a Native kid."

For some individuals, the range of "who they get taken for" reveals the stereotypes about Native people that permeate Canadian society, and the relative invisibility of Native people in Toronto:

"I find that when I have, like a modern haircut, I'm suddenly Italian or Portuguese. But when I have my hair long, or like this, then it's Native."

"I guess people usually ask if I'm mulatto. And I remember one time I was caught shoplifting when I was thirteen, that was the big question. So when I said "Oh, I'm half Native", it was like "oh, well, that explains it then."

Those of the participants who look entirely white, however, do not even encounter this kind of ambiguous identification with a non-white lineage. For these participants, their Native identity cannot be reconciled to their appearance at all. For these individuals, it doesn't matter how extensive their knowledge of their lineage is, or how much family they have on the reserve, or how stark is the genocide their families had experienced, or how Native-identified they are in a political sense—on a basic level,

when they look in the mirror and see a white person, it rings false to say “we Indians...” These individuals simply live with the contradictions.

“I identified that I was Native through my mother. I was Native through her—I wasn’t Native on my own. The first job I got at a Native agency, I brought my mother all the way from Woodstock, to show everybody that she was Indian, that I was Native because I’m her daughter. And I got a photocopy of her status card, so that I could prove any time to anybody that my Mom was Indian. I identified that I was Native, but I wasn’t identifying within myself, on my own. It was always through her. The scene that I was in at the time was drinking—that was how I identified as Indian, through being with other Indians and doing what they did. I always felt that they identified my mother as being Native, but they weren’t identifying me as being Native. Because my Mom partied with them too. So I was only Native through other Native people—through the partner that I was with, or through affairs with Indian men, or through my mother—because I didn’t have that myself. It was always “them and me”, not “us”. It was never inclusive. I never included myself with everybody else—like, the language that I still use—it’s a separation language, it’s not an inclusive language. I still use it, I still catch myself doing that, because of my appearance. It’s a real dividing line!”

One white-looking individual, the only member of her family who did not look either Native or Japanese from their mixed heritage, described a highly contradictory sense of her own identity after a lifetime of receiving multiple labels from whites. This woman, raised in an era when Native people were silent about their identity, recognised herself as a Native woman in some respects, but at the same time frequently referred to herself as “white”, and commented a number of times that “she didn’t belong anywhere”:

“Because everybody knew my father was Japanese, and it was just after World War II, I’d get chased home from school being called a Jap. I’d be on my own, coming home from school, and the kids would come after me with sticks, and yelling “Jap”—that sort of thing. But then one day I went and looked in the mirror, and said to myself “these people are nuts. I mean, look at me!” And after that, once I didn’t run anymore, once you’re not troubled about it, then they don’t chase you any more.

And then there's the thing about growing up with Native blood, that people had no expectations of you. Nobody ever expected that I'd finish high school, or anything like that. So, when I got a language prize, in grade nine or ten, the principal's response was "YOU got a language prize?" We knew all the families—there were 1200 people in that town—but nobody ever expected that any of us would succeed at anything. And then, when I finished high school, and got a Burke's medal for leadership, again—people didn't expect anything of me. People just expected that you'd end up in a ditch like your uncle, anyway.

In those days, you didn't discuss being Native. And when I went away to university, nobody ever questioned me. I was friends with the Mohawk students, and the students from West Africa. It's never occurred to me, but I was probably one of the few...white.. people who associated with them. Like, I didn't see them as any different. And my sister married a Jamaican, and I didn't see him as any different. At a dance, one time, I invited my brother-in-law to dance with me. And thinking back, that was probably big-time news—this Black man dancing with this white girl. So I think that it was easier for me. Because so long as I didn't talk much, I fit in anywhere.

I see myself as the invisible minority. Because people will talk in front of me and even make remarks about visible minorities. And I have to come forward. I usually say "do you know that I'm part Japanese? Do you know that I'm Native?" And they'll say "no you're not!". Or they'll dismiss the validity of my heritage by saying "but you're not visible". And I'll say "no, no, you have to think about this."

These experiences of racial ambiguity for light-skinned individuals, of being unable to wholeheartedly identify as Native because of a white appearance, are commonly interpreted by darker Native people as "being ashamed to be Native". The problem for white-looking Native people is that racial identity in a racist society is not only initially established, it is also reinforced daily. White looking Native people on a daily basis are not treated like Indians, they are treated like white people, both in terms of daily assumptions, and in terms of privileges "granted" by the colonizer society. For some of the participants, this works on their ideas about who they are and the validity of their Native identity. Cherrie Moraga has captured the ambiguity of some mixed-race peoples' identities, below:

We light-skinned breeds are like chameleons, those *lagartijas* with the capacity to change the color of their skin. We change not for lack of conviction, but lack of definitive shade and shape (Moraga, 1996:232).

Light mixed-bloods, then, face a white supremacist society which insists on unambiguous racial difference, and which demands racial (and cultural) “authenticity” of Native people before they will be recognized as Native. In places like Toronto, white-looking Native people also face a context where anti-racism is based on the experiences of people of colour, and where most anti-racism activists have little understanding of the long term, intergenerational effects of colonization and oppression which Native people in Canada have experienced. In this context, light mixed-bloods face denials of their Indianness not only by the white society, but by people of colour, who assume that light-skin privilege renders Nativeness meaningless. Below, I will explore the participants’ experiences with denials of their Indianness.

12.2 DENIALS OF INDIANNESS BY NON-NATIVES:

For those of us who do not conform to a stereotype of what Native people “look like”, claiming our identities as Native people becomes an exercise in racism. “Gee, you don’t look like an Indian.”...After a while it almost becomes humorous, even as it’s tiresome. Perhaps the feeling is that we’re getting away with something, that we are tapping into unknown strengths, for which we are not entitled. And how the dominant culture loves to quantify suffering and pain!

Beth Brant¹

All of the light-skinned individuals spoke of the manner in which non-Natives *actively* denied their Indianness, sometimes quite insistently,

¹ Brant, Beth. 1994. “The Good Red Road” in *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*. Toronto: Women’s Press, 20-21.

and the amount of work it took to negotiate a Native identity on a daily basis in the face of such denial.

"If I mention that I'm Native, white people always like to tell me—or Black people too—"Oh, you don't look Native". And I'll say: "You know, I really don't like hearing that, so stop". But they'll keep on saying it: "No, you really don't look Native". And I always have to tell them: "No, you didn't hear me. You have to stop. I don't like that. I'm Native, that's that." So there's always this little conflict, with cab drivers or whoever."

For others, the sheer weight of stereotypes which would have to be dislodged before white-looking Nateness could even be seen to exist has resulted in continuous interactions with white people who are simply unable to see them as Native:

"It always seems like some kind of trauma when I have to identify myself as being Native. I remember sitting in front of the police chief, up in Sudbury, after I'd spent the night in jail, probably for being drunk and disorderly. My partner and I got thrown in jail, and the only people in that cell that I was in were Native women. There were four or five of us, all Native, but they let me out first. My partner had to stay in for hours after they had let me go. So the chief of police decided to have this discussion with me. I don't know if he was playing father or what. He asked me something like 'What are you doing with an Indian?' It was that blunt, there was nothing hidden about what he was saying. He did not see me as being Native. He couldn't understand it. And I just looked at him, and I said "You know what? I'm Indian!" And it just floored him."

For some individuals, the manner in which people of colour frequently assume that skin colour is the only valid determinant of a person's racial identity is also problematic, in that it leaves them without a way of expressing their histories and experiences as Aboriginal people:

"At school we were asked to do this exercise where you take a newspaper and cut out all the pictures of people of colour, and then you cut out all the pictures of the white people. It really shook me up, because I identify myself as Native, but I'm not visibly Native, so if people were to pick me out of the newspaper, they would cut me out as a white person. And I told the teacher 'you know what? You really

need to be educated that its not just black and white. I'm mixed, and I identify as being Native, and where do I fit in this exercise? I don't'. And this was supposed to be about anti-racism. I was really upset."

For the African Cherokee participant, Black people's denials of her Indianness is an ongoing issue:

"It's been really strange for me, you know, because its not like in the United States, where the communities come together—where there IS a community of Black Cherokee people, or Black Seminoles. For me—I have friends in the African community, I have friends in the Native community. But there's not a lot of places where they can come together. Here in Canada, each community is very distinctive, very separate. So its really been strange to get used to the idea of dealing with two separate groups. For example, when I first moved in, I gave myself a party. And I invited people from my circle, and some of my Native friends. And I thought 'why don't I invite some of my Black friends'" and then I thought "no, its not going to work'. There are times, I have to say, where I've had some real difficulty. There's an African woman who was a really good friend for four years. When I separated from my husband, she was there for me, and she was wonderful, she was my best friend. But she just couldn't accept that I was doing the drumming, that I was doing all this Native stuff, you know. And its those kinds of situations that I find really difficult to deal with, in terms of 'well, what do I do?'"

Another individual described being caught between her own family's denial of their Indianness and white peoples' denial, in trying to assert a Native identity at an early age:

"The very first time I dealt with the issue of being Native was in Grade Six, when I did a show and tell. I brought in this really nice red willow basket that my grandmother had made, and all this other stuff that we had stored in a closet—this beautiful beadwork pillow, and this other buckskin pillow, and a couple of other things that were from the family. And so I traipsed off to school and showed all this stuff and said 'I'm Native and this is some of the stuff that we have in our home, this is where it comes from, this is who made it...' and all this stuff. But after I did that, one of the boys in my class came up to me and said 'you're not an Indian!' And I said 'oh yes I am!'. And he said 'no you're not' and I said 'yes I am' And I went home and told my Mom and she said 'No you're not!' My Mom was really upset because I

went and talked about being Indian, and brought all this stuff in to show people.”

For most of the participants, denials of Indianness by non-Natives functioned as a constant irritant, a form of racism which was monotonously predictable, and only occasionally enraging. While these denials at times created surrealistic and disorienting situations which the participants then had to negotiate as part of everyday living, for the most part the participants attempted not to take them too seriously. Those who had grown up identifying as white spoke of the years when they had wrestled with a powerful internalized logic which insisted that they could not be Native if they did not look Native; for these people, white peoples' denial of their Nativeness represented additional obstacles to negotiate. On the other hand, those individuals who grew up with a strong sense of Native identity were far more easily able to dismiss non-Natives' attitudes towards them as irrelevant. For all of the light-skinned participants, however, denials of Nativeness from Native people were another story.

12.3 DENIALS OF NATIVENESS FROM NATIVE PEOPLE:

“Most of my life I grew up with ‘You’re not Native, are you? You don’t look it’ and a dozen other variations. Recently I was walking down the street and a Native panhandler accosted me for money. Because I was in a hurry for a meeting, I waved him off. As I hustled away, he saw the First Nations jacket I was wearing and screamed after me ‘First Nations! I don’t think so!’. Another time I was entering a money machine alcove in a bank. There was a young Native woman standing there warming herself. She took one look at my jacket, sneered and said ‘What tribe, Wannabe?’ [To white looking Indians] My advice? Get used to it!”

- Drew Hayden Taylor²

² Taylor, Drew Hayden. “Good People Outnumber the Bad”. *Windspeaker*, October 1997, 9.

A number of white-looking or light-skinned individuals described the difficulty of negotiating a sense of Native identity in the face of denial by whites when Native people also made it clear they didn't belong. One white-looking individual, whose life had been dogged with drinking problems, and uncontrollable anger stemming from intergenerational problems of abuse in his Native family, described the problems he faced with denials of his Nateness when he applied for a Native entry program which would enable him to attend law school:

"For me it was the first experience that I had of being the other side of the racial coin, you know—of not fitting in. Having people looking at me and saying "who the fuck are you? What are you doing here?" It was only one or two Native students saying "you don't belong here", but I guess it hurt me. Because then I started second-guessing myself "do I really belong here? What am I doing here?" But then, when I went back, in '93, they had a little introduction the first day, and one of the first things that they said is that everybody has a right to be here, no matter how light their skin is. They said "any racial problems, there'll be serious repercussions—we don't need it here! Which really sort of took the edge off me, right off the bat because suddenly I felt saje, I could be who I was."

Many of the participants described multiple experiences of everyday rejection from Native people, as the participant below demonstrates:

"I remember standing in front of the Native Centre, and one of the drummers from the group that was drumming came outside, and was joking around with his other buddy there. He looked right at me and called me "Shoganash". And by then I knew what that meant. I was really insulted and really hurt, because by that time I was already working in the community, and doing what I thought was really important work.

I remember, too, when I was seeking treatment for my alcoholism at one of the Native agencies, they had this really long intake process over there. I remember being so uncomfortable in my own skin, and in my own body, because my identity as a Native woman was being questioned—because I didn't look Indian."

One woman described painful incidents which occurred in her childhood, which taught her that she was not valuable to Native people except when they recognized her as her father's daughter:

"With my father being in such a high-profile situation, I would regularly go up to Native elders and start conversations and be dismissed or pushed aside until my Dad introduced me, in which case I was thought of as adorable and lovely. They thought I was white, until my Dad showed up, and then suddenly I was so-and-so's daughter, and therefore acceptable. I also remember going to conferences with him. One time we were in Ottawa and my Dad was speaking, and I fell asleep on a chair—and an elderly Native woman came and pushed me onto the ground, and just sat down on the chair. There's been quite a few very painful early memories like that. You know, now I can deal with it completely differently, but it was very painful, when I was younger."

One participant described a childhood incident where the Native community victimized her. As the daughter of a highly racist white policeman, she believes that she was targeted because she represented an easier target than her father for the community's anger:

"When I was four or five, we moved to this village, which is a predominantly Native community. My father was a policeman, which meant we lived at the police station. Looking back now, I realize that I didn't have a lot of friends. The Native parents wouldn't let their kids play with me because my father was a police officer, and the white parents wouldn't let their kids play with me because my mother was Native. So it was really hard. I went into the community as this gregarious little outgoing girl, who was really bright, always eager to do things, wasn't afraid to talk to people, that kind of thing. And when we left, I was a shy girl who'd really turned inwards—it was hard for me to make friends.

We were only in that community for about a year. I think there was a whole lot of animosity and violence geared towards me, from the Native community. One day, my Mom overheard a couple of Native kids talking about how I was gonna get pushed in front of the train that day. Then an attempt was made on my life. Somebody from the Native community shot at me, in my back yard. Within a week, we were packed up and gone. Because of that, a precedent was set, that no police officers with children would ever be transferred up there again."

This individual, however, was accepted and nurtured in the urban Native community as an adult, to the extent that she now feels fully as if she belongs among Native people.

For those individuals whose appearance is ambiguous, and who have all the other markers of Indianness—status, band membership, and knowledge of lineage and heritage—denials of Indianness by Native people are seldom traumatic. For those individuals who lack other markers of Indianness as well, however—such as being non-status, or lacking knowledge of lineage or heritage—denials of Indianness by Native people can represent a routine devastation marked by a “no-win” situation. If individuals attempt to manage the situation by not caring if other Native people externalize them, they risk gradually losing their sense of being part of a community, by ignoring the importance of group recognition. If individuals continue to demand to be recognised as members of their community, however, they will continue to routinely face sometimes devastating disappointments.

The violence of racism which darker Native people must negotiate on a daily basis must be seen as integral to the lateral hostility which their denials of lighter Native people’s Indianness represents. On the other hand, a couple of participants described incidents where Native peoples’ denials of their Indianness seemed highly strategic—where dismissing these individuals as “not really Indian” was not a matter of a marginalized dark person attempting to assert some personal power, but rather, was about enabling the individual to dismiss issues or perspectives which were troublesome to them by externalising the troublesome individual as “not really Indian”.

“Something had happened within the community—it was an injustice. And I had been approached by somebody, to help organize a meeting to address this issue. I made one phone call, to ask an organization for some support, or any kind of help in that way. And I got a very

negative response. And then because of that one phone call that I had made, I had heard a lot of rumours about myself, within the community—that I'm not Native, that I shouldn't be sticking my nose into Native business. You know—'white people should deal with white issues, and leave the Native business for the Natives'. And the person is not full Native herself. To me, I don't feel that it's a race issue. I feel there is underlying stuff that's there."

Whether denials of Indianness are used to assert personal power or externalise dissent, the result is an atmosphere where discussion of racial ambiguity is discouraged, where flexible, hybrid identities are distrusted, and light-skinned individuals who challenge rigid attitudes about identity or who simply break step with the opinions of others can easily be dismissed as “wannabees”.

12.4 THE LIMITS OF NATIVENESS:

With respect to individuals who are very mixed race, occasionally the conversation was brought around to concepts such as “the limits of Nativeness”—the extent to which a mixed-race person with very little “Indian blood”, particularly if their families had almost ceased to identify as Native—should be considered to be Native. For some of the participants, such conversation brought the issue of racial ambiguity into the open in ways that made them visibly uncomfortable. Addressing this issue without simply dismissing the Indianness of marginal people demands a flexibility about notions of “sameness” and “otherness” that can violate firm beliefs about absolute difference between whiteness and Nativeness. The individuals who were most uncomfortable about such questions were not necessarily those who were very mixed-race. Instead, it was participants who had grown up extremely alienated from Nativeness, such as some of the adoptees, who felt it was extremely important to belong, and as a result found it difficult to address racial ambiguity. For a few of the participants, however, who were very mixed-race and knew very little of

their histories, unstated anxieties about “at what point should bloodlines be considered irrelevant—at what point should an individual be considered no longer Native” seemed to be perpetually hovering beneath the surface of the interview process.

The question of “marginal Indianness” can only be answered by asking who is doing the evaluating, from what perspectives and with which goals in mind. Is the individual attempting to erect boundaries in the interests of preserving Native identity from outsiders? Is the question being asked by white people interested in categorizing an individual’s “authenticity”? Is the question being asked to shut down on diversity within communities, to maintain an individual’s sense of their own Nativeness by externalizing somebody “less Native” than themselves, or through a cynicism which only sees phoniness everywhere? James Clifford’s notion that ambiguity in Native identity cannot be “solved” but simply must be recognized as existing—that there will always be individuals and communities who are white if looked at from one direction, but Native if looked at from another direction—is extremely useful here (Clifford, 1998).

Two important issues to consider, when attempting to understand “marginal Indianness” are the divergent experiences of Nativeness which mark those Nations with vastly different experiences of colonization, and the different types of bonds which tie individuals and families to those communities. A couple of the participants had a sense of being only marginally Native because they came from small east coast nations who have struggled to maintain themselves against extinction through intermarriage and adaptation to a white norm, but found themselves living among people with much shorter colonization histories who had much more racial distinctiveness. Other participants come from marginal *families*, which have been externalized from Native communities by the

Indian Act or other processes of colonization. And some of the participants are reclaiming a marginal Indianness *within their families*. It is primarily individuals in the last category, for whom Indianness is such an individual issue that they have almost no collective ties to their heritage, whose Nativeness might be considered problematic. What, if anything more than a “few drops of blood”, separates these individuals from “wannabees?”

This is a difficult question to ask, not in the least because individuals’ actual lives are concerned. One way of looking at this issue, however, is noting the extent to which Native culture, in the interests of survival in a genocidal environment, is premised on the notion of hard and fast distinctions between “whiteness” and “Nativeness”. Lived experience, however, is always far more complex. As Maurice Switzer has noted, even without taking racial mixing into account there are no hard and fast definition of what constitutes Nativeness in a context where blood, culture, and dedication to the cause of Native people all play a part in the survival of Native peoples.

Who is more Indian: a “full-blood” like Walter Twinn who, as a strategic Mulroney senate appointee, was instrumental in helping ram the Goods and Services Tax through Parliament over the objections of Indians across Canada, Ovide Mercredi, a “C-31” who, during two terms as National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, raised the political profile of Aboriginal Canadians higher than it had ever been, or perhaps popular entertainer Shania Twain, adopted by an Ojibway father, who bases her claim to Indian-ness on an upbringing that included being taught by her grandparents how to snare rabbits in the northern Ontario bush? (Switzer, 1997:2).

The issue is not that Nativeness is a constructed category, but that Aboriginal identity flows from a complex history of colonization and strategies of resistance, including a history of adopting captured whites into different nations to maintain cultural survival, of having your

children abducted into schools where “the Indian” is killed but the (racially Native) person remains, of having Native identity carefully regulated according to various standards of blood quantum or “living like an Indian” while at the same time racial segregation ensured that mixed-blood Native people are treated like Native people, and many other contradictory experiences which makes Nativeness at times an issue of blood, at other times of culture, and at other times simply lineage. It is the history behind the word “Native” (and the precariousness of Native survival under a regime that is still colonial) which makes Native identity an extremely complex issue.

For these reasons, as I have already noted, post-modern or post-colonial notions of self-invention, hybridity and boundary crossing have been rejected by most Native elders and scholars, as lacking the tools to adequately protect Native culture. Nevertheless, the fact remains that when the boundaries of racial/cultural categories are maintained as hard and fast but intermarriage continues to proceed, there will always be individuals whose lives fall on the margins of those categories, but who are pressed to identify simply as being one thing or the other. Jonathan Hart presents the example of Louis Riel, a person of only limited Native heritage who identified strongly with that heritage, and yet embraced both a love of Catholicism and of his French heritage. Hart suggests that Riel disturbs “the opposition of colonizer and colonized, the simple division between European and Indian...as a man who was and was not European, was and was not Indian” (Hart, 1997:164). Because Native people for the most part reject these notions of the fluidness of boundaries and assert that mixed-race Native/white people are simply “Native”, this kind of rigid classification will *inherently* create boundary problems—or, in real life, credibility problems—for those whose “racial” mixture tends towards the margins of Nativeness.

Another important thing to consider when looking at individuals who by blood quantum are only marginally Native is the class background of the individuals involved. As I explored in Chapter Five, “wannabeeism” is largely a privileged-class phenomenon. White-looking individuals from poor backgrounds who identify as Native because they have “a few drops of Native blood” are not identifying with a romantic image of Nativeness to hide their privilege and complicity within the dominant culture, as “wannabees” are. They are individuals who face considerable *actual* powerlessness within the dominant society. While the images of Indianness that they grew up with may have predisposed them to identify, at least initially, with a romantic conception of Indianness, the fact remains that their choosing to actualize a Native identity out of only one strand of their heritage represents a pragmatic choice, of recognizing that they may have more in common with the Native part of their heritage than with the European heritage which forms the greater part of their racial background. With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that these individuals have “burned their bridges” to white society and cast their lot in with the Native part of their heritage.

In considering “marginal” Nativeness, it might be useful to move beyond a focus on “how many drops of Indian blood makes a person an Indian”, and to take up the question of *how* marginal individuals live their lives as Native people—in particular, the crucial question of longevity, of how long they “stay” Indian. As William Penn has noted, one of the main problems with “wannabees” is that they have no commitment to their Native identities; as soon as they encounter the difficulties of Native life, “playing Indian” becomes boring, and is rejected for other games. Penn suggests that the argument should not be over who is Indian, but *how* the person is Indian, how they conduct themselves, and how long they stick around (Penn, 1997:106-108).

While engaging with the question of the limits of Indianness is relevant for a couple of the participants whose Native heritage is relatively marginal, a number of other participants face another kind of difficulty with the narrow focus on Nativeness as a homogeneous identity which is prevalent in the Toronto Native community. For these individuals, their central concern is not whether their Indianness is too marginal, but the fact that it is seen as “too different” from the norm. For these individuals, asserting hybridity is extremely important to their abilities to identify as Native people.

12.5 EMBRACING HYBRIDITY:

I am using the term “hybridity” here to denote both the rupturing of colonizer stereotypes about the “Indian Other” and to describe the form of resistance which is being taken up by some urban Native people as a challenge to the assumption of cultural homogeneity which is common in the Native community. In this usage, hybridity is less concerned with precise racial “origins” than with the lived complexity of urban mixed-race peoples’ lives as Native people. It is concerned not only with how individuals who are multiracial refuse to be restricted to only one identity, but with the manner in which some participants are struggling to broaden notions of Indianness to reflect the hybrid nature of many Native communities.

The individuals who assert hybridity most proudly are often those who are multiracial, who refuse to abandon a Black or Asian identity as the price of embracing a Native identity. In the context of the Toronto Native community, where fairly rigid notions of Native identity are maintained, these participants’ affiliations with multiple communities occasionally causes them to be viewed with some distrust. The African Cherokee participant, for example, described how she did not simply feel

pride about her “Africanness” and “Cherokeeeness”, but also about being a “Black Indian”; part of a historical tradition which has a considerable presence in the United States. In Canada, however, where the tradition of Black Indianness lacks historical longevity (outside of the Maritimes), she finds the Black and Native communities to be disparate and disconnected, each disowning part of her heritage:

“I’m very proud of both of those aspects of my heritage—and when they came together, as well, because in my particular case, they came together during slavery. I’m very proud of the history of Africans and Native people when they have come together. You know, they did some amazing things—the Black Seminoles in Florida, for example—they held up the American army for forty years, that kind of stuff. So I’m just very proud of it. But as an African Cherokee living in Toronto, I find that its very lonely sometimes. I find I really want to talk to some Black Mi’kmaqs, or other Afro-Metis people, and find out what their experiences have been, and if there’s any similarities. Because it just seems that I have to define myself so much, and clarify things so much to everybody, all the time, you know. Every time I go into a circle and introduce myself, I always say I’m an African Cherokee. And people ask me why do I need to say that I’m African? And I get the same thing in the African community too, like “what are you trying to claim privilege for?” which is how the African community sees claiming a Native identity, which is totally nuts. So its lonely sometimes”.

Another kind of hybridity is expressed by individuals who are Mestizo, who are members of the dominant society within their Latin American countries, and yet who still have close or recent ties to their Native roots. These individuals, particularly those who have emigrated to Canada, cannot easily conceptualize themselves simply as “Native” without in some way oversimplifying their identities. The participant who is Mestiza with recent Mapuche heritage on both sides of her family, and who spent every summer in a Mapuche community, spoke of the complex social caste system in Chile where she grew up, which enables the majority of its Mestizo population to claim white privilege. In Chile, her Spanish name and the fact that she had grown up outside of a Native community

mark her as a member of the dominant culture, while at the same time she is constantly derided and inferiorized as “la India” (“Indian”) *within* the dominant culture because of her dark skin and Native features. She identifies as Native because her father, who died young, was Native, and because of the traditions passed down to her by her Native grandmother; however, she is careful to assert that her experience is different from that of Mapuche people who grew up in Native communities:

“What right do I have to talk about Native people if I haven’t lived in Native culture? I never lived with them. I would stay with them for three months at a time, every year, but its not the same thing as being there, day and night, and having my whole life there. In Chile, they make a big difference, if you live in the community or not. They say “we are Native, we live in our culture, and you are not because you are mixed, and because you never lived with us”. It doesn’t hurt me. I think its important to recognise the differences. But to me it is not important, because I know I am a Native person. Because my roots tell me that I am. And I would say “Why would somebody try to define me? Its in my genes”.

Those of us who are mixed-race, or who aren’t recognised, or who haven’t lived the culture—for us it is different to be Native. To me, it’s something that we were born with inside us, a way of seeing things, a way of living, of connecting with other people, with other beings.”

In Canada, among the immigrant Latin American population, she has faced pressure from other Chileans to identify solely as Chilean; because of her education and Spanish name these individuals claim she is “indulging in folklore” by identifying as Native. In the Native community, she is welcomed instantly as Native on the basis of her appearance, until she speaks, when her Spanish accent alienates some Native people who are unaccustomed to hearing Native people speaking Spanish. This individual has been marked both by her experiences as a Native person and her experiences in Canada as a Latin American. As a result, she is tied to two communities—both are vital to her identity.

These participants, and others whose non-Native heritages is non-white have found that the Native community occasionally views them with uneasiness or suspicion. This suggests that the Toronto Native community takes a heritage of intermarriage between Anglo-Canadians and Native people for granted, but views the products of other kinds of intermarriages as too “different” or “foreign”. In some respects, urban Native people may have been so heavily anglicized by generations of forced interactions with Anglo-Canadian culture that they demonstrate precisely the same kinds of racism as Anglo-Canadians do, towards mixed-race Native people who are less “whitebread” in their cultural affiliations. The distrust of the hybridity of those participants who are Black and Aboriginal, or from Latin America may be rooted in this kind of racism inherited from a long history of interactions with a white-supremacist Anglo-Canadian culture.

Still another form of hybridity is demonstrated by those whose Metis families show an extensive history of French and Indian intermarriage, because of the historical longevity of these experiences.

“Southern Ontario doesn't have that Metis tradition, and things are a little weird around here, from my perspective. This name that I carry is not an Indian name, it's a Metis name. It was a fairly big Metis name in the old Red River colony. In terms of the actual Aboriginal people that contributed to my identity—I guess it's my great-grandmother who is the last “identified Indian” on my father's side, but you have to understand that among Metis people there was a lot of intermarriage, of Metis people marrying Metis people, so it wasn't just one shot of blood, right. My father's grandmother was an Indian from North Dakota—I saw a picture of her all dressed up like a good French woman, but she was a Dakota Indian, probably the last one that was “an Indian” on his side. But the bloodlines continued to flow, right, among Metis people. Except for my generation, by the way—in which we're all no longer marrying into the rural Southern Manitoba/North Dakota Metis people. We're starting to marry out.

My mother looked absolutely Cree—but do I know? Her mother was from another Metis family, but whether she was an Indian or a

Metis, I don't know. I know that she was Aboriginal. In the Red River settlement, and in the formation of my family's identity, these Aboriginal women were incorporated into these French Catholic families, and they became, to all intents and purposes, better Catholics and better good French women, than any of the French women that weren't there!"

For this individual, who grew up in Western Canada where differences between treaty Indians and Metis are viewed as significant, to come to Toronto and claim to be an "Indian" is a falsification of his family's real experience. However, in the Toronto community, he has been challenged as being "ashamed of his Native heritage" for not identifying simply as Native.

On a practical basis, being comfortable with the notion of hybridity enables people to "decouple" some aspects of their appearance from their identity. For individuals to see their identities as hybrid, in this respect, is to allow their identities their diversity and specificity without dismissing them as *Native* identities. In this study, those participants who saw their Native identities as hybrid seemed to find it far easier to accept their white appearance than those who believed that the only way to be Native was to conform to rigidly-bounded notions of Indianness:

"I've certainly encountered people with attitudes. But right now, and I think probably for the past ten years, my attitude is, basically, if someone wants to call me white, well, that's fine. I'm okay—to you I'm white—that's fine. It's not a crime! And some people will call me Anishnawbe, and that's fine too. I think of myself as a bit of both, and something else besides. And I don't know—I guess at this point I'm comfortable with however people perceive me."

This kind of resolution was also possible for those status Indians who acknowledged their communities' histories of racial mixing, so that being a "halfbreed Indian" was not a contradiction:

"On my reserve, I think there's always been a lot of intermarrying with non-Indians. You'll find this a lot around the Great Lakes in general, I think. For all intents and purposes, I believe that Wikwemikong, in a

large way, is a halfbreed community. And always has been. Wiki's been a halfbreed community that functions differently than most, in that Wiki absorbs non-Natives into their fold, and effectively turns them into Indians."

This individual was able to relatively easily accept his fair skin as part of his identity:

"I've thought a lot about wanting to look "more Indian", just so I wouldn't have to hear comments like "well, you don't look it....". If I had black hair with a big long braid, I'm sure I would look more Indian. And if I shaved my mustache off, and laid out underneath a tanning bed, I'd definitely look more Indian. I mean, I can pass, right? I can pass as an Indian. I can pass as a white man. But that's not the point, right? I look this way because I AM a halfbreed—I am exactly that.

I realised at some point that, you know, being a halfbreed is an empowering thing—as opposed to it being caught between two worlds and not belonging anywhere. I belong everywhere! Its given me a lot of resources, a lot of things of beauty that I can say are part of me. Like when I listen to Celtic music—as opposed to being something that's currently trendy—for me, it's part of my roots. I grew up listening to it. I have a father who plays traditional Celtic music on the mandolin. When I listen to powwow songs on a tape, I remember going to big powwows in Alberta as a very small child. I remember the powwows up in Wiki when I was small. I remember the one last year, right? I mean—it's there, on both sides."

This individual found it important to reject the stereotype of the "tragic halfbreed", a concept which probably originated in the white society but which, over the years, has assumed almost mythic proportions within Native literature, as Kimberly Blaeser notes:

The depictions of mixed-bloods by most contemporary Indian authors treat their condition as temporary, as a phase that, by nature, entails the possibility of change, the possibility of resolution of the ambiguous state...Most mixedbloods in Native American literature...have desired and sought this resolution of ambiguous identity that results from movement to one side of the border or the other (most usually back to a tribal centre of culture). Therefore, unless and until they reach that resolution, they exist in and are depicted in a tragic state (Blaeser, 1996:158).

A number of the participants indicated that while they identified entirely as “Native”, they were most comfortable locating themselves in a hybrid Native space “in the middle”, between those Native people who self identified as “full-blooded traditionalists” and white people. As the individual below noted, being halfbreed was a strength, not a weakness.

“When I look at my circle of friends—most of them are halfbreeds. Then there's the odd one that's—well, they may look more Native, but who really isn't, they're only half. I find—you've got the best of both worlds, but also the worst of both worlds. You can always go over to the white side, and fit in, and vice versa. I think I'd rather be a halfbreed than to be either side, full. I'm comfortable with it.”

“I can think white, and understand where whites are coming from, because I've been there, and I can also be on the part with Natives, or visible minorities—I would have to say not so much Native, as non-white. I know what its like to think from that perspective as well. And I think "how wonderful!" It's amazing sometimes when it happens, that you're crossing back and forth...Not have that would be a loss, I think. I like to step back from both of them, and observe both of them, and understand perfectly well how each group is thinking. I can relate to both groups...and I figure, its excellent for me, in this kind of work. Its terribly comfortable for me. I mean, I'm right at home. Where I feel uncomfortable is being forced into either category.”

At the opposite end of the pole to these individuals who insisted that Native identities should fit their realities were those participants who held views that Native identity was a relatively homogenous essence. This perspective was common among some of the adoptees, and others who had grown up feeling like outsiders, who had an acute desire to belong among Native people. These individuals brooked no ambiguity about Indianness; their struggle involved finding ways to conform to it. One individual described her difficulty in asserting boundaries in such circumstances, with her awareness that belonging was important enough

to her that she would sacrifice most of her values to obtain recognition by other Native people:

Because of having been adopted, I have this incredible need to belong. A lot of adoptees experience this. We don't belong in the white world, we don't belong in the Indian world—we just want to belong. What happened to me in the process, and still happens a little bit, was that I had a lot of difficulty with a Native man here in Toronto, who was very abusive. And...goddamn it, I let him abuse me! I've only recently made the connection, that because of my incredible need to belong, I let him do that to me. And my partner said to me "you know...you're this incredibly strong woman. You would never let a white man treat you like that, ever! I think this is much more wrapped up with the fact that he was an Indian. Long black hair, dark. It didn't matter how shitty he was treating me!" And that's happened with him...and with other people, several other times. I just made that connection recently—you bet, that's what it's about. I don't want to be shunned, I need to belong—so I don't care how bad you treat me. All my life I wanted to belong, and that's what that's about."

Other individuals who, despite their white appearance, held to a strict notion of themselves as entirely and unequivocally Native, were able to manage contradictions in their self-image through adopting a traditionalist perspective that rejected the importance of appearance to Native identity. This enabled these individuals to be comfortable as white-looking Native people, and therefore, to be less concerned with how other Native people saw them.

The individuals who held to uncomplicated notions of "Nativity" found it hardest to acknowledge their light-skin privilege. They did not, for example, see identity as context-dependent, and therefore were left with no conceptual tools to acknowledge how in some contexts, white-looking Native people *are* white, compared to darker people (which does not in any way deny that they are also Native people). Cherrie Moraga perhaps is best at describing how identity fluctuates according to context for light-skinned mixed-race Native people, when she describes how

Native people in the southern United States see her as halfbreed, while Native people across the border in Mexico see her as white:

I thought I met a lesbian once, an Indian woman from the south of Oaxaca who sat three tables away from us at a club in the capital city. As the salsa band plays, I watch the woman in a short mannish haircut watch us, a table of U.S. Latinas, as Sabrina takes her girlfriend out to dance. When they return to the table, the waiter brings us another round, courtesy of the woman three tables away. We invite her to join us. She is already drunk, and her tears well up and flow down effortlessly as she recounts to my *comadre*, Myrtha, the story of her passage here to this city of *ricos* and government officials, and poverty...She cries, and eyeing Sabrina's Indian *trenza* and Mixteca features, keeps wanting to understand who we all are. We try to explain, but she only cries all the more as the full moon passes into view through the *zocalo* window...I mention the moon's Indian name "Coyolxauhqui". She stares at me. It is the first time she has looked at me all evening. "How do you know that?" she asks. "You are white."..."She's right," I say later. "In her world, I'm just white" (Moraga:1996:234).

12.6 LIGHT-SKIN PRIVILEGE:

By comparison with Moraga's acceptance that one's identity and access to privilege shifts in different locations, some of the light-skinned participants demonstrated complex, emotional, and in some ways contradictory thoughts around the subject of their identities. Some individuals both acknowledged and denied light-skin privilege. The less-educated white-looking individuals, who lacked access to academic theory on identity and had to try and slot themselves simply as "Indian" or "white", exhibited a profound defensiveness to questions that suggested any ambiguity about their position as mixed-race people. For these people, it was clear that the manner in which the white society dismembers their identities weighs too heavily on them to enable them to explore their racial ambiguity too much. In a society where dark skin and experiences of racism are assumed to absolutely define Indianness, these individuals perhaps fear that, through the

hyper-critical eyes of the dominant society, they might not be able to find “an Indian” in them at all. A couple of individuals, who firmly denied having any light-skinned privilege at all (and indeed, who were tremendously economically marginalized) expressed anger at what they saw as their rejection by the Native community.

It is clear that some of the light-skinned participants, particularly some of the white-looking, university-educated men who occupy leadership positions in the community, enjoy tremendous levels of privilege from their abilities to utilize skills and resources from both communities to enhance their personal opportunities. Those white-looking individuals who seem to be “playing both sides of the fence” raised a heated response in a number of the darker individuals:

“Last year, when I worked at a native agency, my coordinator—you could not tell by looking at him, at all, that he was Native. And just talking to him over the summer—its like, he did play both sides. Like, he got the education, but his involvement with Native stuff was virtually nil. He got the job because a requirement was that you were Native. So he played that—he got his status to get jobs, but his involvement was nothing. His background was more towards the white side, being raised that way. Other people that I know that don't look Native, I didn't see that in them. Maybe because I know they're involved, and they are trying to find their background, and they are searching for roots, that sort of thing. So it just bothered me when I saw somebody not interested in his Native heritage, but who played the part up when he needed it.”

What became clear throughout the interviews, however, was that light-skin privilege goes much deeper than an individual's motives or intent, and enters into virtually every aspect of the lighter participants' lives, particularly those who have class and gender privilege already. Every one of the white-looking participants had received some form of unacknowledged benefit from NOT having to show up with a brown face when looking for an apartment, in dealing with government bureaucracy,

or in trying for a job in the mainstream. One individual demonstrated his sudden, visceral realization of his own privilege on moving to the prairies:

"Racism never really affected me until the time I went to Saskatoon. Until then, I didn't really acknowledge its existence. Except insofar as comments that came from my Mom's family about my father. I've got one uncle by marriage who's extremely racist, and he makes comments about Indians and stuff like that, just to be an asshole. But I never really experienced it until I moved to Saskatoon, and then I sort of thought "my god! Here is how I'm feeling, and I've never really had to deal with it before. Imagine how people feel when they're facing it every single day of their lives!" In Saskatoon, people will call and say "hey, I want to rent your basement", and they get told to come on over. They get there and get told "sorry, I don't rent to your kind". These sorts of things start to hit home after awhile. Holy Fuck! Its insane!"

This individual also described an instance where only his white appearance saved him from being arrested. In this instance, however, his strategic use of silence enabled him to prevent a darker woman from being arrested as well:

"One time I chose to stay silent, actually. We were in Saskatoon, at the Indigenous Bar Association, and there were a bunch of people in this party, about 30 people. The hotel security raided the party, and banged on the door "Everybody out, everybody out!" And they were giving us all this grief. I came walking out, and there's all these brown faces around me. When I came walking out they sort of looked at me, like "what the hell was that all about?" And then two more guys came up from downstairs, and I went up to the elevator—ready to go down, because I was in another hotel. And this Metis woman tried to go back to get her purse. And these two guys said "No—you can't go back over there". And I was just standing at the elevator, waiting. He grabbed her, and radioed downstairs "call the police, that's it! We're charging this girl...". And I just went over and said "what are you doing?". And they said "She's being arrested...she's here in this hotel and she's not registered as a guest, at this time of night, and she's causing trouble." I said "oh! Well—I'm not registered as a guest either. You better arrest me too". And because they saw me as a white onlooker, they let her go. So....that's one instance that I can remember, where I didn't say anything about what my background was. However you define it."

In listening to this participant, it is clear the extent to which in some contexts, looking white provides individuals with tremendous social authority and privilege, relative to darker people.

Of all the white-looking participants, only one individual, a low-income woman with relatively little education, said that she identified as Native everywhere—including to social services and to the police:

"I've not tried to keep it silent. I was arrested because my partner is epileptic, and he is fighting for the right to use marijuana medically. And because I was also charged with him, I decided to try and go a different route, and charge the government on Native rights. I was approached by the Native court worker. She had just sat down and started talking to me one day, asked me why I was there, and everything. And I was going to go along with that, and fight. My sister had had a dream for me, and told me to follow the sparrow. Now I don't know about the Sparrow case yet, but I know that it's one that is often used in the courts with Native rights. So I was told to follow the sparrow. But I guess the court didn't want to deal with that challenge, and they stayed my charges. If I don't get into any trouble within a year, its off my record. I'd never been in trouble with the law before. I know with UIC, or social services, every time I've filled out one of their forms, I've put down "non-status Indian".

Some light-skinned individuals noted the need for white-looking Native people to continuously speak out against racism. They recognized that in extremely racist environments, even if they were known to be Native, they often manage to escape the brunt of racism because they are not seen as being too different from whites—until they make an anti-racist intervention. Others suggested that it seemed important that they begin to be open about the times in their lives when light skin had protected them—even if this risked raising the anger of dark-skinned people towards them—in order to begin to bring these issues out in the open. One participant described how when he and his light-skinned partner attended a ceremony for the first time on her reserve, they were assumed to be white and were initially asked to leave, until his partner could

satisfy them that she had family from the community. The participant then raised this issue during a talking circle, so that members of the community could have an opportunity to talk about light-skin privilege—a process which was quite productive:

We got into a really interesting talk on racism, it raised the issue. A person who'd been adopted, who'd come back two summers ago to the community said that she'd had such a positive experience of people welcoming her—that it was very different from my partner's experience. And then people were saying "you know, we have a responsibility to welcome all our members back—not to question them and challenge them, but to welcome them. It doesn't mean we can't challenge people, but how do we do that? And where do we do that?" Those were the questions that were raised. And then other people were saying how they've been hurt, in white society, who are very dark-skinned. So we got into this discussion about skin colour, in the circle, and different people went around, and they said "well, I'm very dark, and I've been hurt, when I was very young, almost daily" And I didn't ask for that. You didn't ask for that. Its not a question of who's hurt the most—its a question of "what are we gonna do with this?" So people started to ask those type of questions. So it was a very interesting circle that we contributed to—we raised that issue, we brought it right back to the circle, and that circle turned into a whole question about race, mixed-race, colour perception amongst our own people, and racism."

One participant spoke about the need for critical thought in the Native community, particularly with respect to the use of terms such as "reverse racism":

"I really hate the term reverse racism. I hate it—because there's no such thing as reverse racism. Let's just get that right out in the open right now. That term is used far too often in the Native community. I'll give you an example. A former acquaintance of mine, a non-Native person, has made it to being the president of the board of directors for a Native organization. And any time anyone challenges the fact that maybe non-Natives should only be in supportive positions, she'll cry "reverse racism!". And so she's won a couple of people over on the board, like any time its said or implied, she says "reverse racism". Also, at an organization I formerly worked at, that argument has been used as well, when a non-Native person has been hired. If anybody brought up any kind of objection, then somebody would say "well,

that's reverse racism". No its not. I firmly believe there's many, many places for non-Natives to work in the Native community—but they have to be in supportive positions, not positions of power. A lot of energy ends up being taken on looking after the white person, because he or she might feel put upon. It downplays all the experiences of Native people with real racism."

As another of the participants pointed out, the divisions on the basis of relative privilege within the Native community are real. They have implications beyond individual circumstances, and need to be addressed in concrete ways, in organizational terms:

I think some concerns I guess I want to raise are...like, jealousies, that can happen between Native people, individually, and between these agencies in the urban community. Because I've seen it when I worked at different Native agencies. And sometimes I think I see it between individuals, whether its because you have status or you don't, or "you look more white so you might be able to fit in more when you have a job"...sort of thing. I think these are very real. I guess it all boils down to some people having more advantages than others—about appearance, and also about whether or not they have status. Like, if a person is darker, and they're job-hunting. It all depends, but I think sometimes that can be played on, intentionally or not."

12.7 SUMMARY:

From the participants' words, it is obvious that there is a need for clearer thinking on the part of individuals in the Native community—particularly those with rigid perspectives on Nateness which deny hybridity and the reality of multiple locations—about what it means to be a Native person who looks white, both in terms of the constant dismembering of their identities within both white and Native society, and in terms of the privileges that white-looking individuals enjoy. It is imperative, however, to point out that in some contexts—particularly with light-skinned individuals who are low-income with little education—the concept of having any kind of “privilege” seems to fly in the face of their generally impoverished lives—which suggests the need for anti-

oppression education which takes into account how gender and class mediates light-skin privilege. The question also arises as to how we can discuss appearance critically without falling into the dominant culture's reduction of identity to appearance. One way or the other, the Native community as a whole needs to open dialogue around the issue of appearance more succinctly—without closing down on the current acceptance of a broad range of appearances as “Native”, which appears at present to be a tremendous strength to the community.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

STATUS AND ENTITLEMENT

“It is sort of an issue in Indian country, whether you have status or not. Having status means that you're a real Indian and not having status means that you're not, right? And nobody really takes the time to deconstruct what that means. You rarely hear Native people really taking that on.”

INTRODUCTION:

Urban Native communities are diasporic environments, composed of families and individuals who migrated to the cities from their home communities. Many individuals came to the cities because residential school alienated them from their communities; others came to the cities to find work after resource development made it impossible for their families to live off the land. But to a phenomenal extent, urban centres also represent the places which Native people migrate to because they have lost status, or never received it in the first place, and therefore have nowhere else to go. From this perspective, urban Native communities are to a tremendous extent composed of the fallout from government regulation of Native identity.

Urban Native communities are unique in other ways, in that these are the only environments where status and non-status Indians are able to work together in the same organizations, because these organizations are not funded on the basis of strict status distinctions, as they are on reserves. In this respect, status in urban settings ceases to signify what it generally stands for in reserve environments. For many urban Native people, their experiences with government categories of Indianness have highlighted the racism and sexism of the *Indian Act*, and its utter inappropriateness as a vehicle for determining who is a Native person. Not

having status has impinged on their families' livelihoods, on their access to culture, and in deep ways has affected how they see their Native identities.

Two American Indian participants, both of whom grew up in Canada, are not eligible for status because their ancestors had never registered as status Indians in Canada. Both drew attention to the inherent racism of having your racial identity regulated by legal categories:

"On the Canadian side, the blood quantum is set at fifty percent, on the American side it's twenty-five percent. We had Indian papers, from the Canadian government, for my mother, because she was fifty percent—but of course, we're only 25%. So that means that in Canada, according to the government, we don't have a bloodline.

I'm not comfortable, or happy, about the measurements. I think it makes us less of a person than the person who doesn't have to measure how much blood they have. When I think of being a "status Indian", it reminds me of old slave movies, where they check your teeth. "Better check her teeth—see how much she's going to be worth on the block". That's the feeling I get when I hear talk about bloodlines. "Less than human, time to be auctioned off."

I keep thinking of when I was working in the hospital. I remember the Eskimo children who would come down for surgery or whatever. I remember one little girl, a gorgeous little girl. And her name was "Lisa E9997". That's how she was registered, that's how her family name was recorded. And when I think if it—what a horrible thing to do to a people. And she didn't know any better, and I didn't either. But the government did at the time. That was her family name. Just like the numbers on your arm in a concentration camp."

"I used to think that I'd like to have status in Canada. That certificate of blood quantum, in the United States, this "25 percent" thing—you know, it reminds me of the Nazis, measuring how Jewish a person is, and I hate that. It is a little bit more blatantly based on race in the United States, then it is here. It highlighted to me that I'm Native. Because I began to realise—if you're 25 percent Jewish, they'd throw you in a concentration camp. The more I started thinking about status, though, I began to think that I really did not want the government that oppressed me to define me. I know that sounds like wannabee talk, but that's the way I feel."

In this chapter, I will be exploring how experiences of exclusion from government classified Indianness have been lived by the participants—how it has impacted on their daily lives, and how it has shaped their own and their families' identities as Native people. I will also engage with the participants' views on status, and attempt to deconstruct the function of status in urban settings.

13.1 EXPERIENCES OF “HALFBREED” EXCLUSION:

If government categories of Indianness represent a war of jurisdiction over who has the right to define an Aboriginal identity—Native people or the government—then one group of casualties in this war have been the generations of non-status Indians and Metis who have lived traditional lives out on the land, as well as experiencing tremendous marginalization and racism in the cities, but who have internalised the government's logic that they are not Indian.

One very dark-skinned, Native-looking participant described how growing up off-reserve, as Metis meant that he would forever feel the need to qualify calling himself “Native” or “Cree”:

“When I was about 21 or 22, I started defining myself as a Native person. Not a Metis, because when somebody would look at me, they'd say “no, you're not a Metis, you're Native”—you know, that type of thing, because of the colour of my skin and because of my features. Because some of the Natives were lighter coloured than I was. So I started defining myself as Cree. Which wasn't exactly true, because both my mother and father came from Metis families. Now, maybe one was more predominantly Native than the other, but they were both from Metis families. So how I define myself now is as Native, but still it's not the truth. I don't really come from a Native community—I was brought up in the white society and always participated in the white activities, went to the white school, and the whole bit. The only really inkling that I got that I was Native, when I started to say “Hey, this is Native”—was when I'd go up to my mother's place, and I'd hear a different kind of language—and then look at some of my cousins, and

whatnot, and say "oh yeah, they're the same as me", but they'd be Native. So it's not really the truth to call myself Cree or Native, because I never really did live in the Native community."

Another participant described how her mother also could not see herself as a "real Indian", despite her Native appearance:

"In the last few years, I've continually said to my mother: "Mom—you don't know how many people that I have met that have blue eyes and blond hair, but they think of themselves as Indian!" And maybe they're not fullblood, but they're Indians, as far as they're concerned. So I ask her "How come those people have no problem with it but you do?" And that makes her stop and think. Like, if these people claim to be Indians and they don't even look it, then maybe she should think of herself as Indian as well. But its hard for her. When she was growing up, they never talked about their identity at all."

The reality of namelessness was constantly raised by the non-status and Metis people. For their parents, lacking entitlement to Indian status and a reserve, and forced to adopt the standards of the mainstream meant that their Nativeness could not even be called "Indian." Western Metis people sometimes referred to themselves as "breeds"; however, for east coast Native people, without a tradition of "Metisness", being urban non-status Indians often involved having no real name for themselves at all. These individuals simply struggled all their lives from a marginal position within the mainstream.

Some of the Metis people described the racism, poverty, and extreme marginalization their parents suffered in urban settings from lacking access to a reserve. One woman described her mother's childhood experiences of urban Metis life as follows:

"She had cousins who would beat her and her sisters because they wouldn't be prostitutes. It's like my family 'thought they were better than anybody else', in their neighbourhood, because they wouldn't bootleg, or be prostitutes. That's what they were constantly fighting against, from their cousins, in their own back yard—being attacked at any given time because they were trying to get an education, they were trying to work hard, and do better. And there was sexual abuse."

My Mom was sexually abused by a friend of her father when she was only six years old, and he threatened to kill her if she told. And her sister, my aunt, was raped more than once. That's what they grew up with. Everything to do with being dark and growing up there was bad, totally bad. If they could have washed the colour of their skin right off, they would have jumped in the river and done it. I mean, everybody was so jealous of their cousins who had lighter skins. And they would all buy the lightest shade of face powder that they could possibly get away with, and use it all the time, every day, trying to look whiter. But they had jet black hair, dark dark eyes, and dark skin—much darker than me—and it was pretty hard to hide.”

The Northern Saskatchewan Metis woman could not understand why her people do not have status, given that northern Metis people in Western Canada have approximately the same degree of racial mixing as status Indians do, live in equally as remote or northern communities as many of the First Nations, have a common cultural heritage, look the same, and speak Cree. She described the meaninglessness of the divisions between northern Saskatchewan Indians and Metis as follows:

“One time, when I was in Grade Eight, there was an announcement over the intercom. It singled out all the Native kids, and raised our anxieties about racial tensions, because there weren't a lot of Native people in our school. Anyway, the announcement said something like: "all the status Indians come and register with your numbers". I said "what number?" I had no idea of what they were talking about. So I went to the principal's office, and I asked them what number they were talking about. I said "I'm Indian, but I don't have a number". And they said "don't you have a status number?", and I just said "no". So I went home after school, and I talked to my Mom about it. And she said that number was just for Indians. And I said "but we're Indians!" And she said "no, we're not Indians. We're half. We're Metis. We don't have a number". I was so confused. I have my culture, and I speak my language. I look Native. To me, all this time, I was an Indian, that's all I was. I didn't know about halfbreeds. But that's the day I found out, that day, in Grade Eight, that I was not an Indian. And that I don't get the rights that the status people do.”

Her community, heavily affected by uranium mining, with high rates of cancer, is as remote as many First Nations communities, and the elders

in particular are suffering because they do not receive the non-insured health benefits and medical transportation which status Indians enjoy.

“There’s a lot of health problems in my community. Our seniors are so sick, and they can’t afford the medicines. If you’re on old age security, you get some discount. But if you’re not, you have to pay for all your medication, and it’s really hard when there’s no income. There’s no hospital in the region, and lots of people die who could have lived if we had health care a little closer. If you are really sick, you have to be flown out by ambulance, and then you get a bill for thousands of dollars.”

The harvesting rights historically denied to Metis people have also been an issue for this participant’s family, because her family still relies to a considerable extent on country food:

“Last year, the Metis got hunting rights! So my grandma said “ah, we can hunt now!” And it’s the first time, because before, if they wanted to hunt all season, my uncles would have to take a treaty person with them. And it’s usually Chipewyan, who the Crees never got along with traditionally—because they’re the treaty people on the reserve next door.”

For some of the participants, Metisness signified loss of access to culture, because their family had not been able to live on reserve. Education was also a sore spot for a few individuals, who are carrying significant debt loads for their educations, while most of the status Indian participants in this study have had their tuition paid by their bands.

Because Bill C-31 did not address the reinstatement of the descendants of those excluded from Indian status as halfbreeds, Metis people have been forced to try and get status by tracing their connections to any status Indians who may have married into their families. The above individual described her family’s attempts to get status in this manner:

Well, when the bill came out in 1985 that people could get their status back, my uncles tried. Because on my grandfather’s side, we think

someone had status—his Dad. And so we sent off the papers, and I sent mine off too. It took ten years! I applied in 1985, and in 1995 I went back home, and I got a letter. I should have kept it! But it said it was too far back, right? My uncle's still working on it. He's been corresponding with the government back and forth, back and forth. For me, what I wanted status for was the education benefits. I owe a huge student loan—but if I'd had status, I could have gotten that education as part of my treaty rights”.

Of crucial importance to contemporary Native empowerment is the manner in which the *Indian Act*, by separating Metis and treaty Indians into different communities, and providing one group with benefits and constraints which the other did not face, structured divisions between Metis and treaty Indians communities which still have resonance today. One woman, for example, whose mother had lived on the land as a child, but then faced racism and other forms of violence in urban settings, described the complex relationship of identification, alienation and fear which her mother still maintains towards treaty Indians:

“For all these years, I guess my Mom has felt some wistfulness, maybe, but mostly bitterness, about treaty Indians, because she always used to feel jealous that some of her cousins that grew up on the reserve had shoes, but they didn't have shoes. Things like that. She felt that the Indians were better off. And yet, at the same time, she saw reserve life very negatively. She would say things like “those Indians, you know, from the reserve—they're always partying, always drunk.” She felt that in their family, they worked harder because they had to get ahead—because they didn't have anything to rely on.

And she was afraid of them too. All we heard, growing up, was ‘don't go and associate with those Indians. Don't go to powwows’ and stuff like that. And it's because of the medicine. My Mom grew up knowing that there was a lot of bad medicine, and being exposed to some of it, too. She's told us stories about some pretty bad things that have happened to our family with medicine over the years. So that was the other reason that she grew up trying to keep us away from Indians. That fear, that something bad could happen to us as a result. So if you had status, then you lived on reserve, and you had all these benefits that her family didn't have. But then you also had all those other things to be afraid of.”

Other Metis individuals echoed this participant's words, describing the contradictory messages which they received about Indianness from their Metis parents as they were growing up:

"There was a reserve right close to Portage, just south, about five miles away. And when I looked at the conditions that they were living in, and then seeing that it didn't seem that there was any ambition there to do anything else but to stay on the reserve—then I began to believe that my father was right, in saying that "the only way that you're going to get educated or gain anything in this life is to follow the white man's way". Now, he was talking like a white man. "You have to learn from them". And this is the route that we followed. I'd look at the reserve and say "no...that is a terrible way to live." My Dad and Mom, they didn't have very much, so maybe that's why they decided that they would push their children. My father could see the advantages of the white school system, and the disadvantages of the school system in the Native community, when people in my mother's family were taken away to residential school. And they both wanted the white system of education for us.

I'd like to have followed the traditions that I'm sure that my mother knew. But...it wouldn't have happened at that time. Today its different, but back then when I was growing up it never would have happened, because the Native was a downtrodden person. For my parents, they could see that if we had ended up on the reserve, or applied for status, or anything like that, then we'd be in the same kettle of fish, and not have been educated. Or maybe we would have been educated but sent to an Indian school, residential school, and I don't think that either my mother or my father would have ever stood for having any of their children taken away from them. So yes, I would have liked to have followed some of the traditional ways, but it was just impossible. There was no way that you could ever do it, without being told 'get away from here'".

"When I was growing up, we lived beside this creek. And whenever we were bad, Mum would say that she was gonna give us away to the Indians, who lived on the other side of the creek. Now, my mother always treated Indian people—mostly Dakota people who lived nearby—with respect, and acknowledged the connections between us as Metis people and Indians. But there was this whole other layer, of internalised racism, of colonial oppression, that we also learned. It took me until I was in my twenties to begin to unpack some of that

stuff, to really understand why I didn't feel entirely comfortable, on a certain level, with Indian people."

The participant from a northern Saskatchewan Metis community related how the logic of the treaties still structures Indian-Metis relationships, even where differences between communities are relatively minor:

"In Saskatchewan, there's a lot of northern communities that are all Metis. The word for Metis in Cree means "half sons". And the word for treaty Indians in Cree means "fullbloods". There's nothing racist in it, it's just the way it is. But then, the Cree treaty Indians have a word for us, which is "Mitisse"—they play on the word "Metis", right? So they call you "mitisse", which means "my ass". But it's like, a little teasing going on between the Metis and the treaty Indians."

In talking about cultural revival, this individual made it obvious that her grandmother, who has lived a traditional life on the land as the wife of a trapper all her life, does not see her skills as equal to those of "the real Indians"—treaty Indians:

"My grandpa's Mom was a medicine woman, so she knew medicine. And my grandfather knew medicines, where to go and pick herbs. But it wasn't passed on. And my grandmother still uses traditional medicines. But she calls them, in Cree "the Indian medicines"—like its something that "the Indians" do, rather than the Metis. Even though to me, we're all Indian, right? But up there, because our communities are separated, the treaty Indians and the Metis are apart. All the reserves usually have Metis communities right next door to them, so we live separate."

The participant spoke of how, a decade ago, tensions between her community and the adjacent reserve escalated during an interval when the band began pursuing a land claim:

"There's a reserve that's two miles out from Beauval. When I was in Grade Ten, there was a lot of tension, because they came so close to our village. They were trying to extend a land claim to encompass Beauval. There was a lot of fear, and tension in the village, because we were afraid they were going to take the town over. I mean, the Metis aren't allowed to live on the reserve, right? The band seemed to

be taking over everything. Our village is surrounded by the reserve, and we can't go on their land at all."

Given this heritage of forced separation, it would be worthwhile exploring in more detail how contemporary relations between Metis people and those who identify as Indian are structured by the *Indian Act*. However, because of the highly context-dependent nature of Native identity, and because this study did not take place in Western Canada, such in-depth explorations are beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I will be exploring how Indian-Metis relations are manifested in the Toronto region. In Toronto, "Metisness" is not well understood within the urban Native community, and to a tremendous extent individuals tend to simply speak in terms of being "Native" (often encompassing significant degrees of racial mixing). As a result, below I will explore how the Metis participants see their identities in this context, as well as how Toronto Native people understand Metisness.

13.1.1 Contemporary Attitudes towards Metisness:

The participants manifested diverse origins and experiences of "Metisness", only a few of which are adequately explained by notions of a Metis Nation. For a number of the participants, their experiences of "Metisness" had as much to do with losing or having never had Native status in Western Canada as it did with the history of the Red River settlement. Four out of the eight individuals had Cree grandmothers who had lost Indian status for marrying Metis men.

It is interesting to note that in eastern Canada, where the category of "Metis" has little resonance and where Metis people are therefore free to choose whether to define themselves as "non-status Indians" or "Metis", the extent to which the participants identified as "Metis" seemed to depend on whether they had actually grown up in Western Canada, or the colour of their skin. This was most obvious in one family group I

interviewed, where of two siblings who had grown up in Eastern Canada, the darker one tended to identify as “Cree/Metis” while the lighter one simply called himself “Metis”. The father, meanwhile, is very aware that he is “Metis” and not “Indian”; however, since he is so dark he has called himself “Native” all his life because most Native people simply refuse to believe that he is Metis. Metisness then, appears to have been historically linked to a notion of being light-skinned, with darker Metis people simply assumed to be “Indian” in common-sense ways.

Two of the participants, both visibly Native but from vastly different experiences of Metisness, spoke of the quandary they face in Toronto where their understandings of themselves as “Metis” are seen as indicating that they are ashamed to simply call themselves “Native”.

“My friends don’t know anything about the Metis. They don’t know we don’t live on a reserve. Even friends that I’ve had since I’ve been here still don’t know that I don’t live on a reserve. They say “oh, what’s your reserve again?” They acknowledge that I’m Cree—they just don’t acknowledge that I’m Metis. So I sometimes feel bad to say I’m Metis, so I say “I’m Cree”. I think that when I say I’m Metis, they think I’m trying to be better than them...more white, right? Because that’s how they make you feel. And I have a Cree accent, and look Indian, so they automatically assume that I’m a status Cree Indian. And I leave it at that. They’ll talk about Cree people, and traditions, and stuff like this. And I can talk about traditions, and I can talk about Cree people.”

“Toronto’s a funny place—you’re either an Indian or you’re white, right? There’s not much allowance for Metis people—because there’s no historical place for it. That’s what I find in Ontario. Its like, in Toronto, when I first got here people said “are you an Indian?” And I said “no—I’m Manitoba Metis, historical Metis, going back to the Red River settlement”. Some people understand that, the ones who are fairly sophisticated about issues of identity. But I have found that other people see me as sort of suspect. “I mean, what is he really—anybody can be Metis because it’s self-declared. Maybe he’s not really Native. Or maybe he’s just ashamed to be Native”. I’ve had that kind of experience. Which might have affected me in terms of holding me back

from full participation. I don't know. Frankly, I'm not that introspective about it."

One Metis individual who had worked for Ontario Metis organisations pointed out that in Ontario, Metis identity at present is simply a matter of individuals having their Native heritage verified so that they could have access to resources:

"Right now in Ontario, being Metis simply means that if you have one Aboriginal grandparent, and you can document it, you'll be verified by the Metis Nation of Ontario. It's so that people of Aboriginal heritage can get access to funding for training. But it's all about money. There's all kinds of definitions of Metis floating around. Metis originally I guess meant French Cree or Saulteaux. Now it's anyone who's mixed-ancestry and wants to say they're Metis. And in this case, it's if you can prove it. Which makes sense if you're trying to get hold of some money—it's only fair."

This individual identifies as Metis primarily because his father is Western Metis and because of his white-looking appearance; however, he asserts that Metis people need to rethink their ideas about what constitutes their "nationhood":

"This whole definition of Metis right now....what people seem to be really hanging onto is these pictures of Riel, and so forth. And let's face it—I mean, my ancestors were probably not too fond of Riel. They were English halfbreeds, and they were not Catholic, they were Anglican, or Protestant. So what is all this?"

A further point which needs to be emphasized is that the tendency to identify with Louis Riel and the Red River settlement, and the concept of a Metis nation forged in the west in 1870 were positions strongly held by two out of the four Metis men interviewed, but by none of the four Metis women. The other individuals were concerned primarily with cultural revival, not specifically as Metis people but as people of Cree heritage.

One of the Metis people felt very strongly that, in the Toronto context, for Metis people to set themselves apart *was* a matter of them being ashamed to identify as Indian. His comments, however, only underlined the extent to which, in his mind, Indianness and Metisness *were* separate realities—but had to be somehow brought together, through denying difference:

“I think that some Metis people are more for living the white way than the Native way. Maybe that’s just my feeling, but I still think they think they’re a little bit better than the status Indians, the on-reserve Indians. I firmly believe that. As I say, some of them don’t even want to recognise the fact that they have that Native blood in them. Some of them are fairly dark, too—you definitely can see that there’s Native blood there. But they don’t seem to want to acknowledge that. This gets back to my father, who as I say, was Metis, but he’d talk about “those Indians”. I mean, he wasn’t Indian, but he was Metis, with Native blood in him. But he used that kind of talk—and I think it still goes on today.”

Another participant identified strongly with the concept of a Metis nation because he saw his own family’s history of silence and denial of heritage as closely linked to the repression that Metis people experienced as a result of the 1885 rebellion. On a daily basis, however, he sees his history as strongly interconnected with all Indigenous people. He does not differentiate strongly between “Metis” and “status Indians”—and he notes that the meanings of “Native” and “Metis” are changing:

“I grew up, and many Metis people grew up, not being seen as Native by Native people. So you had Native people that would look at Metis people and say “Aw, you’re not Native”. It could be based on appearance. It could be based on history, on status. But then Metis people also get white people saying “you’re not really white”. And so, for many Metis people, they just wanted to survive, have a place to live, have a family. Just survive. We are wonderful survivors, and that to me is a skill. And so what do you do, what choices do you make, in order to survive? And can I really judge that great-great grandmother, or great-great grandfather, for their choices, in order to survive? I don’t know—I don’t think I can. Each generation has to make its own choices. And the issues are the same, and yet they’re

also different. Because what's always at stake is our very survival. As peoples, as nations, as families, the ties that bind us. And I would say the thing that does unite us, as Aboriginal people, is the land. And that is one thing that I have a very clear vision of, and that's the land. Its our mother, and our mother can support that.

As Metis people—many people say that we're bridge-builders between cultures. Well, that's a bunch of bullshit. Bridges get walked on. Maybe once, we had a real function that way. But what defined Metis life keeps changing. So the question, the very question of what does it mean to be Metis or what does it mean to be a Cree man or woman—its changing. Its not a static thing.”

For the above individuals, who for the most part grew up in Western Canada and/or identify in deep ways as Metis, it is obvious that a heritage of being forcibly separated from Indianness has deeply marked them. Whether the individuals adopt strategies of asserting Metis difference or attempting to subvert differences by refusing to recognise them, the fact remains that a history of externalization from Indianness has manifested itself in the identities and choices of the above participants and their families. Only the participant who spoke of how lived meanings of Metisness and Creeness are both changing appeared to have found a way to move beyond the history of separation from Indianness which shapes Metis identity.

The other Metis participants, however, all children of Western Metis who had grown up in Eastern Canada, tend to focus primarily on the Native part of their Metis identity as the foundation of their Aboriginal identity. For these individuals, Metisness (as loss of status and loss of reserve community) is simply another brush with genocide that their families have had to face as Native people. These individuals spoke primarily of the difficulties they faced as non-status urban Native people, in a context where lacking status, even for dark-skinned people, overwhelmingly means not being “Indian enough”. They spoke of the attitudes that they encountered within the Native community, in which

lack of status seemed to signify that they lacked grounding in an Aboriginal community, lacked immediate ties to Indianness, or in other ways lacking a *living* Native heritage:

"I do have the heritage, and the bloodline, and that is my birthright, but it doesn't seem to be recognised—because I don't come from a band, and because I don't have Indian status. And sometimes people will ask, you know—oh, if they're talking about shopping or something, and they'll say "oh, what about your card" and you say "I don't have status", and they kind of go "Oh...who are you?"

"Sometimes I think it would be easier if I was status. Because sometimes I feel left out, since I don't belong to a band. When you're working for a Native organisation, these things are important. I've worked on the administrative assistant level, and sometimes I would envision myself working up to a higher level, speaking for a group of Native people. But you know, you read in the papers, or you hear gossip through the office, about whether somebody's fully Native. And so its harder, when you don't have status. You have to state your values, your traditions, all that is taken into account as you climb up the employment ladder, because those are important. In the community's eyes, you are a role model for our young people, and you manage other people. So its a question of what are your beliefs—what do you believe in? If you don't have status, and have no reserve, then its like 'who are you?' Those things all suddenly become questionable."

One of the participants, a dark-skinned non-status woman from Western Canada, with a non-status Indian mother and a Metis father, rejected the label "Metis" for herself. She admitted that being identified as Indian was very important to her, because as an adoptee she had felt like she didn't belong for most of her life. To her, being Metis signified an inferior, "less Indian" identity, which she rejected.

"Okay, this might be warped, but to me "Metis" means being not as much Indian as if I was to say I was Cree/Saulteaux. That's what it means to me. I'd much rather say mixed race than Metis. I'm kind of using mixed-race a lot more lately. I guess because when you say you're mixed-race, it doesn't question the Nativeness of your Native

part, it just says you're "Indian and other". Whereas saying you are "Metis" is different—it means you are all mixed up, that you are very mixed-race, and probably white-looking. I'm always amazed when I see dark-skinned people who are very proud, who identify themselves as Metis. For me, personally, it doesn't work. And you don't hear it in Eastern Canada. I think its all wrapped up in my whole struggle with getting status—the fact that I do kind of look Indian, and I don't have status, but how come all those white people got to have status. Its all wrapped up together. I don't want to be called a Metis. Goddamn it, I'm an Indian and I want my status!"

At this point, it is important to take into account the attitudes in the Toronto community which shape these responses from Metis individuals. On the whole, mixed-race Native people in Toronto who are not from Western Canada tend to reject the label "Metis" as their self-designation. For the status Indian participants, "Metisness" seemed to signify lack of connection to place, and a diminished sense of Indianness. Several of the darker-skinned status Indians described how in their youth they were called "Metis" by older people because they were products of racially mixed marriages. They all hated the use of this terminology because, as the older people were using it, it signified that they were somehow not entirely Indian in ways that externalized them from community. It must be emphasised that individuals who hold to this worldview are as mixed-race as Metis people are—they simply do not identify as such. A few individuals referenced the belief that to identify as being of hybrid lineage, as Metis people do, is the same as not knowing how to align one's self racially or politically. A few status Indian participants attacked Metis people in the community for being "ashamed of their Nativeness" because they refused to identify as Native (implicitly "Indian"), but instead insisted on their Metisness. Several status Indians conceded that asserting pride in Metisness might be something that was "good for Metis people out west"; however, they firmly rejected the notion of "Metisness" in Toronto as something that was simply divisive. Some of

the status Indian participants remarked that all people should simply “identify as Native people”, thus ignoring the centrality of status to the “in-group” nature of Indianness, and how non-status people have their identities routinely invalidated *because* they lack status.

Even the non-status participants from Eastern Canada indicated that they preferred to identify as non-status Indians rather than as Metis because of the association of Metisness with lacking an Aboriginal territory and having an “untraceable” lineage (from circumstances where mixed-race people may have been marrying other mixed-race people for generations). These individuals preferred to identify as “Indian” (even if non-status) rather than risk a sense of being further externalized from Indianness by embracing a “Metis” identity. The vehemence with which the majority of the participants asserted the importance of identifying as Indian, rather than Metis, suggests that “Indianness”, as a cohesive group identity, is extremely important to the self-image of most of the participants, and that “Metisness” signifies being outside of this group identity. In this respect, individuals in the Toronto Native community appear to have entirely accepted the *Indian Act*’s externalization of “halfbreeds”, in common-sense ways, as a “natural” phenomenon.

13.2 EXCLUSION ORGANIZED BY GENDER:

“In university I wrote an article on how Bill C-31 affected me and my family, for the newspaper, and the guy who was editing the article, a non-Native, noticed that I had used “Native/First Nations/Aboriginal” throughout the article. And he wanted to, I guess, clean it up and just use one term. So instead of calling me, he called a Native friend of his, who said to him: “well, she’s not really Native, anyway”.

If the previous section outlines the extent to which mixed-race individuals in the urban Native community yearn for a cohesive “in-group”

identity *as Indians* within the community, the issues raised by the refiguring of Native identity under Bill C-31 highlights the extent to which this cohesive sense of Native identity hinges on Native status. And yet, the participants' experiences with attempting to have their status reinstated, or to gain status, under Bill C-31 demonstrate the extent to which relying on the bureaucracy of a colonizing government to bestow the central determinant of one's identity can be extremely problematic. For many individuals, frustrating, dehumanizing, and sometimes bizarre issues have arisen in their attempts to acquire Native status.

One individual, who falls under the second-generation cut-off with Bill C-31, which renders him ineligible for status, points out how gender discrimination persists in the present, in disallowing the status of the mixed-race grandchildren of Native women who married white men while leaving the mixed-race grandchildren of Native men who married white women with status.

"My grandmother married non-Native, and had my father. So she would get her status back under C-31, and so would he, but not me. On the other side of it—anybody who was my grandmother's brother, no matter who he married—he could pass his status on."

Cross-border jurisdiction issues between Canada and the United States figured in the stories of a number of individuals. One American Indian woman whose family had always lived in Canada knew that her mother had had what she referred to as "Indian papers"—documentation attesting to their Native heritage in Canada—although she never discovered what kind of documentation this was, and whether it would be useful in their struggle to be recognized as a Native band in Canada. For another individual, her attempts to ascertain whether her mother could gain status have been held back by the difficulties of doing research in a number of American locations for information about her

family, who had fled to the United States to avoid government repression after the 1885 rebellion:

"I asked my Mom to see about getting status, and she did. About three years ago, she got the long form birth certificate, and sent it in to Indian Affairs. But they said they don't have enough man hours to do all the research that's required to establish the credibility of her story. Because my grandmother went to the residential school in Montana for a little while before they went back up to Saskatchewan. And they also lived in Turtle Mountain, North Dakota. My mom's sister wants to write to Turtle Mountain, to see if they have our grandmother listed, and in that way she could get her status from the American side. For the federal government, that line between Canada and the United States is a big issue. But my Mom says 'well, there was no border at that time'. At least as far as Cree people were concerned, there was no border."

Another individual whose Cree and Saulteaux family members moved back and forth between Montana and Alberta in the wake of the 1885 rebellion, who has been denied status in Canada because of a history of intermarriage with Metis people in her family, is also attempting to be recognised as American Indian by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States. This individual, an adoptee, described her difficulties in trying to regain status in Canada, caught between adoption laws which prohibit full disclosure of birth parents' identity, and Indian Affairs' restrictive and demanding edicts, and how she ultimately realised that her family history, which is Native on both sides, is apparently not enough to make her a status Indian in Canada:

"My mother's father was one of the landless Indians of Montana. Her grandmother is from Cold Lake First Nation. But the first thing Indian Affairs said was that they had no record of any member of my family ever being registered as Indians in Canada. I protested this, based on the fact that they had also said that my mother was eligible for status, even though she didn't have status before she died. But based on the facts as they knew them about my father, they could not determine whether he was an Indian or not. And because I'm under subsection 6(2) of the....no, not the criminal code, the Indian Act, I can't get status unless both parents are eligible. And so I protested their decision, and

I found the only Native woman in the whole country of Canada who works in Ottawa, who handles all the protests. So that was a nice connection. It took me years to find her. But I got denied again. And so then I had a conversation with her, and she said 'I have your adoption file in front of me'. She was divulging information that she wasn't supposed to be, to me. She said 'I can tell you—I know for a fact that your father is not an Indian. He's Metis'. So I can't get status in Canada—because my father isn't eligible, being non-status."

One woman, whose mother had grown up non-status because her father enfranchised, now faces the restriction that her mother is considered as having only one "full Aboriginal" parent because her Native grandmother's documentation has vanished (although she is still alive). Lost in a bureaucratic loop, she is presently denied status in accordance with Bill C-31's ruling that her mother's "partial" status cannot be handed down to descendents whose other parent is non-Native:

"Right now, my Mom is working on getting her full status. She has that...what's that, half status, or part status? When you're under Section 6(2), where you only have one parent that is Aboriginal? She has both parents that are Aboriginal, but somehow there has been no record of my grandmother as being an Indian and living on the reserve. Now my grandmother was born on the reserve, went to residential school, is very much alive, and has a birth certificate—although the documents which prove all of it were somehow burned or destroyed. For me it's been really bizarre, because my first cousins—they have status. We have the same grandparents, and they have status. Its been nine or ten years where I've tried to pursue it, but so many times I've put it on the back burner. And actually it's my Mom who's pursuing it now, to get her full status. And as soon as she gets her full status, then automatically I'll get it."

One woman related how getting her status back involved four years of research and having two separate affidavits sworn about her mother's identity, since her mother had been removed from her band list after being sent to residential school. Another described how her mother mistakenly assumed her status had been removed when she married, although through bureaucratic oversight it had not. When she went to Indian

Affairs to be reinstated, they discovered the oversight—and promptly removed her status, only to immediately reinstate her under Bill C-31. This means that any children born after her marriage cannot pass status on to *their* children, while earlier children born of the same white father but without legal marriage simply received their mother's at-that-point-uninterrupted status and can pass their status on indefinitely to descendants (depending on who their marriage partners are).

One participant referred to her grandmother's red ticket, which was issued to women who'd married out but had then been widowed, to identify them as eligible for treaty monies. These documents were widely seen as "phony Indian cards" because the women who possessed them didn't really have status—which suggests that the tendency to externalize Native women who lost status as "not really Indian" goes much further back than the present:

"My grandmother had a status card, which she showed my Mom at one time, but my Mom used to joke about it and then cry about it. I could never understand why when I was younger. Because some people said it was a phony Indian card. And I think now it may have been what they call the red ticket that a lot of women were given. People thought of them as 'phony Indian cards'".

On an individual basis, loss of status has had severe repercussions for some families. One individual spoke of the poverty which her grandmother's loss of status signified for her children when she married a Metis man:

"To ostracise a woman for marrying non-status or non-Native—it was so unfair. Men weren't ostracised the same way—their non-Native wives obtained status through marriage! And if you just think about the economic effects alone—financially, my grandma wasn't in a good position when she married a Metis man. She lost whatever she had on the reserve. And when you can't live on the reserve, you have to have money to live on every day—paying for housing, buying all the food. So she lost out, economically."

One participant described her grandmother's feelings on finally returning to the reserve, forty or fifty years after her husband had enfranchised, which removed her status as well:

"I took my grandmother back to the reserve when I was trying to get my status, to visit with old friends of hers. They knew who she was—they remembered my grandmother instantly, and they hadn't seen each other probably for forty or fifty years. And so anyway—they start talking Indian to my grandma, and I'm looking at my grandma, right, and she ain't talking back—but I can tell she's understanding what they're saying to her. That was kind of neat—seeing this really young woman in my grandmother when they started talking Indian to her, although she was answering them back in English. So that was a real surprise to me, that my grandmother understood the language. Or understood some of it, enough to know what they was saying to her. So they had their visit, and they really welcomed her. It was quite touching, very moving to see that, after all those years, that that was still her home and people still knew her. I don't know where I heard it, but somehow its stuck in my head—that my grandmother's last wish is that that's where she wants to be buried."

Many individuals spoke of their mothers' predicaments, cut off from their communities for marrying non-Natives, and forced to live in a largely hostile white society. Despite their mothers' independent attitudes and resourcefulness, the fact remains that these women were rendered far more vulnerable to the whims and attitudes of their non-Native husbands than they should have been.

"My Mom grew up in Rama, and my father grew up in a little town just forty minutes away from Rama, called Norland. He was back home visiting his father, on his summer vacation, from mining gold in Northern Ontario, at the time. He met my Mom, and they spent a lot of time together during his vacation, and on his last day he asked her to marry him, and she said yes. This was at the end of the summer, and they were married at the end of October. And she left the only home she ever knew, a Native community, to move to a gold-mining town in Northern Ontario—Kirkland Lake. They were married for 44 years, and my father passed away 2 1/2 years ago."

It was really important for my mother to get her status back. She was really bitter, over the years, at losing it, and having to leave her community. She was really shut out for the longest time...I think it was a matter of principle for my mother, for me and her to get our status back. It was something that was taken away because of a misogynous law—so it's only fair that all the women who lost their status receive it back."

Knowing that they could not go back home to live heightened power dynamics within relationships which already existed because of race and gender:

"I think the conditions of marriage for women aren't very good. And for Native women, in particular, in many cases they have been terrible. My mother would go up to the reserve with my brother and myself, to see her mother. My grandmother would wonder where my father was—and then she would talk to my mother, about how 'you gotta somehow make this thing work'. Meanwhile, the violence at home got increasingly bad. At one point, I think that he was abusive in every way possible. I remember him picking my mother up by the throat and waving her around. I don't even remember why, it wasn't like there was a reason. Its just that if he could do it, he did it. He'd throw her across the room. He'd grab her and do terrible things to her, right in front of us, and here we were, seven or eight years old."

It is important to consider what loss of status represented for the individuals themselves that I interviewed—how growing up non-status affected their sense of their own identities. Several of the individuals, particularly those who looked white and/or had entirely lacked access to their Native communities growing up, found that a status card was important to their sense of entitlement to a Native identity. For most of the individuals, their mother's efforts to regain their status was the focal point for a whole shift in consciousness, a sense that being Native was valuable, and needed to be supported and reinforced. It was the change in attitude, rather than the legal recognition itself, which spurred the shift. However, while most of the individuals interviewed were quick to preface their comments about status with "of course, a card does not

make me an Indian”, each also made some reference to the manner in which their sense of their Native identity had been reinforced by this legal recognition of Native status. Meanwhile, many of the discussions about status with the participants revealed that while the contemporary generation may have relatively easily adopted the rhetoric of rejecting government classifications, “status” as a category determining Indianness still has tremendous resonance for many urban Native people.

Many of the non-status or Metis participants described how for them as they were growing up, an invisible line existed in their minds between themselves and status Indians. They might be of Native heritage, and consider themselves to be Native people, but they could not consider themselves to be “real Indians”, because this category was only for status Indians:

“Before I was married I was not the least bit interested in status. I was the most interested, I guess, in finding out if people actually conceived of me as a Native person, if they actually accepted me as a Native person, even though I had grown up separate from that for a number of years. Because I felt comfortable with it. I couldn't understand whether other people would accept me, but they did, even though I haven't grown up on a reserve or anything...But this thing around having status or not—there was a line there. Like, I could never imagine myself as a status Indian. I never even thought about it.”

This gut reaction that status Indians were the “real” Indians (which renders the Nativeness of all Native people who lack status as less valuable) was commented on by a number of participants:

“I never thought of it, but when you said it—I think status does, to a certain degree give people a sense of entitlement as a Native person. Because why would people say “oh, I'm status”. Or non-status. Some people do that when they introduce themselves in a circle—why is that so necessary? But I think, to a certain level, people think it is, or it affects them somehow.”

"Well sometimes I think having status might make me feel a bit more secure, because I would have the number, same as everybody else."

"Status—to me that's only a number from the government. What's important is acceptance from the Native community, and from the government—accepting us, allowing us to choose what culture we will follow. But I guess if Native people see a status card, they unequivocally sort of say 'welcome'".

Many participants were aware of the contradictory nature of their opinions about status—the manner in which they tended to deny its validity in theory but were bound to its logic in deep ways. Most were highly aware of the power of the government to regulate identity—they felt that status Indians *were* more Indian than those without status, because of the entire apparatus of government recognition of Indianness which shapes status Indian lives in ways that it does not shape the experiences of non-status Indians or Metis people, particularly if they are light-skinned.

"There's this American Express gesture like 'look, my status card!', a symbol of 'hey look, I'm a real Indian!'. And I think to some extent it is. It's recognised by the government."

A few participants were quite open and cognizant of the fact that status was (or at some point had been) important to them because it offered them a sense of connection to a Native community which was important precisely because they lacked any other connection in their daily lives to Indianness:

"When I got my status card, I was about eighteen or nineteen. Having a card, and having a number, and, you know, getting the band list—because there was such a small connection to the community at that point, it did give me sort of a sense of belonging. And there are those times when you meet really ignorant people who don't think you're Native and pulling out the card, as childish as it may seem.....I don't do

that anymore, but definitely there was a time when I really relished having it.”

The non-status individuals who felt strongly that “real” Indianness was synonymous with status often had intense emotional reactions to being denied status:

“But I know, on both my two legs, standing here, that both my grandparents are Native, and my mother’s Native, so that means that I’m entitled to some type of status.”

By comparison with the problems related to regaining status which many of the above participants described, three individuals were reinstated under Bill C-31 in a relatively problem-free manner. These individuals revealed little awareness of the difficulties which some individuals are facing in regaining Indian status. They seemed to generally assume that anybody of Aboriginal heritage can now simply apply and get their status back, and that individuals who don’t simply aren’t proud enough of being Indian to want to get it back.

13.3 THE FUNCTIONS OF STATUS IN URBAN SETTINGS:

A central aspect of the so-called “real Indianness” which only status Indians can possess (perhaps its most crucial element for many of the participants) was the experience of growing up on reserve. While this will be explored more closely in the next chapter, being at least able to claim band membership is part of how urban status Indians qualify their Indianness. Being members of specific First Nations, as compared to those who can merely claim to be a member of an Indigenous nation *in the abstract* speaks to the concrete connections to place which are central to Native life, connections which band membership secures for status Indians:

“When I used to work at one of the provincial territorial organizations, at our assemblies, everybody would go around, and they’d have their name and their nation underneath it—not, like Cree nation, but, like “Saugeen First Nation” or whatever. And well, that’s more a question of belonging to a certain band, I guess. But it is also part of the whole status thing.”

In daily life in the city, being able to say you are a member of a specific First Nation also is a way of saying that you have a *known* Indigenous lineage, that you can therefore trace your ancestral connections to a specific tribal heritage. Status then is equated quite openly with heritage:

“My mother initiated getting our status back. She went and got our live birth things, and filed all that stuff, and got it for us. She went out and got us back our heritage.”

Non-status Indians and Metis people, by comparison, are often assumed to *not* know extensive details of their lineage. In many cases, they are seen as being “detrribalized” (even if they are part of a specific Metis community), as having lost the *concrete* connection to land and community which First Nations band members appear to possess. They are therefore seen as “Indian only in blood”. At the same time, however, lacking status also renders bloodlines in some ways irrelevant, when even dark-skinned individuals are assumed to be “not really Indian” by virtue of lacking status.

These assumptions need to be unpacked, in view of the actual identities of contemporary urban status Indians. A sizeable number of urban status Indians are adoptees, who while technically members of specific First Nations, do not typically know much about their heritage or their lineage, and who have no real connection to their land base—even though they may be members of a specific First Nation. Another sizeable group of urban status Indians are those who have been reinstated under Bill C-31—who also frequently have little actual connection to their

reserves (and sometimes are not even accepted as members), and who may have very little knowledge of their culture (although several have had to do extensive research of their lineage to get their status back). Many on-reserve Indians currently dismiss the “Indianness” of those individuals reinstated under Bill C-31. However, unless Native people are also prepared to dismiss the “Indianness” of adoptees, there needs to be some recognition that for *urban* Native people, status does not at present signify anything other than proved connections to recent First Nations ancestry—which, as the above accounts demonstrate, many non-status Indians and Metis also possess.

More to the point, it is necessary to challenge the historical accuracy of the apparent “grounded” nature of Native identity in many reserve communities. Many reserve residents have complex histories of coming from other communities, being arbitrarily assigned membership in bands where they have no family, and in other ways “ending up” on certain reserves through bureaucratic sleight-of-hand. The reality of a structured nomadic existence on specific territories prior to colonization, and the exigencies of being part of a marginal labour force in seasonal markets which for years have demanded that Native labourers migrate to where the jobs are, has meant that many families end up on specific reserves simply because they have been made members of those communities through government regulation. To speak as if reserves were microcosms of ancestral land experiences belies the fact that to a certain extent all Native people, urban and reserve-based, have been affected by deterritorialization and diaspora.

Assumptions about status and race also need to be unpacked. The non-status or Metis participants have indicated that their Nativeness has been viewed as suspect, particularly if they are light skinned, because they do not have status. More to the point, however, even darker-skinned non-

status or Metis individuals face times when individuals are suspicious about their Nativeness because of their lack of status. Meanwhile, the *Indian Act* statutes which regulate blood quantum have enabled status Indians to use their status as an “official stamp”, certifying the presence of “Indian blood”.¹ This is despite the fact that in many reserves close to white settlements, Native women for years have been having children by white men without ever naming them as such, and without their children necessarily losing status. Furthermore, the children of one generation of intermarriage between Native men and white women have always been allowed to stay on reserve with full status. The results of this history is that in some communities, status Indians are becoming increasingly mixed-race. However, individuals from these communities are able to use the fact that they have status to ignore their “mixed-bloodedness”. One dark-skinned Metis woman describes how this worked in her marriage to a light-skinned status Indian:

“When I met my husband, and we started going out together, I think the thing that first attracted me to him was that he was light. I could tell he was part Indian and part white by looking at him, and I felt a kinship to him because I could see that there was a mixture in his background. But, as soon as I got to know him a bit, I realised that even though he was a lot lighter and more European looking than I was, he was full Indian as far as he was concerned. He would never admit that he wasn’t full Indian. And if anything came up about his appearance—particularly about his Dad—he would shoot you if you would try to say that he was anything BUT full Indian.”

One of the most problematic aspects of equating Indian status with Nativeness in all its multitude of meanings (lineage, “blood”, rootedness to land and community—in essence, Native heritage) is the effect that this has on those dark-skinned, non-status or Metis individuals who have had

¹ On some Mi’kmaq reserves, it is common knowledge that white people have for years been abandoning their “illegitimate” and otherwise unwanted children to Native families. As a result, there are individuals on some reserves who have status and band membership without having any Native ancestry at all.

to struggle against marginalization without a strong sense of having a Native heritage to give them pride. One dark-skinned participant, whose extreme family experiences of intergenerational alcoholism and abuse stemming from residential schools cannot be described as anything other than a lived experience of genocide, described how lack of status still affects her today. She fears doing any further research into her lineage, in case she discovers that she is ineligible for status. For her to discover this would imply that she is “less Native” than she needs to be to feel strong as a Native person.

“I guess maybe I’m afraid to find out. There’s fear of finding out that our lineage stops with me. My aunt got reinstated, so I think my Mum would have been, too. And yet I’ve just realised today how much I have that fear of finding out, you know, that I might be less Native than I would like to be, if I was to find out that I’m not eligible for status.”

This individual talked about how learning about Native traditions has empowered her to such an extent that she would still continue to be active in Native organizations even if she was to find out that she is ineligible for status. Nevertheless, she fears the possibility that her present state of being non-status might be discovered to be permanent.

If the above accounts demonstrate anything, it is that Native status provides a sort of “official seal of Indianness” for urban status Indians, despite their frequent disclaimers that “status is really irrelevant”. The participants’ conversations revealed that in very deep ways, Native status secures for an urban individual certified “Indian blood” (even if the individual is very mixed-race), a verification of concrete connections to land and community (even if these connections do not really exist or do not reflect the individual’s family’s history), and an intangible sense that one is in full possession of one’s heritage (even if one does not speak their language, has never lived among Native people, and has been taught

relatively little about their culture). By defining certain urban Native people as “official Indians”, status also automatically deprives non-status Indians and Metis of a sense of entitlement as Native people. Meanwhile, in actual fact, the lives of urban status Indians, particularly as rights for off-reserve status Indians continue to be withdrawn by the federal government, are actually drawing closer to those of nonstatus Indians and the Metis, than to their cousins on-reserve.

While fluctuations in the colonial regulation of Native identity continue to demonstrate its artificiality and its uses to divide Native people, the fact remains that Native status has real implications for the day to day life of many Native people. A few individuals discussed the considerable material benefits that status had brought them, in the form of education (one woman was completing her Ph.D. entirely funded by her band). Others were more doubtful about the actual benefits which status would bring them, because of the gradual erosion of benefits for off-reserve status Indians, and the amount of work it takes to actually claim treaty rights in most stores, medical offices and other places where a status card is produced for tax exemption. A few individuals relished the fact that they were able to work in the United States, because of the Jay Treaty, which the United States honours but Canada does not, which enables status Indians to cross the border freely and work in either country.

One individual, while grateful for the rights and benefits which status provides for her, described how status is dividing their family, with the children born before her mother’s marriage being able to pass status on to their kids, while the child born after her marriage cannot.

The benefits of having status—going to school and that sort of thing—makes a difference in our family. But when I found out that my nephew isn’t eligible for status, I’ve been worried about him not feeling included, in the family and in the community. There might be a little bit

of rivalry in the family. Like, "why do my cousins get this, and I can't"? You can't explain government bureaucracy to a child that way."

Beyond all economic benefits, however, is the meaning which Native status holds within Canadian society, as an indicator of the special relationship which exists between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government. This issue appeared to be extremely important to a number of the status Indians—in fact, there was an apparent consensus among the status Indian participants that the very survival of Native peoples depends on their maintaining Native status.

13.3.1. Status Is The Only Protection Against Assimilation:

The other side of the coin of seeing status as government regulation of Indianness is recognizing the role that status has played and continues to play for status Indians, in terms of survival *as* Native people. The ever-present tension in contemporary Aboriginal peoples' lives between decolonization efforts and the need to deal with reality *how it is*, is seldom manifested as clearly as when exploring issues of status and band membership. Particularly at present, when non-insured health care benefits and taxation rights are increasingly being denied urban status Indians, a trend appears to be present on the part of the government to render Native status meaningless unless an individual resides on a reserve. In this respect, urban status Indians are vehement about the importance of maintaining their status, particularly in the face of the racism and resentment they often encounter from whites when they insist on their rights to the benefits which Native status gives them, and the frequent problems they face in actually receiving those benefits.

Several of the participants spoke about how Indian status is the only remnant which remains of Canada's recognition of the First Nations—that since all the treaties have been violated, it is important for status Indians to assert themselves and defend their rights to have status:

“Status is important because Natives are—like, we’re all human beings, but we’re not all the same. Native peoples made treaties with non-Natives, you know, a long time ago. And the treaties were made because we shared things with them, with the promise that we would have certain securities. And in the old days, when they made the treaties, the whites were willing to listen to us, because they were outnumbered—they were always ready to listen. But as soon as they outnumbered us, then they broke the treaties. That’s what the elders say. And now, we have to fight for all the little things that we get, and we have to even fight for our recognition as Native people. So there’s people today that are saying “We’re all the same”. Well that’s not true. We’re Native people, and this is our homeland. Our ancestors signed treaties to give us a future, and that’s what we have to hang on to. To me, status means that I am recognised. Well, I already recognise myself as a Native person, and my traditional chief recognises me as a Native person—but it also gives me the chance to get free medical attention, and free schooling if I want it. It gives me the ability to travel where ever I want, and it also gives me the ability to not pay taxes. My mother’s ancestors fought for those treaties. My Mohawk ancestors fought with the British, so that we wouldn’t become a part of the United States. My ancestors fought for these treaties. And that’s what they are. All we have to do as Native people is to be adamant about what our rights are, and know who we are.”

“I think status is important in that I’m of the belief that the agreements that were made between the original nations and the settler culture should form the backbone of our relationship with that settler culture, and consequently, the government. So I’m a firm believer in maintaining all of our rights, accessing all of our rights, using all of our rights. Because if we don’t, they will get taken away.”

“In the best of all worlds, we would all be Aboriginal, and it wouldn’t matter. The problem is, that—see, the problem with being a Metis—if status was the same as a Metis card, right—‘here you are, you’re a Metis’. ‘Here you are, you’re not a Metis’. These rights can be withdrawn arbitrarily. And there are Indian groupies. I think status is important because of the nature of the world we live in. If there are no status people, there are no treaties. If there are no treaties, there are no Indians.

What I think would happen is that they would obliterate us. Aboriginal people are under siege for cultural genocide. So I refuse to co-operate with my own genocide. I pull out my status card, I insist on my tax rights. I insist on being recognised. To me, status is sort of like hanging on by our thumbnails. Somebody's got to do it, or we're all going to be obliterated. And they would like nothing better than to have us all leave the reserves and then say 'now we can turn them into municipalities'. That's the only reason. It's not about saying that some people are more Indian than others."

One woman whose status was reinstated under Bill C-31 but who cannot pass it down to her children described how she would only marry somebody or have children by them if they were a status Indian, so that her children would be able to have status:

"My children have to have status! They have to—that's the only way that we can ensure, ten years down the road, that we have any Native people left. Status is the key to ensuring our rights."

13.3.2 Status Is Government-Organized Divisiveness:

Some of the participants were unequivocal that the benefits of having status are far outweighed by its divisive effects. In particular, a number of individuals, all Metis, who have worked for both urban-based and provincial territorial organisations (and in some cases for the Metis nation as well) discussed the constant struggles around the issue of entitlement which happen when different groups of Native people become involved in struggles for funding. They reiterated that despite the rhetoric from status Indian organizations about status being linked to the treaties, the fact that the organizations representing First Nations, off-reserve Indians, non-status Indians, and the Metis are all competing against one another for federal monies made the status Indians' assertions that status gave them some sort of unique sovereignty claim over and above those of other Native groups quite meaningless:

"Status is a crock of shit. No, really, it is. The point is that it's a government definition. And I respect that I'm not a status Indian, and

maybe not what most people would think of as an Aboriginal person. I'll accept that. But what I won't accept is the notion that "you're a non-status Indian and this person is a status Indian, and you're a Metis, and....." I mean, we've already got so much difficulty, and we're always scrambling to meet those definitions. I just have a problem with them. I mean, I also have a problem with people who only have some distant blood in there, you know, and they're playing at being Indian—that's not respectful, to me. But those people are few and far between, and they're nut cases, and everyone knows it. So it's not like they threaten me or anything.

Why are people identifying as Metis all of a sudden? Well—there's bucks in it. Why did people sell their status [enfranchise]? So they could join the army, or get a job, or vote or go into a bar, or get married and live in the city, or what have you. Why are they going back now? So they can get money. These categories are all government-defined. It's nonsense”.

This individual, however, does recognise that status HAS served a protective function for Native communities, and that in this respect it has real meaning:

“Clearly people who are status Indians who have lived on reserves and were raised on reserves probably do have more of an identity—that fact of just grouping them there has obviously retained the identity more than it would for someone like me. So there's something to it—that status thing. Its not like it doesn't mean anything in reality, because it does.”

Other individuals concurred that money was at the root of many of the divisions between status, non-status and Metis people, and that the on-reserve/off-reserve division was undoubtedly the biggest, in this respect:

“I've sat on different sides of the Indian table, which has been interesting—working for provincial organisations, one that represents the on-reserve people, and the other that basically represents the off-reserve people. And what it comes down to is usually fighting over dollars, the bones that are chucked to us from the government. There's always a big fight over where the money's going to be spent. It gets divided up between the on-reserve and the off-reserve, with the on-reserve feeling that the off-reserve shouldn't be getting the money, because they're the REAL Indians. Like "they should give US the money and we'll look after our people". Well, of course, off-reserve

people know that—THEY DON'T, right? So there's power struggles between the on and off reserve people. So I've been sitting on different sides of the policy tables, fighting for dollars for one side or the other. That's a lot of what it's about. There's lots of stuff you'll hear around the table at First Nations organisations—stuff about "aw, the Metis, those people don't even have status—you know, who are they?"...or "well, off-reserve people have access to most services in the city, so they don't need any money, they don't need anything". There's a real sense I think that "we're the real Indians", right? "We deserve all the rights, and all the services".

But with the urban organisations, there's a much greater sense that everybody's accepted. If you say you're Native and you seem to have some trace—then you're accepted. Although, you know I've heard, like—there are mumblings in the community, questions like "Are they really Native?" So yeah, there's talk about this person and that—"Well, you know, I think that person's a wannabee, you know, I don't think that person is..." So there's some of that. But on the whole, it's only a small part of it."

"It all boils down to fighting over resources, most of the time, and it's really too bad, and instead of being positive and working together to complement each other, we usually have to look at the issues separately. And again—it does tie back to treaty, and fiduciary obligations. And to things like how come I felt uncomfortable and insecure, about working for First Nations in Ontario, when I'm not from a reserve here, I don't speak my language, and so, there's really no reason why you should have me working in this job. It's really interesting, though, because the other organisations, the ones that represent Aboriginal women, or the urban Indians, or the Metis, they all make efforts to work together. I don't generally think that the First Nations have made any efforts to work with the others. I think the extension of 'let's try to work together' tends to be coming from off-reserve groups towards on-reserve status Indians. And there's differences. I mean—services—it's a separate thing, from treaty rights, and our legal issues around the constitution and everything else."

The crucial stumbling block for all of these individuals, however, was the issue of the land—the reality that what separates status Indians from all other Native people is that they alone have reserves which have special legal status distinct from all other forms of land tenure in

Canada—and that in this respect, the question of what to do about the divisiveness of status becomes incredibly complex.

One individual asserted that all non-status people should identify as “Metis” to have their legal rights as Aboriginal people protected. He asserted that unless the non-status people had organisations which advocated for their rights, their voices would disappear. However, he differentiated between legal identity and cultural identity, stating that there was a need to consider how individuals could be “adopted back” into their communities, so that cultural regeneration could be facilitated:

“What we started with was a whole voice of First Nations people—all First Nations people, including Metis. But a lot of negotiations are going on, where a lot of people aren't coming from a principled position. They see money on the table, and that starts to separate us. Whatever you do, if you haven't resolved some of the principle issues, and then you throw money on the table—it's gonna divide and conquer. Always, every time. Money is hard enough to handle, but when you're talking about major dollars, it's something that is really, really difficult. So how do we use our resources to the best use of all our peoples? And that's when you get into these off-reserve/on-reserve, status/non-status, Metis/status divisions.

The people that I'm really afraid for are the non-status people. I'm really concerned, because eventually their voices will become lost. Unless they find a safe harbour in which their stories can be told and retold, where those stories can be kept alive. Because those are very important stories. There has to be a way to protect those stories, to protect those people, those families, and to really connect them, however they want to associate themselves. If they want to associate themselves as urban Mi'kmaq—but they're still mixed-race and non-status—then we have to find vehicles that can maintain them. Now, the only way, for me—I look at it from a legal perspective, a constitutional, legal matter—the only avenue we have is as Metis. As a legal concept. Now, not necessarily as a cultural or historical concept. We'll have similarities, we'll have similar stories, but we will relate more culturally, historically, as First Nations. But it can't exist just with the Metis Nations. The First Nations have to start to accommodate mixed-race people—or at least keep those networks. What's gonna happen to some nations? I mean, some communities have doubled or tripled in size since C-31's became citizens—and infrastructure commitments in terms of sewage, roads, housing,

schools, health care—have not been made. All that's been opened up. And what's gonna happen when—not this generation, but the next generation—finds that they can no longer live on that reserve? That's gonna be the end of their family's involvement in that community. How is that community gonna be facing the future? Like those families, to me, are their resources—and yes, they may represent additional pressures, because they bring more mouths—but they bring more money too. But once the person loses that status, the money stops flowing to that community, that community can no longer service that individual, and the individual will have to go away. So what are those communities going to do about that?”

13.4 SUMMARY:

The opinions of the participants as to the importance of status vary broadly. Generally speaking, the status Indians (and a few non-status and Metis individuals) consider that status is vital to protect the rights of Native people—and that without the presence of status Indians to force the government to maintain some recognition of Aboriginal presence, Native people as a group will disappear. This suggests that non-status Indians in urban centres like Toronto are able to live as Native people *because* there are First Nations who continuously insist on their treaty and Aboriginal rights. On the other hand, other individuals felt that the *Indian Act* caused such divisions between Native people that the entire apparatus of legal regulation of Indianness was ultimately highly detrimental for Native people as a whole. From this perspective, it is difficult to estimate whether nonstatus Indians are being protected by the existence of status Indians around them, or whether they face more marginalization because of the existence of status Indians who are everywhere seen as “the real Indians” undermines their claim to a Native identity.

At present, it seems to make sense for urban status Indians to make every effort to exploit the current strength which a colonial category has created for them. But it is questionable whether this should be a long-

term strategy for survival for urban Native people. Particularly when significant numbers of individuals, the grandchildren of C-31 Indians, begin to lose their status, it might perhaps be important to question what kinds of options are being foreclosed by a strategy that resists assimilation primarily through the use of a colonially-created category, while fragmenting Native people in the process.

It is necessary, also to maintain a clear view that while status is currently being used to promote Native heritage and defend treaty rights, status is not “heritage” and it is not the same thing as treaty rights. Status in fact was the government’s way to pre-empt the rights of Indigenous nations to govern themselves, a signifier that the colonizer, not Native people, controlled Native destinies.

Those individuals who assert that status must be maintained to protect all Native people, but that “it doesn’t have anything to do with who’s *really* an Indian” appear to be avoiding looking at the extent to which Indianness has been linked to status. If status is vital to the survival of Native people as a whole, and is to be maintained as a primary strategy against assimilation, then status Indians must be ready to have the question of “who is a status Indian” opened up yet again, this time to include the descendants of those who were externalized as halfbreed and who still maintain an affiliation as Aboriginal people. This would enable a significant number of non-status Native people to enter into a treaty relationship with the federal government. It does not have to signify that “treaty Indian” and “Metis” are the same people. It merely means that both are now subject to the same privileges and constraints under the *Indian Act*, and that the injustices of how Indianness was assigned to some groups and denied to others will be rectified. Choosing this course of action, however, would make it more difficult for status Indians to achieve gains by downplaying the Indianness of non-status Indians. One

participant, a strong advocate for the necessity of hanging on to status, acknowledged this quite honestly:

"I think its really convenient for the Native community to say "oh, non-status Indians don't count". Because, then they don't have to include all of those people in any demands they're making, or any changes they're making."

From this perspective, individuals who assert the importance of status and then say at the same time "but that doesn't mean status Indians are any more Indian than non-status people" are simply refusing to look clearly at the issues of power and privilege *between* Native people.

Native people, of course, did not choose this conundrum, and in a sense, as long as they continue to rely on government regulation of Native identity to set the boundaries of Native identity, they will face this problem. The reality is that *the only way that status can continue to maintain its "clout" as an indicator of a special relationship with the government is precisely by maintaining its power to exclude*. The primary function of status is as a boundary marker—a clear indicator of who is Indian and who is not, and it is only by retaining this power to include some and exclude others that Indian status has any meaning².

A few of the participants, looking towards the future, have pointed out the problems they see occurring with the next generation of urban Native people when large numbers of people lose their status, or retain

² Just prior to the passing of Bill C-31, certain individuals proposed Bill C-47, which would have amended the *Indian Act* to reinstate everybody with any historic claim to Indianness. These individuals would all be on a general band list, and then chiefs and councils would indicate who could be accepted back as band members. This was strenuously resisted by the women who were struggling to have their status reinstated, on the grounds that it would mean that "anybody could be an Indian" and that the "general band list" would simply be a meaningless bureaucratic item to be filed away in Ottawa, leaving Native people more powerless than before (Silman, 1987:202-204). In this view, rather than the government abolishing status, as they attempted with the *White Paper*, the government would render status meaningless by opening up the category of Indianness to anybody with any claim to Native ancestry. Status, then, is only effective as a means of protecting the rights of some Indians insofar as it can exclude others from Indianness.

their status but find that all benefits for off-reserve Indians have been removed. They talk about the impoverishment that will result when individuals find themselves no longer eligible for education or employment programs, and how difficult it will be for these people when they get older and do not have treaty health benefits. Widespread loss of status will, according to them, turn the tide against Native empowerment in the cities, “drying up” the benefits which Native people have begun to experience because of a generation of access to education and to jobs in the urban or on-reserve Native communities, and truncating the rebirth in cultural pride which an empowered community can work towards. These individuals point out that this is the first generation to really enjoy access to the education which had been expressly specified in many of the treaties, and it is these benefits which have helped to create a strong, growing urban Native middle class who are proud of their heritage and working at cultural promotion. All of this is threatened by the government attacks on status rights for urban Indians, and by the second-generation cutoff in Bill C-31. In this respect, retaining status IS tied to retaining heritage, at present, in the cities. However, in view of the fact that large numbers of the next generation of urban Indians will be ineligible for status, it might be wise for individuals to begin to strategize how Native empowerment can be brought about without status—or how non-status Native people can be brought into the status relationship. Both are risky concepts. Many Native people are aware that the strength of Native people has been in their access to land, and to a distinctive relationship with the government—that without these strengths, which at present accrue through status, Native people could conceivably be further reduced to powerless, impoverished “visible minorities” drifting through the urban mainstream. Whether fighting for status rights for a relatively small percentage of the urban population is the key to avoiding this fate,

or building for other forms of empowerment—is difficult to say. Again, this points to a need for different ways of conceptualising citizenship in Indigenous nations, one where being “Onkwehonwe”, or “Anishnawbe”—that is, members of specific nations—is the goal and where “Indianness”, as a signifier that one is a member of an oppressed and colonised minority, ceases to exist.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE: URBAN AND ON-RESERVE IDENTITIES

A high dark mesa rises dramatically from a grassy plain, fifteen miles southeast of Laguna, in an area known as Swahnee. On the grassy plain 140 years ago, my great-grandmother's uncle and his brother-in-law were grazing their herd of sheep. Because visibility on the plain extends for over twenty miles, it wasn't until the two shepherders came near the high, dark mesa that the Apaches were able to stalk them. Using the mesa to obscure their approach, the raiders swept around from both ends of the mesa. My great-grandmother's relatives were killed, and the herd was lost...Thus the high dark mesa and the story of the two lost Laguna herders became inextricably linked. The memory of them and their story resides in part with the high, dark mesa. For as long as the mesa stands, people within the family and clan will be reminded of the story of that afternoon long ago. Thus, the continuity and accuracy of the oral narratives are reinforced by the landscape—and the Pueblo interpretation of that landscape is *maintained* .

- Leslie Marmon Silko¹

INTRODUCTION:

Connections to the land, for Native people are important in different ways than for settlers in the Americas. Contemporary notions of being on the land in Canada have been shaped by an urban white middle class, for whom the land represents personal recreation—either as a solitary retreat or as “cottage country”. For reserve-based Native people, as well as rural Metis, however, land is about community, culture, and ancestral connection.

It is only when we take land into account that we can see the full extent of the control which settler governments have been able to assert

¹ Leslie Marmon Silko, 1996. *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. New York: Touchstone, p. 34-35

over Native identity by the act of tying land access to Indian status. Indian status, at present, is the sole determinant of which individuals have any access to what remaining territory in Canada is still recognized as Indian land, and which individuals are already removed from that equation by *Indian Act* laws which deny their Indianness.

The first part of this chapter will explore the participants' experiences with band membership, including the issues which the Bill C-31 Indians faced around band reinstatement. The second part will focus on the strategies which "placeless" individuals use to negotiate a sense of groundedness in their Native identities. The third part will explore the participants' views on on-reserve and off-reserve distinctions.

14.1 BELONGING AND ESTRANGEMENT: BAND MEMBERSHIP

"The most uncomfortable Indians I've met are those who are most removed from their physical locale. Because if you're removed from the physical locale, you're removed from relationships, and Indian culture is all about relationships and how to manage them, and the importance of them, right? So...they're like fish out of water, here."

For over a century, Canada has exercised the right to determine which status Indians belong to which communities, and therefore who has a right to live on what reserve. This system has been notorious for its patrilineal structure of affiliation, which has violated the matrilineal traditions of many nations. For example, one participant from Six Nations, a primarily Mohawk community where many band members are from the Cayuga nation, described how Indian Affairs classifies these individuals according to their father's nation, while descent among the Iroquois nations is reckoned matrilineally.

I know a lot of people from my reserve—they're actually listed on their status card as being something that they're not. People are listed under their father's side, but our traditions are matrilineal. So a person

with a Mohawk mother and a Cayuga father is listed as Cayuga, by Indian Affairs, when the community actually considers them to be Mohawk.

She also described how her family, who are considered Mohawk under Iroquois traditions, are legally considered Ojibway by Indian Affairs:

“My mother is Mohawk, from Six Nations. But she married an Ojibway man from the Mattagami reserve, so she was listed officially as Ojibway. When she left this man, and started seeing my father, who was white, she decided not to marry him, so she could keep her status. So when I was born, and my sisters, we got her first husband’s name, and inherited status from him—so we are listed as Ojibways from Mattagami. That was something that made my Dad really mad, because he wanted me to have his name and everything, but I think my Mum was scared I would lose my status if she declared him as my father, so she never did. When I became an adult, I decided to switch back to my reserve—Six Nations. All I did was write the band council and explain the situation—that my Mum was a member and could I come back? Actually, my Mum still isn’t a member of our reserve. She’s still under her first husband’s reserve, as well as my sisters. So they’re actually considered Ojibway under the government—but they’re not, right, they don’t even have any Ojibway blood. I keep trying to get them to go back to Six Nations membership—because, especially if they die, where are they going to be buried—way up in Mattagami where they’ve never ever been? This could cause a lot of problems, so I’m trying to get my Mom and them switched back—like, you never know what could happen, right?”

Other participants mentioned that their families had somehow been made members of bands where they had few relatives or allegiances. One woman described how her family belongs to a reserve where they have never lived or even visited, while her grandmother had actually been born on another reserve. Another woman described a similar discrepancy:

“My father was born in Sucker Creek. All my father’s brothers and sisters and his parents, both of his parents, were born in Sucker Creek. But we actually belong to the Birch Island reserve. I don’t really know why. I never really had any connection to Birch Island,

except belonging to that band, and I never even knew that until I was in my teens. I always thought I belonged to the Sucker Creek reserve."

The patrilineal manner in which Indian Affairs automatically assigns children to their father's reserve, and the indifference of one band office employee nearly resulted in an adoptee never being reunited with her father's Native family:

My Mom thought that my Dad was from Couchiching, which is where my Grandma is from. But we're actually registered with Rainy River, which is my grandpa's reserve. So to try and find my father, I didn't write to Rainy River, I wrote to Couchiching, because my Mom didn't know anything about Rainy River. The communities are right next door to each other, and the membership person for both communities wrote back to me and said "no, this is not the right band, your father isn't registered here". She didn't say "try Rainy River". So I felt that I was hitting a dead end. But a couple of years later, I decided to try again—this time writing to Rainy River—and I got a reply right away—that my family was from there, and that this was my band."

With the passing of Bill C-31, which reinstated Native status to women who had lost their status for marrying non-Native or non-status men, as well as to their children, a fury of struggle erupted in a number of communities, along gendered lines, over entitlement to band membership. As one individual remarked, no aspect of status has been so divisive among on-reserve Native people as the issue of band membership for those individuals reinstated under Bill C-31. And yet despite this, most of the participants' experiences with their bands have been positive.

Of the seven participants who had their status reinstated under Bill C-31, only one individual, the daughter of a woman who was orphaned and grew up in residential school, has not been reinstated. The other five individuals, whose parents either maintained a continuous connection, or who still had family members on reserve, have been able to be reinstated.

One participant described a warm feeling of being accepted as a band member years after her mother had been forced to leave the community for marrying a white man:

"When my mother and I regained our status, it had already been forty-four years since she left. Her mother had already passed away, and she wasn't close to her one remaining sister, who didn't live on the reserve anyway. And it's a pretty small reserve. But a lot of people remembered my Mom. My mother's cousin owns the gift shop on the reserve, so we go and visit her every now and then. I was up there in June, and I went to see her. It felt really nice—she gave me a big hug, and I think it was a real turning point for me. It felt like a message 'it's okay, you can come back—you're part of this family now'. Maybe I always was, but this kind of underlined that I'm family and I belong there. It felt nice".

Two individuals, who visited their reserves regularly as children, described how they never felt any doubt that this was their home. One woman, whose mother had been enfranchised, described how they were always welcome in their community:

"My mother and I weren't singled out as non-status whenever we visited our relatives. At my reserve, it's very unusual, in that they don't make a big thing about it. If you go and visit, they don't tell you 'hey, you're non-status, get out of here'. And in fact they've actually been very welcoming to me. When we got our status back, they never gave us any difficulty—they made us band members right off the bat. And my community has welcomed me back. They actually had me up there as one of their role models. It was amazing."

Another individual, whose mother was an activist in the struggle to change the *Indian Act* so that women would no longer lose their status by marrying non-Native men, described how he was always on the reserve, every summer, growing up. Indeed, for a few years, when his family lived on a farm adjacent to the reserve, he actually went to the reserve school:

"It's not up to the government to define who we are. I mean, I went through all my formative years, my entire childhood, being around my reserve. I never cared about being non-status. In fact, I used to roar around, and get tax off, and stay on the reserve with my relatives. You

know, I went to school on the reserve. I guess I was about fifteen years old in 1985, when they changed the Indian Act. And its like—all of a sudden, I got this card, and they're confirming 'Yes, I'm an Indian!' As if that could make a difference to who I am! I never cared."

In contrast to these tales of belonging and the sense of entitlement that they generate, one participant has not been reinstated by her band, after a long struggle to get her status.

"Once I got the status card, I wrote to my band and said 'hello there'. I was asking for membership, and they sent me the stuff. I sent off the membership, and never heard anything. I did phone once or twice....and...oh, well, they're having new members on board, and I have to wait....and I never heard anything more, and I never pursued it. The government says I belong to them, but they've never taken me in as a band member. They never responded. So it means to me that they don't want to deal with it. They never responded to any written application. So I'm not a member. Bill C-31?—they don't want to hear from you.

My Uncle Fred, my mother's half brother, lived there, but he died two years before I got in contact with the band. I missed out, because he was apparently well-thought-of up there, and he would have been my 'in' into the community. It was very expensive to go up there, during the years when I was researching getting my status back, so I'm not sure if I'll ever go up there again."

This individual described how her initial excitement at the possibility of becoming a member of her mother's band gradually gave way to disappointment, and finally to a mixture of apathy and some bitterness:

"I suppose I did at one point feel rejected. Now I don't even give it a thought. I keep trying to think about it from their point of view, so I say to myself 'it's not surprising, is it'. I might have felt different, I might have felt more connected, if they had accepted me. I might have felt 'maybe I should go up there and teach'. It would have been good if they had been able to help me with my education. I think I would have felt different.

I've severed some emotional ties there now, whatever emotional ties that were there. I was curious, and I was kind of high on this for awhile. I know now that that has worn off. It doesn't make sense for me to try and fight for membership, when the community is so far away. Now, if it was within a hundred miles, that would be different.

But because of the work involved, I'm not willing to chase that down and fight for it. Maybe if I was younger, and thinking of moving up there to live, work, and teach, then maybe I'd try some more—but I've kind of resigned myself. I'm too old to relocate. I'm gonna start needing medical services soon. See, the only relatives I've got up there live in an adjacent town and they're not band members either. I have no living roots that I know of, there—although it's hard to trace relatives too, because our name was translated into English, and I'd have to work with translators, because everybody up there speaks the language. I've probably still got some relatives there, but I don't know who they are. I figure, the energy I'd put towards trying to get band membership I might as well put into trying to establish a land base here in the city for urban Indians. I could go for that.”

By comparison, the adoptee who inherited her status through her father, rather than her mother, described how her band was extremely obliging in facilitating a family reunion, and enrolled her as a band member after her father's death, even though her family has been off-reserve for sixty years:

“It took me four years to get status. One of the first things I did, when I was looking for my father, was to register with D.I.A.'s adoption registry. But my birth father's name had never been put on my birth certificate, so there was no paperwork to match it up.

When I did find the right band, I was told by the band that my father was deceased. But they have a family services up there, which assists adoptees in getting reunited with their families. So I put together a little budget, and they flew me out there. I told them ‘I want the reunion to be on the reserve, at the traditional powwow’. I didn't know at the time that my whole family's been off-reserve for the last three generations. But they were obliging. ‘Okay—I guess we'll go to the reserve for the powwow. We never go to the powwow, but we'll do it for you’. So I flew to Winnipeg, and met my auntie there. We stayed overnight, and then she drove me out to Fort Frances, where my grandma lives. We had a motel that they paid for, and we all stayed there, and had our reunion. We went to the powwow for two days—so I got to dance there at least once. They showed me the burial mounds, that are 8000 years old, and the rapids were just beautiful, and there was an eagle flying over the top of the powwow. Everything was amazing.

After I met my family, they vouched for me, and they went up to the chief. The chief and my uncle were pretty good buddies in business,

so I guess they put it through. My status comes from my father so I'm actually not a Bill C-31 or anything—I'm just a plain old status Indian. The band council voted on it, and made me a full member. It all worked out after I had met my family."

For most of the participants whose status was reinstated under Bill C-31, acquiring band membership was a relatively positive experience. By comparing their outlooks with that of the one woman whose band has not reinstated her, it is obvious that to a phenomenal extent, band membership provides status Indians with a sense of community acceptance—and most of their sense of entitlement to a Native identity.

For the most part, the participants' experiences suggest that communities are more open to reinstating Bill C-31 Indians than the controversy around Bill C-31 would lead us to expect. It is worth pointing out, however, that for each participant, the burden of proof has been on them to find relatives who can vouch for them, and convince the band to let them in. In this respect, it is safe to say that bands have not seen the loss of status of Native women marrying non-Native or non-status men as a violation of the women's birthright. They have not acted as if the *Indian Act* violated their sovereignty by forcing female members of their bands and their children to leave their communities. Instead, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two, some bands have labeled their resistance to reinstating these women as acts of asserting sovereignty. In particular, the children of these women have not necessarily been welcomed back.

On the other hand, it is clear that bands *have* viewed the massive theft of Native children from their communities by Children's Aid as a violation of their sovereignty, so that they generally make every effort to repatriate these children to their bands. The participant whose father was a status Indian was accepted as a band member in his community, even though his family had been off-reserve for three generations. In this

woman's case, we can only speculate what might have happened if her mother had been Native instead of her father. If she had approached her band as a Bill C-31 Indian who was also an adoptee, would they have been so anxious to reinstate her as a band member?

The participants who had been reinstated all discussed the issue of entitlement to band membership at length. The interesting feature of these discussions was the manner in which the participants, once their own reinstatement had been effected, usually situated themselves within the mainstream of their bands, as if their own entitlement to band membership had never been in question. They would judiciously discuss the predicaments of those individuals they knew of who had been rejected by their bands as if they had nothing in common with these individuals.

Furthermore, the dialogue around reinstatement often focused on the *intent* of Bill C-31 Indians in asking for band membership. This only reinforced the sense that each individual had to prove themselves worthy of being reinstated before they should be accepted as band members—that Section 12(1)(b) had not been a *collective* violation of the birthright of Native women and their children. While most of the participants expressed in an abstract manner that it was an injustice not to reinstate people to their bands, some individuals implied that Bill C-31 Indians must demonstrate the *right* reasons for wanting reinstatement (selfless devotion to community) rather than the *wrong* reason (looking for education funding or other financial benefits from the band). In fact, two of the participants who were themselves Bill C-31 Indians, but who had been reinstated as members of their bands and who acted as if their own rights to membership in their communities had never been in question, engaged in some aspects of “blaming the victim”. In their interviews, they

expressed some level of belief that if individuals did not get reinstated by their bands, they probably didn't deserve to.

"I've heard horror stories from other people, that their reserves just don't want to know them. And I say 'wait a minute! These are our people'. On the other hand—and it's not that I would ever be against anybody who was Aboriginal, to whatever degree, don't get me wrong—but they have to be sincere. They have to have a love for our people, not a selfish love, but a love that is caring and respectful. I think that's the problem with the so-called Bill C-31's. Well, not even just them. Because of the nature of the interference in our families, with the kids being removed and sent to residential schools, you can have somebody who has status, and is 100% Aboriginal looking, but you don't know how they see themselves—They may see themselves as Aboriginal people, they may see their future in the Aboriginal people, or they may not. You can be status, you can grow up on a reserve, and you can still have that... loss. See, that's the whole thing with the diversity of our peoples' experience. When you meet an Aboriginal person, whether they look very strongly Aboriginal or whether they look very white—you don't know what that person's heart is like. You can't see that. But you can experience it over time, after a little while. And I think that's the thing. I don't believe that white people should be coming into our communities and doing our jobs—because that's like somebody trying to appropriate our resources."

"Ultimately, it doesn't matter what the government says—the only thing that does matter, is what the community says. Not even what the band says—not the band council, not the band administration. What does the community say? And that's what matters. You know, when the Bill C-31's get their card, and the first thing they do is write to the reserve? Well, a lot of what you hear on the reserve is 'well the first thing they do is go on welfare and ask for a house'. You know, that's the other side of it."

It is interesting that while the individual who did not get reinstated as a band member had remarked that she *was* hoping to get some education funding from the band, the element of self-interest in her desire for reinstatement was scarcely unique (particularly as the

individual wanted to use her education to return to her mother's northern community and teach). The adoptee whose status flowed from her father, who was enrolled into her father's band after his death, also considered access to education monies to be a high priority for her in going through the process of getting registered as a status Indian. Another of the Bill C-31 Indians who *did* get reinstated and funded stated the same desire. Finally, one of the individuals who has had status all her life, and who has been funded up to the Ph.D. level by her band but who grew up with her white mother and has not been able to spend much time in her community also regarded education funding as a central aspect of why she was glad to have status and band membership. A selfless desire to put the wishes of the community before one's own educational or other needs is in fact demanded of *nobody* but Bill C-31 Indians.

One adoptee, who has been unable to get her status back at this point, was quite clear that some bands do not reinstate Bill C-31 Indians as band members because they agree with the sexism in the *Indian Act*, and consider Native woman to have forfeited their right to be considered Native, by marrying white. These individuals never question the Nativeness of Native men who married white and did not lose their status.

"In my community, the chief has refused to let the Bill C-31 women be reinstated. They protest every year, and he says "These women will only be reinstated over my dead body."

The restrictive or suspicious attitudes which a number of bands—and some of the participants—have demonstrated towards Bill C-31 Indians, with the notion that they are "outsiders" whose dedication to Native people must be proved (or at least brought into consideration) before they can enjoy their right to band membership, needs to be

compared to the fact that white women who married Native men (including the white mothers of some of the participants) enjoyed the privileges of automatic band membership for many years without the issue of their dedication to the community ever being raised. This should also be compared to the actions of the one Metis participant who married a status Indian before the passing of Bill C-31 and who therefore automatically acquired his status as well as membership in his band. This woman worked on issues of community empowerment far harder than most of the individuals who took band membership for granted:

“My own personal background is that I’m Metis, but because I married a status Indian before they changed the law in 1985, I became a status Indian and a member of my husband’s band, which is a landless band with a land claim that’s been outstanding since the 1800’s. My husband had been a counsellor for a number of years, and so after we were married I was very much involved in the politics. We took a militant approach, and organised a lot of different protests and demonstrations on the band’s traditional land base, which is now a park. We would show up every year and refuse to pay, and go in and have an annual picnic or whatever—things like that. My husband ended up becoming a chief while we were still together, and since we didn’t have any land, our kitchen became the band office. I had three young children, at the time, and I was working full-time, as well as doing all this work for the band. It was really insane. It certainly contributed to our eventually splitting up.”

The above accounts clarify a number of issues on the subject of band membership. First of all, it was obvious from the comments of individuals whose bands had reinstated them that band membership, with its implication of community acceptance is probably the primary means through which Native people secure a sense of their Native identity. Indigenous identity, despite years of state regulation, remains both collective and highly place-specific. These two aspects are intimately related—it is ties to place which enable people to maintain collective ties. One participant elaborated on this:

“What makes a Native person who they are, is....you have to be from the community. You’ve GOT to know who you are, you’ve gotta have family, you’ve got to have that connection. That’s what makes you who you are, is your connection to your family and to the community. That’s where you learn. That’s where the oral tradition comes in, that’s where you learn culture, that’s where you learn values, that’s where you learn language, that’s where you learn...everything. That’s where you learn how Indians.....walk! How they tell a joke. Whatever, right? I mean, all these things that make us Indian—you know, not the things that make us Hollywood Indians, but things that actually make us Indian—the sense of humour, the love of laughter, the valuing of children, the fact that friends and family are important and not necessarily money—you know, that kind of thing. I think it is a connection to community, its all about community. That’s what makes you who you are.”

For urban Indians, who do not grow up around Native people, band membership appears to be even more important in securing for the individual a sense of being grounded in a collective, place-based identity, even if that identity is in some sense an abstract or fictional relationship. Having a reserve to point to as a homeland, where one’s family has been part of a web of relations within the community, anchors these individuals in profound ways as Native people, even if most of the actual connections they develop in their lives are within the urban Native community.

The manner in which band membership connects individuals both to place and to community has obviously been an important issue to many of the families of the participants. A number of individuals described the efforts their parents had made to ensure that they maintained a connection to their community, as the participant below speaks to:

“Ever since I was born, we’d spend just about every summer I can remember—my whole life—on the reserve. I would be there for several weeks in the winter, for holidays. And every chance, every time that we had an extra day off, the family would load up into one of our big cars, and we’d drive up north—eight hours, one way. Just to maintain that connection.”

For many of the older Native people, their desire for community has persisted for decades after they have been alienated from their homes because of losing status or through community dysfunction. Two individuals talked about their mothers or grandmothers who left their communities through losing their status. As they grew older, however, they managed to settle down near the reserve, so that even though they were not able to go back to the reserve, they were not too far away from home:

“My mother goes back every now and then. Her niece has ties with the reserve, so they go back and visit certain people—she only lives forty minutes from the reserve, in Norland.”

“There's the whole issue around my grandmother being 87 years old, and she's getting old, and leaving the reserve. But if you look at the geography of it—she's only an hour away from Oneida. This place that she left and never returned to is only one hour's drive away.”

Ties to community are not necessarily experienced as personally empowering. One individual described the difficulty of re-entering her father's community as an adult after a long interval of separation from him because of his abusiveness. She faced considerable problems in living there, given the reality that her community is still dealing with a legacy of violence stemming from residential school, and that as a result most families are struggling with dysfunctional relationships—within families and between families—which speaks to the damage that colonisation has done to the life of the community:

“I tried to spend a summer in my father's community when I was twenty-four, just before I entered my master's program. My father was living in the community at the time. It was a very, very difficult summer. Part of the problem was the realization that I wasn't going to be able to have a father-daughter relationship with him—that if anything was going to develop between us in the future, it would have

to be in terms of us as adults, and in a completely different setting. But it was also the politics of the community. It's a very small community, there are only about 100 or 120 people there in the winter. The kids only come back in the summer.

There's such intense politics within the community, and it's not like you go to work and deal with the politics and escape them by coming home—it just follows you everywhere. Family politics, band politics—the two are interrelated. There are abuse issues that haven't been resolved, and people that just hate each other as a result of that. And then you enter the community and people are saying 'you know, you really shouldn't talk to this person or that person', and you're trying to say 'well, I'm my own person, I have to make my own decisions'. And I was trying to identify myself as my own person, rather than a member of my father's family, and especially as his daughter, which came with its own stigma, even though I had been away for so long. Partly that was because everybody knew what he'd done to me, and partly it was because he was the main representative of a family that they might be at war with, the other main families in the community—and partly it was because he's a very political person, and they would or would not agree with his politics. From a number of different perspectives."

Nevertheless, for this individual, despite the actual painful nature of her relationship to her community, it remains a real, and grounding experience of collective bonds, which ties her to a Native identity that would otherwise be relatively abstract, given the fact that she was raised by her white mother and has been relatively alienated from the urban Native community.

Band membership can also provide urban individuals with a sense of ancestral ties (although some non-status individuals are also able to trace their lineage back on specific lands for several generations as well). The adoptee who was reunited with her father's family in her twenties has conducted extensive genealogical research going back several generations. Knowing that she has significant family roots in the territory around Rainy River connects her in deep ways with an Ojibway tradition that is ancient. This individual may not have the stories of her ancestors—but she knows that she carries that continuity through her lineage. In many ways, the

solidity of this connection diminishes the importance of her individual experience of adoption and alienation, because the ties that bind her to her Ojibway heritage are much older and deeper—precisely because they exist in the region of their origins.

Another individual has also described the sense of rootedness which comes from knowing that your ties to a region are ancient:

“My family's been living here ever since there WAS a here. And not living here like, living on the planet, I mean, living here like pretty much in the same place they're living now. The Great Lakes area is where they've lived the whole, entire time”.

An important function which these ancestral ties to specific regions play for many urban Native people is to diminish the significance of otherwise-devastated family histories, to counter their genocidal implications with a knowledge that the upheavals that they and their immediate families have experienced are by far not “the whole story”. Ancestral ties to place have enabled urban Native people to survive colonization as Native people—the stories may be lost, but the connections to the land based on lineage are still there. This was particularly the case for the two participants from the east coast whose ancestors were militarily defeated by the British in the mid-1700's, and who for years afterwards were targeted for obliteration by the colonial government. For one individual whose family had lived for centuries on land which had been part of her nation's territory prior to colonisation (but at present was not reserve land), the stories of her ancestors had been lost for many years, and indeed much of the language had also been lost, but the ties to the land remained, and it was these ties which told her family who they were. For the other individual, the fact that her family had moved to Toronto had removed her from much personal knowledge of her heritage. But she took great comfort in knowing that her father's family, although

non-status, had lived on a plot of land adjacent to the reserve for over a century, maintaining community connections despite being non-status.

One individual, who had visited her reserve frequently as a child, described how for her, during a crisis-filled adolescence, her reserve represented a haven for her, a place where she had felt safe and nurtured, with her grandmother. It also represented a site of resistance—she knew she could walk away from the racism of the nuns that she worked for, and go home where their perspectives did not matter:

“I was about fifteen, and I had worked for the Carmelites for a year, when I finally made the decision that I wasn’t coming back. I wore my little mini skirt to work the last day I was there, and I told them I was leaving. And they were so judgmental—they sort of said ‘how can you wear that?’ And I thought to myself ‘oh, good!’ And that day we set off for my grandma’s. I remember thinking “I’m going home”. Because there was some sense that, although Toronto was where I was born, and where I lived and worked, my happy memories as a child were mostly when I was on the reserve. Now there were probably some scary times too, because people did drink a lot when they were up there. But it never seemed to be as bad somehow. And I guess too, we were carefree, because we were little.”

Another woman saw her reserve as a place where there was simply “more life” to the environment, where people interacted more with one another and had stronger bonds. She saw her cousins from the reserve as far more independent and resourceful than the suburban children she knew:

“My first trip to the reserve was when I was about nine or ten. I loved it! I thought my cousins were really lucky, living on the reserve. I thought it was really wonderful and exciting. I enjoyed the visits, and they would come and visit us in Woodstock. And I knew at that age that there was a big difference, between the way I was as a child, and the way my cousins were as children. I could tell that they lived differently. I don’t know, they were freer. They didn’t have the same type of rules on the reserve that I did growing up in the city. Like, I had to come home when the streetlights came on. That was my curfew, and I would get booted home. And...there’s no streetlights on the reserve! I thought that was really neat—because they were playing outside, and they’d come in, and go to bed. And I don’t know,

it seemed that they were more creative. They did a lot more outdoor stuff than I did, living in the city. There's less television on the reserve. And you had to entertain yourself, there was no just going to the show. It seemed even their house was different from ours. Their house seemed a bit more run-down than ours—but with more life in it. Even though the life was like, loud, and partying—but it was more exciting to me. I wanted to be there, instead of at my house, living in the suburbs.”

In numerous ways, then, band membership (in addition to other long-term Aboriginal connections to collective lands) roots individuals firmly into a web of relations, sometime in a relatively abstract way and sometimes extremely concretely. Ties to place and maintaining collective identity are thus, in a sense, inextricably connected.

14.2 IDENTITY AND PLACELESSNESS IN URBAN NATIVE LIFE:

“For me, what’s even more important than the status issue is not having a homeland that I can point to and say ‘this is where my people come from’. Because for me, my family background is this nebulous territory in the middle of Manitoba somewhere. So if I say ‘I’m a Cree from Manitoba’, and then I meet another Manitoba Cree, they’ll say to me ‘who the hell are you?’ I mean, I grew up in Ottawa. Its kind of a fictional tie. I don’t have a homeland, I guess.”

For Native families who lack concrete ties to specific places, there is little to ground them in a collective identity. Janice Campbell Hale has described the dysfunction and fragmentation of family ties which her family experienced as a result of her mother’s displacement, first from her own mother’s Canadian Native community when she lost status and then from her husband’s American Indian reservation through marital breakup. Loss of any sense of a viable collective future was the result of this family experience of diaspora, as Hale vividly describes below:

In 1987 I had a dream about a turtle. (We are the last family left of the Turtle clan.) A dream, in other words, about the family...I am walking along the shore of a lake or a bay towards a house in the

*distance. I step on a small turtle I did not see lying among the rocks and think I've killed it. I am filled with grief. I leave it there and hurry away towards the house. I come back to that place on the shore later and see that the turtle is not only alive but is no longer the size of a small rock. It has grown to a hundred times its previous size. It's like a giant sea turtle and is very strong. I am filled with joy now. I watch as the great turtle walks into the water and swims away...*The dream was saying that our family only appeared to be dead, stepped on, broken into a million little pieces. The family—or the power of the family—lives on in some form and is strong...Once I longed to belong to the family I came from. Not anymore. I'm one of its broken-off pieces now. But... others are trying to make what's left of it strong again (Hale, 1993:xxxix-xxxi).

For the seventeen participants of this study who do not have band membership or other long-term collective ties to specific lands, a major problem that they face is that they are truly diasporic. These individuals, whose families have been uprooted and scattered and who therefore cannot point to a specific place and say “this is where I belong”, all commented, in one way or another, about the problem of being a member of an Indigenous nation *in the abstract*. Their historical ties to the communities where their ancestors came from, although real enough, in some ways also seemed to be fictional, simply because the connections with those communities had been left behind, and were therefore no longer viable within their families.

The participants had all developed different ways of anchoring their somewhat abstract identities, on a personal and familial level. One way of establishing longevity and ties to place was through tracing lineage. If individuals could trace their lineage for several generations within specific communities, even if they no longer had any direct connection to that community, they still felt themselves to be rooted in that place. One Metis woman spoke about how this strengthened her sense of her identity:

"I would say the important things about being Aboriginal is finding out exactly where you come from, your lineage, and, once you know that, then it makes you feel stronger. You know exactly where you come from, and it makes you feel clear. It gives you a sense of empowerment. And the more strength you can obtain about your identity, especially being of mixed race, the better. It's so important to your sense of being. When I was a child, I didn't want to be Native, because to me, it was the weaker race. It made me weak, knowing that I was not of the stronger race, or the majority. That's what my childhood was, it was weak. So part of getting stronger involves knowing exactly where you come from, even if it's mixed. People can't take that away from you. You have to learn all that you can about who you are, and then no one can take that from you. Sometimes I think about my life, and I think 'Who am I?' When I die, what will people be able to say about who I am? Because family's so important. If somebody was to write up my obituary, I want them to be able to say 'she was born here, and this was her family, and....'. So a family tree is very important to me. I've just bought a book, this past year, and I've started filling in the blanks, because that was never done for my Mom's part of the family."

Language was another vehicle which the participants saw as important for grounding individuals in their culture. The one participant who was fluent in her language described how differently the world looked from within the Cree language. The more tolerant attitudes which she found in northern Native people, as compared to urban Indian mannerisms, was, to her, attributable both to the ability to speak Cree, and to being on the land. Because language shapes thought and custom, and therefore behavior, knowing one's Indigenous language was essential to a really strong grounding in one's culture. One woman, who has made repeated attempts to learn her language, and who still plans to develop a working knowledge of it, spoke about how she saw language as anchoring her to her heritage in bodily ways, despite being diasporic:

"For me, it feels like—language is where you draw your nationhood, your identity from. It's like, what language are you from—that's where you come from, that language. It's not just words. I feel that there's a physical presence of something. I guess it's one of my biggest

challenges. One time I went to a workshop, and they said 'if you only had a few months to live, and you knew it, what would you plan to do with that time?' One of the things I had down there, was I would go to Saskatchewan and I would stay there until I learned the language, and I would learn. That's how I feel about it—that it's something that I have to accomplish."

This participant also spoke of the more ephemeral aspects of identity, including the linking of ancestry, embodied knowledge, and relationship to land which is often referred to as "blood memory". For a number of the participants, flashes of what seemed like memories linked them to the past in ways that seemed to physically ground them in their ancestral heritage:

"The other day, I was chopping some meat, and suddenly my body felt like this was something that we've been doing for years and years and years. There was just a flash where I thought like—I was somebody from 200 years ago, and you know, I knew that this person was here—and we're still doing these things, these things don't change. So there's a sense of something else too, besides the language, that grounds us in our identities."

Another individual, who strongly emphasized the importance of following traditional teachings, also spoke of the connections between land, embodied heritage, and our ancestors:

"This is our home. Its in our blood, eh, in our psyche. This is where our ancestors were—its all here. They're all here, all the spirits are here. The spirits of our ancestors are here, in this continent—not in another country."

A few individuals referred to an emotional bond that they felt as Native people, to a collective past:

"Okay, there's two levels that I base identity on. My more intellectual response would be 'people identify that way for solid reasons, like family. This gives them their sense of who they are'. The more gut level part of it involves in some way...being confused about it. Being part of the 'lost generations', I think. It's more of a feeling, that way, of being part of an historic process, even of loss and pain, that is significant somehow. Like, getting a feeling from people....that it means something

to them. There's an emotional identification. It's not just saying 'well—this is who I grew up with, and this is where I'm from'. It's definitely...emotional. Like, a lot of people will talk about the first time they heard the drum. And I think—certainly non-Native people are capable of being moved by something like that. But I think that that's central, that emotional connection. It's....like family, almost."

For a few of the participants (the author's family included), strong family bonds, beliefs within their families about spirituality and connectedness to nature, and other somewhat ephemeral feelings about ties to ancestors were some of the few things left about *being* Native that they still had access to on a regular basis, as people from extremely acculturated and diasporic families. Other individuals, particularly the adoptees, who have had to deal with extreme feelings of loss for having been taken from their families and communities, tended to feel even more strongly that Nateness was "in the blood" and could not be erased:

"Because of the very difficult relationship I had with my parents, my adopted parents, I honestly believed that our breakdown in the adoption was so much about seeing the world from two completely different places. Because even though they raised me in their value system, I'm a really firm believer that you have blood memory, and you have...something...as a Native person you have something in there that they would never be able to relate to. And that was just always a struggle that I had, and I just really believed that I was really different, and they would never understand me because I was Indian."

Interestingly, the only adoptee who did not speak in detail about blood memory was the one individual who had regained band membership, and whose collective ties to place were therefore ensured on other levels. This would suggest that concepts such as blood memory become increasingly important when more concrete and material bonds to place and community have been removed.

Some participants described the sense of belonging that they felt when they first encountered Native people. Being around Indian people “fit” their lives in ways that they hadn’t known they were looking for:

“I dropped out of school real early, and started that whole partying scene. And my first parties were with these two Indian brothers, all the way from Ingersoll—and I hitchhiked. I’d go to Ingersoll, and that’s who I did my drinking with. Its interesting that you can always find your own people, in maybe, the town over, or the city over. To have never met each other, and then you meet each other and its like coming home. ‘Oh, finally! Let’s hang out!’”

Given the extent to which concepts like “blood memory” are used to explain an ephemeral feeling of connectedness to other Native people, it seems important to examine this concept. I do not want to argue for or against this idea (and certainly not to simply dismiss it as “essentialist”). Rather, I think it is useful to consider what the idea of “blood memory” enables and secures for Native people. In a country where a powerful body of white politicians and scholars have for years maintained a monopoly on defining Indigenusness, and where Native peoples do not control the discourse which controls our lives, the concept of “blood memory” cuts through the pronouncements of “Indian experts”, insisting that we are Indigenous because our bodies link us to our Indigenous past. We do not have to wait for courts and legislation to decide who is Indian, who is entitled or unentitled, and to internalize that logic—our bodies tell us who we are.

The concept of “blood memory” also reassures us as to our cultural survival. For a people who have had much of their knowledge of the past severed, “blood memory” promises a direct link to the lives of their ancestors, made manifest in the flesh of the descendents. In a country where countless past generations have been educated to have “the Indian” removed from the person, where Native people are pinned down by those who control them, where urban Native people are anxiously

trying to discover what remains of the cultures so apparently erased or abandoned in the interests of survival, “blood memory” promises us that we can claim our ancestors’ experiences as our own, that we can recreate our cultures based on what we carry in our genes. For people damaged almost beyond recovery by oppression, it offers us the strength of our ancestors to survive and persist. Blood memory, therefore, is incredibly seductive, in this “post-colonial moment” for urban Native people, whose peoplehood continues to be dismembered, as racism escalates and the colonizer’s logic reigns unchecked—as colonization, in fact, continues unabated. It is also, in some deep ways, impossible to deny, as our bodies have a knowledge all their own. For many of the participants, the concept of blood memory has been an important way in which their families “kept the faith” to an often ambivalent sense of collective identity, despite lives spent placeless and almost invisible, in the heart of the dominant culture.

Some individuals have developed personal ties to specific reserve communities through networks of friendships, which they see as rooting them in some respects in at least some relationship to a land-based community. Others involve themselves in urban spirituality as a means of grounding themselves within nature even in an urban environment. Finally, many of the participants have developed strong community ties, through work or activism, within the Toronto Native community.

The participants, as diasporic individuals, have to negotiate identities in a milieu which insists that the only “real” Indians are on-reserve Indians. Below, the participants discuss this issue.

14.3 PERCEPTIONS OF ON-RESERVE LIFE:

“It wasn't until the white people starting sorting us and classifying us and saying “unless you live here on this little plot of land you're not going to be an Indian” that we started getting caught up in these kinds of divisions.”

The participants were asked about their attitudes towards on-reserve Indians. How important, on a daily basis, were the immediate ties to community and land, which they possessed? To what extent is this crucial for Native identity?

First of all, the individuals who had lived in Native communities most of their lives talked about what becoming urban meant to them. For the northern Saskatchewan Metis woman, urbanization—even the process of embracing an urban Native cultural orientation—was described as acquiring white values:

“I've been noticing now when I go home—because I've been away for fifteen years—that I'm feeling disconnected with my culture. Especially being in the city. Because people in the city, young people, are trying so hard to find themselves, and find their culture. In the city, we do things like traditional singing, using sweetgrass—and we try to have a cohesive Native community. You know, you go to the Native centre—we do things like that. And then, I go home, and I'm not quite fitting in now. It's like white values have come into my head a lot. So my friends treat me a little bit differently. They'll give me a clean cup. Whereas before, they'd say “get it yourself”. But now, they're treating me like I remember treating white people. You know? Not to that extreme. They don't run and hide in the bedroom. Like, when I was growing up, if a white person came to the door, then everybody would go hide right away, so that there'd only be one person there who had to talk to them. That's exactly what happens. And it's not that bad, the way they treat me—but it's like I'm getting further away. And I hate it. It's very hard. Because I remember, when I was in Beauval, and my aunts who had been away for a long time would come, and I would be shy with them, because they were like strangers. They had married white men, so they brought their white husbands along for a visit. And it was just more formal.

I feel that people are a little uncomfortable when I go to visit. It's because some of this urban stuff has rubbed off on me, right? Even

the joking—like, the way you joke at home is you put each other down. But it's not really putting them down, the way we do it. But in the white society, it's putting somebody down. Like calling somebody a dirty spoon, it means 'you dirty cunt', right? I used to whip out those comments like nothing—'hello, you dirty spoon!' But now, if I go home and say that, they'll look at me like I'm insulting them—because I don't have it any more."

This individual, who is two-spirited², described going home with her lover on different occasions, and has suggested that rural Native people are much less homophobic—in general, less judgmental—than urban Native people. She felt that her sense of alienation in the community had more to do with becoming increasingly urban than with being two-spirited.

Another individual described the changes in his outlook which came about from leaving the reserve. He saw this process as involving a greater politicisation, through having had the opportunity to visit numerous other reserves and to become more familiar with the power structures of white society. To him, being in the city did not otherwise involve a tremendous degree of change—which speaks to the heterogenous nature of his reserve, located near a white urban centre:

"I didn't become politically aware until I left the reserve. I worked for awhile as training producer for CBC radio. That's where I really got a lot of education. Travelling, reading the papers, writing stories about them. I've been to over 100 reserves in Canada and the U.S. When I left my reserve, I knew everything about the community way of life, inside the community. That was how I grew up. And then when I left there, I learned about everything that happens outside the reserves, outside the communities, the political and sociological issues pertaining to Native culture that we have to deal with.

I think on the reserve there's certainly more of a connection to the land. You know, I go home, and there's the lake—our reserve is surrounded by water. And now I don't feel as comfortable around large bodies of water as I did when I was a kid. I mean, we have Lake

² "Two spirited" is a concept which many Native gays and lesbians have adopted, not only as a means of conceptualizing homosexuality, but to make connections with traditional Indigenous ways of understanding the qualities of maleness and femaleness, and the flexible manner in which these qualities can fit different bodies, across gender.

Ontario here, but how often do you go swimming or canoeing in that lake? I mean, just crossing the Gardiner to get to it is such an effort!"

A few of the participants strongly felt that because they grew up off-reserve, their Indianness was flawed or in some ways inferior to that of on-reserve Native people, even though they also sometimes expressed an awareness that there was very little actual difference in the lived experiences of the people on the reserve, as compared to their own lives, in some cases lived right next door to the reserve:

"I think on-reserve Native people look more Native. If they have cultural information, they don't always share it. You almost have to find a soul mate, who will educate you and make you more aware. Maybe again, it's my lack of understanding of the culture. We're supposed to hang out and talk to each other. And those are probably things that I didn't learn. I mean, certainly at home, with my grandfather and my uncle, and my mother, we had those skills of relating to one another—although that's sort of blurry, because my mother died when I was so young. My father was not a talker. So, what I know, I learned from my uncle and my grandfather. My aunts weren't talkers, they were drinkers. And I'm not a talker.

I haven't made great efforts. But because not much is written down—there are things on tape, that sort of thing—but it's hard to gain access. The way I live, I could read a book about our culture, but I don't have three hours to sit and chat with somebody. Not on a regular basis, to have an ongoing relationship where I could learn things from somebody—I'm just not geared to that, the way I live now. You have to have an extended family, I guess—which was like my early days, when the elders were around.

But even on the reserve, integration was the goal. Everything centred around the Catholic School. There was nothing Native-oriented, that I can remember. No regalia. No Native dishes. They used to have, like, cans of chipped beef, it was like dogfood, honest to god. And that's what they had to eat. Mostly it was that canned stuff. And...no running water. That's not unusual for the Maine side even today—there's still places that don't have indoor plumbing."

This individual worried that her family's marginal status within their community, as people who had grown up on land adjacent to the reserve rather than within the community, might have negative implications for

one of her brothers. She feared that his strong activism might cause him to be seen as an interfering outsider within their community, and that he might therefore be endangered not only from the police but from some of the Native people in her community.

Another woman also described her own sense, growing up, that she was not “Native enough” for being from off-reserve. However, in later years, when she gained status through marriage and began working primarily with on-reserve Indians, she began to no longer see “Indianness” as necessarily linked to having a reserve, and gradually rejected this idea.

I could be branded here for saying this—but a lot of people who haven't grown up on reserve have for some reason retained a lot, in some cases a lot more, Indian ways of thinking. I don't know—not attitudes...I don't know what it is. But... there's something there. It's in the blood. You can't just get rid of by moving to the city. You just can't get rid of it. It keeps coming back.”

The participant also noted that she was beginning to practice some of her great-grandmother's land-based ceremonies, and that she was able to do this in any park area, if necessary—although this obviously wasn't an optimum solution. From this participant's perspective, being placed on reserves was the coloniser's actions. Being able to access part of her great-grandmother's practices, from the days before they were put on reserve, was just another indication that being based on a reserve did not ultimately determine whether one was Native or not.

Other participants took this perspective, noting that being on a reserve was only an interval of Native experience, not a primeval state of being. One adoptee was adamant about challenging Native people who claimed a superior knowledge of Indianness through growing up on reserve:

“I think on-reserve Indians might have the feeling that their link is stronger, through the generations, because they've not been taken away or whatever. But I've had people tell me that they grew up in

Saskatchewan, like a real Indian with horse and buggy, and I tell them: 'No, no, no....you did not have a pre-Columbian experience'. This is my bottom line. I tell them: "I went through major oppression as an adoptee. I survived it all alone. I could have killed myself way back then, and you'd never have even known about me. Fuck you".

Another woman concurred with this:

"Being adopted is a Native experience! Being mixed-race is a Native experience!"

One woman suggested that Native people had to rethink what was meant by "Indian land"—that when Native people agreed to limit "Indian land" to reserves, they were ignoring the fact that all the land had once been theirs:

"We didn't have reserves, before, we never had reserves. Maybe territories, so I can see the affiliation to reserves with the territory—like we had boundaries that we respected, or went across and maybe had to risk our lives to get, you know, a deer or whatever."

Several of the participants were careful to specify that while many reserve Indians clearly had greater access to cultural heritage than urban Native people did, some reserves were so dysfunctional with alcoholism, or so permeated with fundamentalist Christianity that they could not fill this function.

Other individuals noted that the divisions between on-reserve and off-reserve people—especially with respect to the southern reserves near urban centres—were not as hard and fast as some on-reserve people made them out to be. Nevertheless, they asserted that simply because reserve Indians interact more on a regular basis with other Indians, this made them "more Native" in their orientation than urban Native people are. One participant discussed her opinions on this below:

"Well, there's lots of people I know in the community—I don't know if they consider themselves to be mixed race. They obviously are, and

yet they claim to be fully Native. These are all people who come from reserve communities, so they have more of a claim to Nativeness in that sense.

Its not as cut and dried as it might seem. Our communities have people right at the centre of them who are mixed-race. Despite this, however—I do see on-reserve Native people as being more Indian, because they're totally immersed in a Native environment. They're living in a community where everybody is Native, where people have always lived with other Native people, and that's just the everyday reality, the everyday aspect of it. So, yeah, I do think that its a stronger base there."

One individual talked about her strong yearning for the cultural connections which she saw as being available to on-reserve people, particularly in the north. At times she verged on romanticizing reserve life; however, at other times it was clear that she simply missed the connection with older Native people in her life:

"They've had the connection with mother earth, you know, all those things that we don't have access to unless we go to a park, or you know, that little trip that we get to take out for the day out in the country. They've had the access to those elders. And I don't mean elders as in teachers—simply those older ones who still carry the culture. I would love to be able to go and sit down and just listen. I was watching a program, and there was a woman up in Moosonee or Moose Factory. And she still does hides. They hunt, and then she does her hides. They still live the way that our ancestors lived. And she was so upset that all these women around her were saying "retire—what are you still doing that stuff for, you can go out and buy it". And she wants them to come and learn how to do it, but they're not interested. It almost made me want to just to put some stuff together, get rid of my apartment and everything else, and start walking up there—because she wants people to come and learn. I would love that. Those are the things that we need to pick back up. Mi'kmaq people are fabulous basket weavers—their baskets are in museums all over the world. But there's no basket weavers here—it would be so nice to be able to learn it."

Many individuals simply discussed the pros and cons of on-reserve versus urban experiences—as providing more and less access to certain types of cultural experience, as one individual below noted:

"I think in some ways on-reserve Indians have more access to the language, and to being around ceremonial activities. But I think in some ways here, we have access to things like workshops, conferences and readings, and cultural awareness gatherings, that just don't happen on reserves. So there's kind of a give and a take there. A lot of people living on the reserves are still very Christian. So in a lot of ways, urban people who are living the traditions ARE more traditional. But language-wise—a lot of people living on the reserves speak the language. There's more language speakers then there are in the city."

One individual pointed out how the dominant society influences what people think of as Native identity, how urban Indians are presented in the media as having left Indianness behind:

"Some people think urban Indians are less Indian, you know, because they've become citified. I remember, a number of years ago, watching a TV program, and it was about a Navajo child custody case. I just thought it was so weird, because I never even liked that show, but that one time I watched it. What really struck me was that one of the Navajo lawyers didn't live on the reserve, he wore a suit and carried a briefcase and he had an expensive haircut. That's what people really think—that if you live in the city you're a sell-out, you're a suit. I think some Native people think that. And I know white people believe that if you live in the city, you can't really be an Indian, because if you were, you'd be on the reserve—'where you belong'".

Another participant, who had worked in both on-reserve and off-reserve settings, saw it as important that both sides work together, because both had strengths to offer each other:

Last year I made the break from urban to on-reserve organisations. I was asked by one of the provincial territorial organisations to train 13 frontline workers in the program we've developed for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Over time, I've been going back and teaching at different reserves, about self-esteem, child sexual abuse, family violence, or wellness. I've been to West Bay, and all different places on Manitoulin Island, and I've been up to James Bay to do teachings about violence on Mother's day—so I think the thing I've been able to do is take the things I've learned in both worlds and bring them back to the communities. Because to me those are the same people. Not the same people, but in my mind, I don't want to build up

the notion that the people in the north and on the reserves are separate from us. I think that's very short-sighted. Because we should be able to be Aboriginal people wherever we are. Why should we have to be in a certain place to be recognised as Aboriginal people?"

One adoptee pointed out that to her, as an urban Native person, on-reserve people, particularly those from the north, had many gifts for her to learn from:

"My feeling is that we all have different experiences, but we're all Indian people. And so I know that some of the people that come from the northern communities are truly gifts for me, because they seem to have this wonderful...quietness, a quietness, that I really have a lot to learn from. So I feel that every experience provides something to learn from. I see the urban Indians, and I see the First Nations communities in this area—and they're struggling with different things. And then the people from the north—they're more connected to the land. I'm much more attracted to that, because they have something to teach me. They've taught me about the importance of family. And the laughter, right? The laughter, the food, the community—they're tremendous gifts to me. Because I never experienced that."

14.4 TERRITORIALITY AND EXTRA-TERRITORIALITY:

A crucial issue with respect to being urban is whether the individual is living in the same territory as their Indigenous nation. The participants in this study are perhaps quite representative of the diversity of Native people within the Toronto community—in that they came from thirteen different Indigenous nations. However, one third of them were Mohawks, Oneidas or Ojibways from reserves which were very close to Toronto. For the other twenty participants, living in Toronto entails living in Ojibway territory as a non-Ojibway person. During the interviews, the participants talked about where they felt more grounded—in the city, or their home community—and the issues which flowed from this.

What seemed most germane to the off-territory participants' identities was how rooted they felt in their territory of origin, relative to

Toronto—how much time they had spent in their home village, and how much family remained in their territory of origin. The participants' experiences ranged from those who had grown up in Toronto and had never been to their home territory, to those who were closely linked to their communities of origin but had lived in Toronto for several years and so had a Toronto-based identity as well as a "home" identity. The majority of the off-territory participants, however, came from backgrounds where they had no remaining family on their traditional territory, or had grown up not knowing where their original community was, through forced dislocation. Their identification with their Indigenous nation was mainly in the abstract. For these people, the most concrete identity they had was as urban Native people. For the most part, these individuals saw adaptation (or even absorption into) the local norm as the only way to live as a Native person. One individual, of Cree and Sauteaux heritages, describes how in Toronto she has been drawn to Ojibway culture:

"You know, at one time I wanted to go back and re-claim my Creeness. I wanted to move to the prairies, learn the language, and try to learn more about what it means to be Cree. But now that I'm probably going to be staying in this region for good, it has occurred to me that I feel more of an affiliation to Ojibway culture, for some reason or other. I mean, the big cultures that are here are the Ojibways and the Iroquois cultures, right? For some reason or other, I don't lean towards the Iroquois—although I enjoy learning from their teachings or something, but I don't align myself with them. Maybe it was from watching that terrible scene in Black Robe, about those Mohawks! In any case, for some reason I don't feel like that's part of who I am, you know. But I do feel some kind of connection or tie to Ojibway culture, for some reason or other. So now I would like to learn that language, and perhaps follow that spiritual tradition a bit more.

So as far as seeing myself as part of some kind of community, or how I trace myself—I guess I've taken the tack that I have to look forward. There's no going back—I can't really make those connections to who we were on the prairies. But I'm building a life here as part of this community instead. The culture I'm learning about may not be the

one that I come from, but its as close as I'm going to get, around here, anyway."

The African Cherokee participant, on the other hand, feels alienated by Ojibway culture and has gradually become deeply involved in the Haudenosaunee traditions. She feels clearly that because the Cherokee and Iroquois peoples have common linguistic and cultural roots, the fact that she is drawn to Mohawk culture is a natural affinity.

Other individuals, who had had a deeper access to their own cultural background before coming to Toronto felt too grounded in their own culture to attempt to grow towards an Ojibway or Iroquois norm. However, their attempts to continue to learn about their own particular cultures were hampered by the lack of elders from that culture in the community, and the lack of access to instruction in their own language:

"They are supposedly offering a language course [in the participant's West Coast language] through the University of Victoria. But for me to get it I'd have to go through the band, and for the past two or three years they've ignored my requests. The other thing is that individuals who take the course in Victoria can actually go up to one of our communities, where our language is spoken, to practice. That would be hard for me, in any case. I would find it an effort to say to people "I want to be with you for one or two hours on a regular basis and just speak our language". I guess I'm too far away from it right now. And of course, you don't really want to learn a language like that on paper.

I started taking Ojibway lessons this past year. I sort of realized that it might be too difficult to learn my own language under these circumstances, and I have a language requirement for my Ph.D.. But its difficult for me. And you need to have friends who speak Ojibway to practice it with."

Other participants paid less attention to language, and simply felt comfortable pursuing Ojibway spirituality, because they did not see it as too different from the traditions of their origins:

"There's not that much difference between South American Native culture and North American Native culture. Their beliefs, and our

beliefs, are more or less the same. I associate being Native with my traditions, with the love for mother earth, those things. I just had an appointment with an elder, and it was so interesting, it was just like having a talk with a grandmother at home."

The participants' words seem to suggest that with respect to issues of territoriality and extra-territoriality, living far from your own territory is only an issue to those individuals who have been strongly exposed to their culture as children, or who grew up in their communities of origin. The rest of the participants tended to adopt an urban identity coupled with a somewhat abstract identity as "a member of a specific nation" (rather than a very concrete location-based identity). Those individuals who had been definitively severed from their own context frequently spent a number of years living in hope of some day being able to go home to their village where they might somehow re-create themselves within their ancestors' identities. In many cases, however, these individuals eventually became pragmatic, and gradually began to absorb cultural teachings either of the Haudenosaunee or Ojibway cultures.

14.5 SUMMARY:

In discussing the various issues involved with being land-based, two sets of problems have arisen. On the one hand, there is the real connection between being land-based and maintaining collective ties to identity, which each participant engaged with from different locations. On the other hand are the hegemonic perceptions about Indianness—the immense body of stereotypes within the dominant society which link Nativeness inextricably to an on-reserve environment. For the most part, the participants were relatively clear that they did not subscribe to knee-jerk ideas that on-reserve Native people simply were "more Indian" than them because Indianness required a reserve experience. Their responses, rather, indicated a comprehensive awareness both of the strengths that being reserve-based brought to Native identity, and of the reality that a

considerable amount of interaction and cross-fertilization is taking place at present between the more southern and urban reserves and urban centres like Toronto—and that these interactions are important for both urban and on-reserve communities.

Several participants saw a need for on-reserve Native people to deconstruct the sense of “real Indianness” that being from a reserve generates. They suggested that Native people in general need to be clearer about what actual differences (and similarities) exist between on and off-reserve Native people, rather than simply asserting in a blanket manner a sense of absolute difference. To continue to assert this notion of absolute difference is to promote the idea of reserves as culturally homogeneous communities, which ignores the real differences *between* First Nations, semi-urban and rural, north and south.

On the other hand, the participants were also aware that being land-based was vitally important to maintaining a viable Indigenous culture, and that in this respect, for urban Indians, asserting a Native identity can be a highly contradictory enterprise—one that might require unique and fresh approaches both in understanding what constitutes an Native identity, in building bridges with land-based communities, and in finding ways to deal with the issue of extra-territoriality. These issues will be taken up in the next section.

SECTION TWO - SUMMARY:

“You know, when you start to really analyse it—that’s the way the colonisers work. The beauty of what they do as colonisers is—after they have come and instituted their ways among a critical mass of people over a certain period of time, then they establish that that is now going to be the norm. And so the colonisers have now left a group of the colonised who continue to oppress their own people. They’re the ones who are oppressing their own people. And that’s what everything that has happened in Canada has been about—the residential schools, and the churches, and everything else. So that it’s us doing it to ourselves.”

As this section has demonstrated, the impact of hegemonic images and definitions of Indianness on the participants’ sense of their own identities has been considerable. At the same time, it is obvious that the urban Native community in general is engaging in ways of subverting or actively resisting these ways of thinking about Indianness, with greater or lesser degrees of success. One of the greatest difficulties individuals face in attempting to work their way through these hegemonic ways of thinking is the fact that these constructs have power precisely because of their ability to reflect reality in common-sense ways. Appearance *does* make a difference to Indianness. Native status *has* shaped the realities of status Indians in ways that are highly distinctive. Being reserve-based *has* provided for a stronger collective identity for band members than is typically the case for urban Indians. And yet, as the participants’ family and individual experiences have demonstrated, none of these descriptors—appearance, status, or a reserve background—are ultimate signifiers of a Native identity.

For Native people, appearance has been one of the obvious ways in which boundaries have been maintained between members of Indigenous societies and a hostile colonizing society. And yet a crucial way in which

the cultural distinctiveness—and the nationhood—of Indigenous societies has been denied within the colonizing society has been to reduce cultural identity to race, therefore reducing Nativeness to appearance, with its implicit connection to “purity” of blood. In the urban community, a critical response to this colonial obsession with appearance has been the attempt to de-couple “Indianness” from “looking Indian”, to ignore colonial divisions among Native people and assert that anybody of Native heritage is a Native person, regardless of appearance. These urban attempts to exercise a strategic flexibility about appearance, intermarriage and “Indian blood”, however, are directly opposite to the approaches taken by certain First Nations communities. As I indicated in Chapter Four, Kahnawake Mohawk territory has implemented a 50% blood quantum membership standard, and restrictions on intermarriage in an attempt to maintain a high level of “Indian blood” within the community. These approaches diverge broadly, and it may be helpful to see them not only as philosophical positions, but as responses to the significantly different circumstances facing urban and reserve-based Native peoples. In particular, urban communities have had to wrestle with the almost inevitably higher rates of intermarriage with non-Natives than reserve communities typically face, while the pressure on reserve communities to maintain their land base, in a context where the reserves are the only sites in Canada where Indian land is legally recognized and protected, creates a need to maintain fairly rigid boundaries about Indianness, to ensure that the land is not gradually alienated into white hands. For communities such as Kahnawake, adopting a blood quantum standard represents an attempt to come to grips with the community’s desire to regulate Native identity while at the same time rejecting government categories of Indianness as determined by Native status.

Native status, above all, is a system which has enabled Canada to deny and bypass Indigenous sovereignty, by replacing “the Nation” with “the Indian”. As the experiences of the participants’ families have demonstrated, Canada has been able to use Indian status to define who can be *considered* to be “Indian” in ways which have alienated whole communities from any access to a land base and permanently fragmented Native identity, as well as controlling racial miscegenation and Native blood quantum through an extremely patriarchal and racist system which has torn large holes in the fabric of Native societies. Native status has also been an extremely effective way to control access to Native territory—through demanding that only status Indians can live on the reserves supposedly set aside for all Native people.

The fact that the participants were able in a relatively straightforward manner to reject hegemonic concepts of Indianness as determined by appearance or being reserve-based, but continued to wrestle with issues of status indicates the profound power of the state to regulate identity. In many respects, the participants’ opinions about status were entirely reflective of whether or not they actually possessed Indian status. While the status Indian participants all saw status as crucial to protecting Native people from extinction, virtually all of the non-status people saw Indian status as so ultimately divisive that it represented a significant weakness to Native empowerment. What both groups held in common was an avowed belief that status was irrelevant to Nativeness, combined with a generally deeper-held, almost instinctive reaction that the only *real* Indians are those who have Native status. This is the problem with government legislation on identity—once created and established, it cannot simply be undone. You cannot put the genie back in the bottle again—you have to deal with it. It is one thing to recognize that *Indian Act* categories are artificial—or even that they have been internalized—as

if these divisions can be overcome simply by denying their importance. Legal categories, however, shape peoples' lives. Legal restrictions on Indianness, on the basis of blood quantum and gender have created a legacy of experiential differences between status Indians, confined to reserves, and most other Aboriginal people. These differences—*between* communities, as manifested in conflicts between on-reserve status Indians and all other groups—urban Indians, the Metis, and non-status Indians—and *within* communities, as manifested in conflicts over reinstating band membership for Bill C-31 Indians, are the most divisive issues which Native people face in Canada today. Government created differences have now been naturalized as inherent differences, to the extent that the government has been successful in tying treaty rights and a nation-to-nation relationship to Native status (and increasingly now to reserve residence)—a process which has created a large (and ever-growing) group of disenfranchised Native people, while those who fit the government's notion of who a "real Indian" is—on-reserve status Indians—continue to argue that they alone are uniquely entitled to the rights and benefits of Aboriginality.

For the participants, what complicated their opinions about status was the fact that it is tied so closely to access to Native land. Meanwhile, because of the blood quantum and gender restrictions upheld for over a century by the *Indian Act*, status has also become inextricably connected to issues of appearance and to gender.

Regardless of the opinions of the participants, however, in some respects the cities represent a space where status has *already* been decoupled from the position it occupies in reserve settings as a crucial signifier of Indianness. In urban settings, where a significant proportion of the Native population are the products of loss of status (or never had it in the first place), status Indians and non-status people work side-by-side at

different agencies and are involved in the same activities in ways that simply cannot happen in reserve settings, where funding for any sort of activity or process is linked to status and where non-status people cannot live on reserve land.

Urban centres, in fact, increasingly represent spaces where boundaries between Native people and the dominant society are maintained neither by appearance nor Indian status. In this respect they represent an unique place to observe what happens to Native people who lack legal protection of their rights as Indians, and who are flexible about the boundaries of Indianness. In many respects, however, urban Native people are able to maintain this flexibility precisely because they have no collective land base, which in many ways is the most problematic aspect of urban Native identity.

Given that the distinction between on-reserve and off-reserve Native people currently represents the biggest struggle around entitlement which contemporary Native people face, the participants were extremely clear-headed about how being urban affected their identities as Native people. While some individuals wrestled with the hegemonic logic that links Native people to images of “living on the land like an Indian”, most of the participants were relatively clear that reserve-based individuals did have a stronger sense of their identities as Native people simply because they had grown up in places where Native people were the majority. These individuals, however, were aware that the boundaries between urban and reserve culture are neither as distinctive nor as fixed as individuals believe—that considerable cross-fertilization continues to happen between urban centres and adjacent reserves.

The participants’ experiences of having band membership reinstated were, on the whole, quite positive. It was obvious, however, that in some respects, Bill C-31 Indians have been entirely externalized

from their communities. There is no unconditional acceptance as redress for past wrongs—individuals are only accepted back if their circumstances fit band criteria, and those who do fit not remain externalized. In many respects, then, it is obvious that for these individuals, and for the majority of urban mixed-race individuals who cannot get their status back, either because they fall below the second-generation cutoff with Bill C-31, or their ancestors never had status, there is no “going back” to a Native identity (or community) which their ancestors became alienated from. These individuals (many of whom are from other Indigenous nations but have no communities to go back to) are attempting to build identities as urban Native people in Toronto. It is clear, however, that these individuals would be extremely enriched by having more continuous access to First Nations communities—and that in many instances these individuals have resources which First Nations communities could benefit from. This suggests that urban Native people and the First Nations need ways of conceptualizing alliances—or nationhood—which does not involve individual bands having to endlessly open their membership rolls to newcomers, or urban Indians attempting to “go back”—having to continuously engage in a fruitless attempt to re-create ourselves in identities that our families left behind.

In the process of discussing urban-rural relationships, a number of questions arose. How is identity maintained in urban settings? How are traditions being revitalized in urban settings, and what effect does this have on mixed-race people, particularly women? How do we negotiate the need to promote nation-building as landless people? What should our relationship be to the on-reserve status Indians of our homelands who may or may not accept us, for being mixed-blood or non-status, or simply for being urban? In the next section, I will explore some of these questions.

SECTION THREE:
URBAN COMMUNITY
AND THE
REBUILDING OF INDIGENOUS NATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

“I just hope that when we have children, that our actions and our decisions will basically give them a greater knowledge, and something to be more proud of, and something to really be immersed in, from their earliest years, rather than a real struggle just to find and to uncover, and to draw out of people grudging story after grudging story...From a wall of silence...We subsist on crumbs...fragments. But I think we have a lot more than fragments. And the thing is, that a lot of our stories, a lot of our history, has not been written.”

The contemporary generation of urban Native people have for a number of years been trying to reconstruct their histories around the once-silenced voices of their parents and grandparents, listening avidly to their memories and experiences, asking them for old stories, and in these and other ways seeking to recover what had been thought lost. In the process, they have been reshaping their own lives to challenge assumptions that their families' Native identities are going to vanish. At the same time, as mixed-race Native people, they have to negotiate multiple affirmations and denials of their Indianness according to their degree of acceptance within the urban Native community, and the extent to which they conform to hegemonic standards of what constitutes a Native person in the non-Native society.

This is not the full extent of the issues which urban mixed-race Native people have to deal with, however. Perhaps the most serious problem is the fact that these individuals are negotiating profoundly contradictory realities from a position of real weakness. They live in an urban setting where there is no land base, where despite significant numbers, the collective “clout” of an impoverished and deeply damaged community is minimal, where government policy continues to curtail the Indigenous rights of those individuals who have Indian status, and where

probably the majority of the population lacks any legal recognition as Native people at all.

It is difficult to describe the combined impact of invisibility and placelessness on urban Native people in Toronto. Between a mainstream agenda still predicated on the “vanishing Native”, the struggles of dozens of “multicultural” or multiracial populations to promote their own agendas and engender their own survival in ways which generally ignore, and often eclipse the presence of Native people¹, and First Nations leaders who disown and undermine the very existence of urban Native people, many of the participants are negotiating their identities almost in a vacuum. It is clear, then, that urban Native people, particularly those who are mixed-race, require two things—external structures which address the problems which urban Native families face and to provide environments which promote Native pride and cultural renewal, and internal empowerment in the face of their relative invisibility within Toronto urban politics, and the ceaseless barrage of messages about Indianness from the white society.

In the first chapter of this section I will describe what the participants see as important to urban mixed-race Native identity, and their experiences in helping to build many of the urban Native institutions which currently represent the only Native environments which exist in the city. The second chapter explores the urban

¹ Without wishing to promote divisiveness between the weakest sectors of the population, in Toronto, the constant denial of the colonial nature of Canadian society has meant that among whites (who control official discourse), the “visible minority Other” is the only “Other” that is recognized as even existing. Despite the relative powerlessness of most “visible minority” populations, Native people in Toronto face the predicament of not being seen as existing at all, in an official discourse which is so intent on delegitimizing “visible minority” populations that the resounding scale of Native absence—in government, in business, in academia, and in the media—is not even missed, within the mainstream OR within the ranks of those outside the Native community who struggle for empowerment and justice.

spirituality movement and the role it is playing in promoting cultural pride and renewal of traditions.

Having looked at the past and present realities of urban mixed-race people, it is important to consider the future. In the final chapter I will be asking is “what roles are mixed-race urban Native people playing in the rebuilding of their Indigenous nations—and what roles might they play in the future?”. These are huge questions, and this work cannot hope to engage with this issue in anything but a tentative manner. However, I will focus, in a preliminary manner, on the nature of the urban/on-reserve alliances which do exist at present, and broach the question about what forms of nation-building might be able to encompass both urban and on-reserve experiences as “wings of the same bird”.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: **BUILDING AN URBAN NATIVE COMMUNITY**

“As urban Native people, you know, we’re not in a comfort zone. And being mixed-race, it’s not a comfort zone. But maybe it’s not all that great, being in that comfort zone and having your little corner all decked out for you. I think that you need to be hungry for something, if you’re gonna learn. It makes you work harder. We put ourselves out on a limb, in search of our identity. I think mixed-race urban people fight for that, because they have it ripped away from them by everybody. They have it ripped away by the Native people, they have it ripped away by the non-Native people. We’re always being torn apart by questions like “who are you?” You’ve gotta prove yourself, you keep proving yourself. Maybe in the end, we just have ourselves.”

INTRODUCTION:

As this study has revealed, the label “urban mixed-race Native people” spans a wide range of experiences—from those individuals who have grown up in Native communities and only came to the city as adults, to those whose families have been urban and mixed-race for two generations. In this chapter, I will explore how these individuals, to a greater or lesser extent, have been involved in creating and maintaining an urban Native community.

The participants were asked a number of questions about urban Native identity—the boundaries they establish to control in-group membership, what they see as central aspects of an urban Native identity, and what the next generation of urban Native people needs to make them strong. The participants also described their families and partners, and the extent to which their personal lives reflected a strong Native identity. And finally, they described their activities within the

urban Native community—from helping to found and run its institutions, to volunteer work and grassroots activism.

15.1 WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE URBAN NATIVE COMMUNITY?

Most of the participants responded to this question in ways which show the uneasy tension between Nativeness as a cultural identity and a racial identity. This tension is almost inevitable, given the history of colonization and land theft which Native people have experienced, which has reduced formerly autonomous and distinct nations to virtually landless cultural groups lacking real sovereignty, their citizens devalued, categorized as an underclass by race as “Indians”, and controlled by a settler government. The question of who should be considered to be Native is central not only to the personal identities of the contemporary generation of urban Native people, but to the issue of entitlement, of who should be considered members of Indigenous nations, as they struggle to assume control of their own destiny.

For all but two of the participants, “Indian blood” was seen as a necessary prerequisite for membership in Indian nations, thereby affirming that Nativeness, at a gut level, is seen as a racial identity. Most individuals, however, refused to specify how much blood was necessary, maintaining that Native people were divided enough without instituting blood quantum measurements:

“I think the amount of Indian blood doesn't mean anything. Nor does legal status, really. The thing that matters most is what's in your heart, and what you believe spiritually—that's what makes you Native. If people start measuring blood, it's going to really divide our people.”

One individual considered it important that people have at minimum one Native grandparent in order to be considered Native. Others simply stated that there had to be something in an individual's life experience or family experience that made Nativeness relevant for the individual, and

that this was really the only valid determinant whether a person's Native heritage was sufficient for them to call themselves Native. Most agreed that they tended to accept others' self-definitions, although doubt and suspicion tended to accrue to non-status individuals who looked white and who did not have family connections in the community or who could not otherwise demonstrate that they came from Native families.

Three of the status Indians voiced their concerns about federal regulation of Native identity, and what standards could replace the current status system. They had all noted the trend on different reserves towards formalizing membership criteria based on blood quantum, in the interests of keeping blood "pure", and considered this to be a form of state-organized Nazism:

"I think its important that the Indian Act changes, big-time. At the same time, I'm kind of afraid what will happen when bands start to use other standards to decide who's Indian. I'm afraid that if it gets into the hands of people who aren't thinking about the potential problems of trying to keep actual, physical blood pure, we will be in trouble. Because then you're getting into the same kinds of things that Hitler did. And you're creating very exclusive clubs. And I don't think Native people are about that, in our truest sense."

One individual, on the other hand, felt that she would be pleased if Canada dropped the *Indian Act* and instead took up blood quantum regulations as a means of determining Indianness—because she felt that far more Native people were excluded from being defined as Indian under the *Indian Act* than they would have under blood quantum requirements. Most of the participants, however, because of their concern that Indigenous nations alone should determine who should be a member of their communities, rejected any form of externally-bestowed rules about Nativeness, whether in terms of status or blood quantum.

While most individuals explicitly stated that the amount of Indian blood that an individual possessed should not be important, a few

participants mentioned in other parts of their interviews that they felt that some aspects of being white-looking were problematic for the Native community:

“I’ve worked in community development now for about six years. And for a lot of Native people that really look Native, who are coming to Native organizations in search of some kind of help—I think it’s really important for them to be helped, or work with, people who look Native. Because there’s a whole trust factor. And it’s not just about shared experience—its all about role modeling.”

The fact of racism, the way it “works” on dark-skinned individuals and empowers white-looking individuals at their expense, thus militates against the tendency of many of the participants to accept individuals with any amount of Native blood as unproblematically Native. Despite this, however, most of the participants held to the notion that Nativeness should be interpreted as broadly as possible.

Throughout the interviews, an unspoken assumption seemed to be operating, that a history of genocide was what made it most important that Native identity require “Native blood”—in the sense that membership in Indigenous nations should accrue only to those who were descendents of those who had survived the colonization process. Paradoxically, however, it is also because of that history of genocide—the reality that of the Indigenous nations that survived colonization, most faced the deaths of ninety to ninety-five percent of their membership, the assimilatory pressures that continue to assault Native families, and the constant attempts by colonial governments to control and constrain who can be considered Native—that most individuals felt that this requirement of “Native blood” be interpreted as broadly as possible.

All of the participants stated, however, that in one way or another they were concerned with “wannabees”—white-looking people who claimed to be Native, but were suspected of being actually white. For some

individuals, this was a serious problem, while others considered that the price of having the kind of flexible boundaries on Nativeness which an urban community requires might be that a few “wannabees” might slip through the cracks—but that the cumulative effect of this problem on the community as a whole was minimal. One individual, however, mentioned that the Friendship Centre in a nearby community seemed to have been taken over by “wannabees”, and that this created problems for the Native people in the community who needed the resources which the Centre had to offer, but were staying away because of their alienation from, and dislike of, the individuals in charge:

“There are a lot of not-so-native-looking Native people running the Friendship Centre in [a nearby community] . And almost all of them are considered to be white wannabees or “native-lovers” or whatever. They claim to be Native—and some of them aren’t—but you can’t really tell, you can’t really say. But there is a real feeling of resentment that they’ve kind of taken over.”

The potential for having this happen suggests that individuals should be careful about the issue of light-skin privilege in institutional settings, and attempt to ensure that at least some of the leadership positions are held by those whose Nativeness is not in doubt.

Two individuals, on the other hand, did not see Native ancestry as a requirement for taking up a Native identity. One suggested that if a non-Native person had been adopted by a Native family and had been raised within a Native environment as a Native person, then they should be considered Native. The other, who closely follows the spiritual guidance of traditional elders of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, suggested that if white people wanted to learn the spiritual traditions *and live by them*, they should be accepted as members of a Native community. Both felt strongly, however, that individuals should be honest about their lack of blood ties, and that something distinctly

different was at stake when a person pretended Indianness and when individuals asked to participate in Indigenous culture *as white people*.

Five of the participants stated that the only relevant issue for Native identity *was* blood. They felt that since so many Native people had grown up alienated from their language and traditions, Nativeness should not be judged on these qualities, but solely on whether an individual was of Native ancestry.

In the urban context, where so many Native people have grown up in silence about the past, and where knowledge of heritage has been severed, the participants all felt that Native cultural identity is something that needs to be actively encouraged. Several of the participants discussed what they considered to be necessary aspects of Native cultural identity. Most felt that self-identifying was important, that one should not only be of Native heritage but should assert that heritage, make attempts to learn about it, and to develop pride in it. Involvement in the Native community was held to be important by a number of individuals—in that Native identity involved a strong collective element. The individual below spoke of the casual, everyday aspects of relating as a Native person:

I would say what I define as a Native cultural identity would involve not only the formal things, like ceremony, but the little things, like a sense of humour—all those things. Do you have Native people over for dinner a lot? You know, my aunt's Native, but I don't think they have Native people over for dinner, except for relatives."

A third element which many of the individuals saw as necessary for developing Native cultural identity was knowledge of Native traditions. This will be explored in the following chapter.

The roles of the participants families' were also discussed. While some of the participants come from families who never questioned their Nativeness, a number of the participants have had to make conscious

decisions to reverse assimilatory trends within their own families. Each individual, therefore, was asked about the extent which their families identified as Native, and what steps they were taking to ensure that Nativeness did not end with their generation. They were questioned as to their attitudes to marriage with non-natives, and what they saw as important to ensure that their children would grow up with a strong sense of Native identity.

15.2 PRIVATE IDENTITIES AND PUBLIC PERSONAS: MAINTAINING NATIVE IDENTITY WITHIN FAMILIES

Eleven of the participants, although personally Native-oriented, came from families where assimilatory agendas were still being *actively* pursued—where Nativeness had either been denied, or was acknowledged but was viewed as relatively unimportant to the family's identity. For these individuals, claiming an Aboriginal identity had involved challenging a history of family indifference (and sometimes active resistance) to their heritage. Two of these individuals were status Indians, the rest were non-status or Metis people. In a culture where family connections define one's Native heritage, to have to assert Nativeness in *defiance* of family has meant that major aspects of Native identity have been shot through with contradictions for some of these people.

One of the status Indians had grown up with two mixed-race parents who were both products of residential schooling. Both were capable of passing for white and both had ignored their Native heritage at home (although the woman later learned that her mother had been active in the Toronto Native community during the 1950's). The other status Indian, an adoptee who was reconciled to her Native family in her twenties, found that her birth family had all left the reserve, were

primarily marrying whites, and were, in her consideration, on the way to leaving Nativeness behind.

Of the Western Metis in this group, two individuals had “paved the way” for other members of their families—siblings and cousins—to later begin to identify as Native as well. These individuals had succeeded in radically bringing to a halt the family attempt to become white, as their generation of siblings began marrying Native people again.

Of these eleven individuals, eight had married or been involved primarily with white people, and six had had children with white partners (most of them very white-looking). One divorced woman regretted having married a white man, and stated that while future partners did not have to be Native, they could not be white, because of the power relationships she had found to be embedded in long-term intimate relationships with white people. For two others, marrying Native partners had been a natural course of development for adulthoods deliberately spent primarily among Native people. A third participant, who had been adopted and who had had to struggle to reintegrate herself into the Native community, was very clear that the father of her children had to be Native. This individual discussed her reasons for this in detail, below:

“My personal choice is that I want to marry a Native man and have Native kids. I want my kids to know who they are. I don’t mind if my partner is also part white. I really just want them to have two Native parents, so that they have a stronger sense of who they are.

I’m in the “husband search” mode—and I know how hard it is to find somebody. I could be married to this guy I met in ‘95 who’s white, who’s really nice, and who treated me really good—but I didn’t want to be with a non-Native person. You always hear from people ten years later that “Oh, my husband doesn’t understand me”—and they’re still fighting about the fact that he’s white. Well, you married him! I don’t want to have to go through that.

A specific example for me is this couple who went down to ceremonies. The husband is white, and the wife is Native, and the little

girl is obviously half. The husband wasn't clued in at all—so he didn't have a place there. Like, there's families there that are mixed race, and they can be amazing, because the white wife stays out of the lodge, but she's definitely a part of the whole traditional experience—and what she's done to find a compromise is she runs the kitchen all weekend, and she cooks and works really hard, and everybody really thanks her and praises her. But she doesn't try to push in where she doesn't belong. But this guy had obviously been dragged along, and he didn't want to be there. So he was surly and snarly—but in a really polite white way. There were a bunch of us women that were outside the ceremony, because we were on our time. He was sitting out there with us, and it looked so pathetic to me. And I was thinking "I don't want my partner to be doing that! I want a partner that's going to stand inside that lodge with me. And he kept the daughter with him, too! So here she was, sitting outside—she didn't get that Native culture inside the lodge. She got this experience of being alienated outside with her Dad, and being really uncomfortable, like a really awkward white person. And you just know that they're gonna fight on the way home about it, in the car. And it's not his fault, you know—it's not that he's the big bad white guy. I mean, she married him. So I try to look for how it works, day to day. And most of the time, it doesn't, for me."

This individual was also conscious of reversing the trend towards assimilation in her family:

"See, with my cousins—I'm probably going to be the only one who marries a Native person. And so, the rest of the family is kind of going to get gradually washed away into the white world. They're going to become a white family. They're doing a little bit of culturally appropriate add-ons, you know—so they're kind of remembering. But they're mostly marrying white people, so they're going to have quarter-Native children who're probably gonna marry white. The line is just kind of stopping somewhere. The great-grandchild, who'll be one-eighth Native, is gonna be trying real hard to be an Indian. I can't sort all that out, all I can do is make a personal decision for myself, eh? But I get flack from the Native community from people who believe that I'm criticising their choices for marrying white."

Some of the participants who had blond, blue-eyed children worried that Native identity might be problematic for them, because of their appearance—or because by their generation, their Native heritage would constitute only a small part of their identity. They saw it as

important that their children felt they had a right to attend events in the Native community, as a person of Native heritage, but felt that their children would have to work out for themselves how they identified, as adults. A couple of individuals, on the other hand, noted that the meaning of “Nativity” was changing, and thought that their children felt less constrained than their generation did by a white appearance, because the younger generation of Native people had many more white-looking people in it than their parents’ generation did. Several participants were making conscious efforts to ensure that their children had enough contact with Native people that they would have a strong Native identity when they grew up:

I think that it's important for them to be reminded that they're a welcome part of another, bigger community, the Native community. And so, from time to time, we'll go to an event, you know, powwows, or other cultural activities at the Native centre. So they feel "oh yeah, this is part of who we are too". Their Dad has made sure that they're registered as band members and that they have their Indian cards. And they have annual picnics, and the Christmas party for band members, and when there are special events, he makes sure to have the kids down for those things—so they're part of his community too.”

Of the eighteen individuals with more extensive Native identification in their families, seven individuals had married white partners, and one had married a Black partner. Four individuals had children who looked predominantly white, while a fifth had a Black-Native daughter. Many individuals stated that they would have liked to have had Native partners and more Native-looking children in order to strengthen Native culture in their families, but that the “right person” for them had turned out to be non-Native. They all were making efforts, through bringing their children with them to Native events, and enrolling them in Native programs, to ensure that their children identified as Native in strong ways.

Seven out of the eighteen individuals felt that it was important to have Native partners, in the interest of maintaining a strong Native identity. For these individuals, having Native partners was important not only for reversing a trend in their families, towards marrying white, but in order to have children whose Native identity was not fragmented and divided. One of these individuals, who had been an activist for years, spoke less of individual than of collective circumstances. She felt that at this stage of Native-white relations, Native people needed to marry other Native people to keep Native culture alive:

"It's not that I have anything against interracial marriages, because I know we can still be Aboriginal people, no matter who you marry. And we have always intermarried, between nations. But the thing that's different between before and now, is that we were stronger then, and when a person came and lived with us, they became part of our world. Whereas now, the world, you know—it's almost impossible to go any place and be away from white people, and be in Aboriginal culture. So I believe its even more desirable for us to marry amongst ourselves. Because otherwise there won't be us. I'm not saying that we have to be static in our culture—because we're not. We're creative, and we're dynamic, and we change. But we live in a culture which denies our contributions, and denies anything good about us. The incredible resilience of Aboriginal cultures amazes me. But right now, Aboriginal people keep running into invisible walls, and it hurts. So I think we need to marry amongst ourselves for awhile."

Three individuals, two of whom were from reserves and were comfortable with the notion that both they and their children would be Indians no matter what their blood quantum, had thought it irrelevant whether their children had two Native parents or not and initially had no problems about intermarriage. They all reported, however, that as they began to get older, they wanted partners who would be comfortable in Native culture for the long run, where they didn't have to constantly negotiate attending Native cultural events with a non-Native partner.

On the other hand, for three other individuals, who had grown up alienated from their communities, particularly one individual who had been adopted, having Native partners was vitally important as part of “reclaiming a piece” of their Native identity. One woman reported that it was important not only that her partner be Native, but he had to be a status Indian. As a C-31 Indian, this woman could not hand her status down to a child unless she married a status Indian—and she was determined that not only must her child be Native, but he or she must be able to have status, so that Nateness was not lost in her family.

One woman felt a strong responsibility to her community, as a member of an important family within her West Coast culture, to have children with a Native partner:

“Its always been in the back of my mind that I should be with a Native person. If I married a white man, he would probably want to raise his child in the setting that he was raised in, and so I would only be able to bring Native culture in on the side. And that would not be a positive thing for my child—they would really be missing out on something, from not having access to Native communities, and not knowing more about their heritage.

In part, I feel this way because of my family’s status in our community—the fact that I’m the only child of a person who holds such a high position, who’s supposed to be giving out all this information. It gives me a very high position within the community, as well, and so I feel a certain amount of responsibility. Even though I haven’t really been raised at this point to fill this position, I still feel that there is some sort of responsibility to the community in that way.”

On the whole, participants, regardless of their choices of partners, felt that it was important to have Native partners to make it easier for them to live a Native life (following traditions, attending social events, etc) without having to mediate between Native and non-Native life. Most felt that their multi-racial children must simply be given the opportunities to involve themselves in the Native community, and must grow up knowing of their heritage.

In general, the participants saw it as much more important that their children knew who they were as mixed-race Native people than that they looked Native. A few indicated through their comments, however, that looking Native *would* ensure that the children felt more resonance towards their Native heritage. A couple of participants said that they had found it odd, initially, to have such white-looking children, or that they did not want to have children who looked really white. Several as well tended to be constantly evaluating, on the basis of looks, whether their children “really” belonged in the Native community—which suggests that at a gut level, looking Indian is seen as far more important to an individual’s entitlement to participate in the Native community than individuals are willing to admit. The strategic denials of the importance of appearance to Indianness do not remove common sense assumptions that those who choose to identify as Native should *look* Native. Despite this, however, none of the participants—even those who wanted Native partners to ensure that their children were more grounded in Native identity—saw it as important to make sure their children had high blood quantum. The Native partners did not have to be “fullbloods”—they simply had to be Native, so that their children would have an *unequivocally* Native identity.

It is impossible, of course, to discuss issues of intermarriage for mixed-race Aboriginal people without considering dynamics of racial identity, and how one’s appearance affects ones’ choices, particularly when considering how gender and class shape ones racial identity. A common comment among white-looking Native women who wished to marry Native men, particularly those who had grown up assuming in common-sense ways that they were white, was that they would have had better luck finding Native men “if they had stayed white”. They found that Native men who wanted Native wives bypassed them as “too white”,

while their adherence to Native standards in the community made them “too Native” for men who wanted white women:

“I think that some of these born-again Indians would never marry a mixed-race woman because they would think it was contaminating the culture, or the bloodlines. I don’t think I’m so blind as to say its all based on romantic love, or anything like that. I think if you’re a white woman, then yeah, I think lots of Native men would go for you. Or if you’re a Native-looking woman—and especially if you have a certain kind of look—the born-again Indians go crazy for you. But when you’re a halfbreed who doesn’t look very Native—nobody wants to touch that!”

By comparison, only one of the white-looking men (an individual who continuously used self-deprecating humour to cope with the alienation he experienced stemming from his fair-skinned, blue-eyed appearance) commented on this issue:

“I haven’t discussed it with my wife! But yeah, I guess I’ve thought about it, that that it would have been nice to have married a Native woman. But then, there’s the other side of it—how would they feel with a guy like me, eh?”

This sample body is too small (and the gender array too skewed in favour of female participants) to be able to discern definite trends here.

However, it must be noted that almost *all* of the women who were somewhat or very white-looking (a total of six out of the twenty-two female participants) commented on the difficulties they were facing in finding Native men as partners, while only one of the six men who were somewhat or very white-looking (out of a total of eight male participants) mentioned this. This suggests that on the whole, light-skinned mixed-race women are far more constrained in their choices of Native partners than are light-skinned mixed-race men.

Class and age was an issue as well, for most of the women, regardless of their appearance, in that those who were in academia or who occupied leadership roles in the community found that there were

simply too few Native men present in the circles they moved in to enable them to easily find partners at their own education level or social position. Some commented on the trend they had noticed, that upwardly mobile Native men seemed to marry either middle-class white women, or to choose much younger, less-educated Native women—women who might be perceived of as “grassroots” and who therefore might anchor them to the communities that their upward mobility was taking them away from. One woman described the social isolation she found within academia:

“I’m entering my eighth year of university, and I really haven’t met any Native men in the academic community. And where I have met Native men there really hasn’t been enough empowerment to build a relationship. You get to a certain age and you think “it’s more than just having a relationship, you’ve got to think of the future as well”. I wish I could meet more men that I had more things in common with, who would feel comfortable not only in Native communities but in attending an academic function. I mean, that’s asking a lot! I’m not always comfortable in those situations.”

This individual also spoke of the manner in which some of the Native men she had been involved with have devalued Native women when they DO form relationships with them:

“I’ve also had issues with some of the Native men I have been able to get involved with. I had one boyfriend, who got really smashed one night and said that he was gonna sleep with whoever he felt like. He wasn’t gonna follow the white man’s rules of monogamy because that’s not a Native thing.”

One participant described how her desire to have children with a Native man was offset by her fear of the abuse that so many Native men have experienced. In her estimation, this seriously affected her ability to have long-term relationships with Native men:

I have a strong yearning to have Native kids—but I’ve also got a lot of fear about it. Every Native person that I’ve dated—if they don’t have a drinking problem, they still drink a hell of a lot. I’m certainly not a

teetotaller, but that's something that would have to change if I was to have children. And because of the abuse that I've had to deal with, and that so many Native people have had to deal with, it affects people in different ways.

Now, certainly white men are abusive, and I've experienced that as well. But I think that I've probably been the most scared that I've ever been in drinking situations when its around Native men. The type of anger that sometimes comes out, and the type of...transformation in personality that you see. So yeah, whether that's true, or whether it's something about Native men that I've internalized, it's definitely a concern for me, in having a Native partner. It's always something that I look out for when I meet any guy, whether he's white or Native—how much he drinks.

In terms of abuse—I just relate that back to the residential schools. And also the fact that for my community out west, the contact with Europeans came later than it did around here, and a lot later than it did in your community. So the abuse that my father suffered from his own family members, where their lifestyle had been completely changed within their lifetimes, really marked him. And then there was the sexual abuse that he experienced in residential school. There have been so many kinds of situations like that for men of my father's generation. I remember at one point when one of my uncles who I thought was a non-abuser was accused of abuse. I remember sitting there thinking "Is there any member of my family who isn't an abuser?" I mean, some of it is accusation—but my bias is I tend to believe the victim over the accused.

I think for women, there are more support groups, and its socially acceptable to talk about feeling victimized and things like that. But its definitely more difficult for men to talk about how they've been abused. And that's so scary for me, because if I was with somebody who had been abused, then would they have really dealt with those issues? Now that could be with either a white man or a Native man, but it just seems to me that so many more Native people out there have been abused. So it's more of an issue than it would be if I was just dating white people, or not caring about having kids with a Native man."

As we can see from the experiences of the participants, keeping families Native in an urban context is not easy. A handful of the participants have only come to understand themselves as Native after years of struggling against hegemonic ways of thinking which denied or

minimized the validity of their Native identity. In the meantime, they had families with white people, and raised fairly white-identified children who fit only uncomfortably or marginally into the urban Native community (one individual, whose status card came after her adult children had married, finds that her children are uncomfortable with her “becoming an Indian”, seeing it as an embarrassment in front of their white partners). Others are uncertain as to whether their children, who by that generation have only marginal Native heritage—*should* identify entirely as Native, or whether they should not simply see this as a viable choice for “part” of their identity. Meanwhile, several of the participants have married Native partners and are bringing their children up to identify as Native. Others feel strongly that they want Native partners—but are finding their choices shaped by appearance and class and histories of genocide in strongly gendered ways. For the female participants, especially those who are white-looking, or highly educated, or who insist that the fathers of their children must be whole and healed, finding Native men to have children with has been very difficult.

Appearance and experiences of assimilation have all impacted on the roles that individuals play within the urban community. Generally speaking, those who feel entirely entitled to a Native identity, because of status, band membership, community/territorial connection or appearance, have been extremely active in the community. Many are playing leadership roles and have a tremendous sense of ownership of the community. Other individuals struggle between a home life that is heavily white-influenced, through having white partners and white-identified family members, while maintaining specific niches in the Native community. In between these two poles are individuals who negotiate varying levels of contradictions with their Native identities, but who are fairly grounded and at home in the Native community. Class

barriers must also be taken into consideration, with the discrepancies between those who work in the community and those who use its services. Finally, some individuals work for the provincial territorial organizations, representing on-reserve status Indians, which have offices in Toronto but which do not work with the organisations serving the urban community. These issues will be explored more fully in the next section.

15.3 BUILDING URBAN COMMUNITY:

The Toronto Native community has only relatively recently begun to assume its current level of responsibility for the health, education, justice, social services, and cultural needs of urban Native people. Indeed, some of the participants have played central roles in establishing and building the institutions which have taken on these responsibilities. The work that these individuals engage in is a crucial aspect of turning the approximately 65,000 Native people who live in Toronto, scattered among several million non-Natives, into a community. In this section, I will explore the various roles that the participants play in building community.

The participants' experiences represented an extremely broad range of activities—from those who helped to start certain Native organisations and who currently lead them, to those who work in them, and those who use their services. A few of the participants had been involved when several of the Native agencies in the city were being started. Three others had mothers who had played pivotal roles in starting the early institutions which gradually led to the establishment of others. Below I will present excerpts from different individuals' accounts of their activities, to achieve a picture of the kind of work that the participants have done:

"I got involved first of all with Concerned Native Citizens, as a young person. We did the Jay Treaty observation, but really, for us it was more about going down to the powwows to look around and go to

the dances. It wasn't big political stuff then. While I was in university, I was with the after-school program for Native children, run by Native people, through a bunch of grants. I volunteered there and read to the kids and things like that. They would feed the kids, they'd have them there for a bit, and give them dinner, and then there'd be a program for them to do different things like crafts or whatever. And there would also be recreational stuff—they took them camping. There were about 200 kids involved—a lot of families. At any given night you'd have 28 or 30 kids, most of them from very chaotic families. When that program closed, most of those kids went into care. Because their families couldn't sustain them.

I was on the committee when they were putting together Aboriginal Legal Services. And I worked with First Nations School, on curriculum, and writing a management and organisational plan. I helped set up the Ontario Native literacy coalition. I was a developmental worker for Native Child and Family Services when it started.

I think the best thing I've done is to work, in conjunction with another woman, in developing a program for adult Native survivors of childhood sexual abuse. That came from the fact that over 60% of the women we worked with disclosed child sexual abuse, and knowing what the pain of that is like, and knowing that I had tremendous resources to contribute, because I was in university. And I was able to gain access to counsellors and traditional people who could help me deal with my healing journey. All my education has been about why are my people suffering so much, and what can we do about it? Like, I had an aunt die when I was about eight years old. She froze to death. The people she was drinking with didn't think enough of her to take her home. That kind of thing makes it clear to me why it is so important to help our women. I think the best work I've done is with our women, providing services, addressing healing, building their sense that they are valuable. For me, that's most important thing for me to do."

"When I left Manitoba, it was over twenty years ago, right? There was no Aboriginal service development, nothing was going on. I was on the Board of Directors of a small Native youth-serving agency, one of the few. It was in fact sponsored by a mainstream agency. And I kind of got the Native-specific caseload from the Children's Aid Society when I was a social worker. The community involvement I had was in the area of volunteering and youth programs, for core area kids, who were primarily recent arrivals from reserves in northern Manitoba. I was

there as part of my own identity affinity, but I was there also as a professional social worker with some sense of program development and all that stuff. That was my involvement in Manitoba. There wasn't all that many opportunities to be involved, not like today. This was the mid-1970's, things were just starting to happen. I participated in Manitoba on a Native-specific child welfare committee, to look at doing things better for the Aboriginal community, you know, stuff like that. But my real involvement started here in Toronto, when things started happening here, like in the rest of the country, around 1980. In Toronto, my involvement has been pretty much restricted to child welfare, at this agency. I was also involved in the Association of Native Child and Family Services, which is a provincial-wide body. I've taken a big bite, with respect to Native child welfare and family services."

"I've worked doing policy work with provincial territorial organisations, and with the provincial government—working with Aboriginal women's issues at the Women's Directorate, and getting involved in the Healing and Wellness strategy. And that led me into working with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, doing policy work on Aboriginal strategies. I've worked with Metis organisations and Friendship Centres, and I've worked with a whole range of groups, together on some initiatives, like the Healing and Wellness strategy, where we formed a joint steering committee."

"I worked at both the Federation of Friendship Centres, and Chiefs of Ontario—one being the off-reserve provincial big gun, and the other being the on-reserve provincial big gun. I've cushioned my little butt in the middle of all of it—warring factions at times...and I'm still happily friends with all around, so...I've sat on different sides of the Indian table, which has been interesting."

"I've been involved with Native literacy and adult education for a number of urban organizations for a few years now. I also sit on the community council for Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto. It's an urban based alternative justice system—I've been doing that for two years now. I was nominated on, its a real honour for me to be part of that. Because I learn so much from the other people who sit on the

council, and I also am able to learn a lot from the people who come in front of the council. And I think its a real way to serve the community in a practical way. The recidivism rate is very low, which is really great, because it means its working.”

“In the last three years I've been working with adoptees, with Native people who have made it back from adoption, or from long-term foster care, or private adoptions, the selling, and buying of children. I don't think any Native family has escaped involvement with the Children's Aid Society. Our people have been shipped all over the world. There's a whole bunch of Mohawk people in Holland that were adopted out. They're all over the place. I've been part of quite a few facilitated reunions, and done the searching process—its been very rewarding.”

“I worked with people with addictions—front-line work, just after I'd come back into the community. Right now, I work at the family violence healing program at a Native housing project. I co-facilitate women's healing circles and children's healing circles, through the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy. Its been amazing work, working with the children, who are all survivors or child witnesses of abuse, and really being involved with the whole program development. And we work with the women, all survivors of violence. We use a combination of Native cultural approaches and western counseling with the women.”

For several of the participants, volunteering was a crucial part of their activities in the community:

“I've done a lot of tutoring. I took one fellow, and worked with him for about 21 months, and in that 21 months we got him from a Grade Seven level and into high school. And then he graduated just this June from high school. And now he's going into college this fall. So that was an accomplishment. And then I worked with some girls at the Native Women's Resource Centre, tutored them in English. And then—just individual people that have called me, within the Native community—I work with them. One girl—she's going to Trent this fall. So, it's very rewarding. It takes a lot of time, but its well done and good work, and I try to...as I said, I have an example from my parents, who were very good at saying “this really means something,

and you can still follow your Native ways, but you've got to learn something else, particularly in today's society—you've got to have some skills. This one guy I took from Grade Seven to his high school graduation last June. He was on the street, heavily into the booze, and I guess some drugs. He is forty years old now, but he got off the booze, and then he started looking for help. That's the type of thing I've got going here. It keeps you involved in the Native community, and the traditions that are involved, and so on. You do your best."

"I wish I could say I've had jobs in the Native community! But as far as volunteering or activism—I've been quite involved over the last few years, since 1990. I've been to a lot of rallies and demonstrations, and I've been involved with CASNP, and I'm also a member of Two-Spirited People of the First Nations. I've used a lot of the services in the Native social service organisations. I think that there are times when I could have done a lot more, but I'm taking what I can handle, given my personal life circumstances, given the issues that I have to deal with. I'm taking on as much as I can handle, emotionally. I'm a dyke, you don't have to keep that off the record. I'm not ashamed of it. I think it's important that Native gay and lesbian people are recognised in the community, and are accepted for who they are, and that they too can live traditionally and spiritually—that we have a place within the traditional aspect of the Native community, and that we have a contribution to make, and that's about it."

"I've been a Native court worker. And I've been on the board at Aboriginal Legal Services. I did work on the Leonard Peltier Defence Committee's paper, with another student and a professor, for the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous People—about the extradition from Canada to the States, and Canada's complicity, that sort of thing."

"At home, I was on the board for the Treatment Centre at Kahnesatake. And I've gone to Prison for Women and sang some songs there for the Native Sisterhood—the remaining eleven women that were there, because they're closing up the building, and its mostly Native women left. I was surprised at that at first, but I think its because they were fighting to not get put in with the men. Most of the

women ended up in prison in the first place because of the abuse they suffered, especially domestic violence, and so they don't want to be put in with the men."

"I worked with the Guatemalan community—Nuestra Voce—Our Voice, addressing the people who disappeared. I've worked with CASNP, the Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native Peoples. I've done contracts with Native organisations, doing sociological research in the Native community. I've volunteered with the Street Patrol, and been on the Aboriginal Advisory Committee at Seneca College."

I've worked at Native people's parish, and I did Five Agency work on the drug and alcohol programs—with Council Fire, Native Women's Resource Centre, NaMeRes, Anishnawbe Health, and Aboriginal Legal Services. And it wasn't to start a new program, it was looking at what resources do we have, and how can we share them, to avoid duplication of services, and utilise each other's resources to address this issue in our midst. I've run the Street Patrol program at Anshnawbe Health, and been involved there almost since it began.

"I've been working with the traditional chiefs and clan mothers of the Iroquois Confederacy for the past ten years. I was a director for Council Fire for three years, and I've worked with some of my elders in the Canadian Native Centre, doing socials. I was involved with the occupation of the Revenue Canada building, over treaty rights. I've been involved in Temagami with Chief Potts, in court. I also did a lot of work with traditional people from Akwesasne when the warriors were, you know, trying to take over the community. They were using intimidation, so I was working with the traditional people, writing articles in the newspapers, to educate people about the issues. I've been working in film for the past five years. My last film became part of the curriculum with the Ministry of Education. My new film involves five traditional elders from the Iroquois confederacy, my people. I've also worked with the different school boards, speaking about Environmental protection through a Native American perspective."

For several of the participants, their primary activities in the Native community involved ceremonial life, as well as attending teaching circles or healing circles—sometimes with activism and jobs in the community, and sometimes not. Four of the participants were artists—one who has acted in a number of movies, another who makes films, a third who has toured with Native theatre companies and who sings and plays traditional hand drum, and a fourth who is a playwright who has worked extensively not only in Native theatre but in the mainstream media.

If the above accounts demonstrate anything, it is that virtually every participant has taken on some degree of ownership of the problems of the urban Native community, and made some attempt to address healing for a generally impoverished and devastated community. On the other hand, their contributions have been to a considerable extent determined by their level of education. Below, we will look at the issue of class divisions.

15.4 CLASS DIVISIONS IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY:

The tremendous range of roles within the urban community which the participants spoke about suggests that class divisions within the urban community need to be explored. On the one hand, it is noteworthy that several of the individuals without university education worked as front-line workers at a couple of the social services agencies for a number of years. Furthermore, at social functions in the community, particularly powwows, but also plays and music events, the participants without high school education attend alongside those with postgraduate degrees. For the most part, the Native community consists of individuals who, if they have an education, are the first in their families to do so. In this respect, class divisions do not yet appear to be deeply entrenched.

On the other hand, one individual, whose Metis father had been highly successful working in non-Native contexts, described her

ambivalent feelings about how his, and her own, successes have been taken up within the Toronto Native community:

Because of the path my brother and I have taken, my father is now being drawn into Native circles where he is really embraced, because he's an older Native man who is middle-class. I always notice how people in the community treat him—they really make a fuss over him. They see him as something to be proud of in our community. But when you think of it—my Dad left all of his heritage behind to become middle class. And this is what they're celebrating! I guess older, striking-looking, charming, kind men in the Native community, who have a certain kind of class to them, are rare. I guess any older men doing work in our community in itself is rare isn't it. Our older men are not usually in very good shape. And those who've achieved what my father has don't usually go back into the Native community—they're all either on the golf course or, you know, drinking their scotch. So my Dad is kind of an anomaly, I think.

And then, when I graduated with my B.A., everybody at the agency I was working at celebrated it like it was some sort of coronation or something. And at the time I was thinking—for me, it was just sort of playing out what my class background had led me to expect out of life. It was no achievement, as far as I was concerned. And here they were all so impressed.”

Another individual spoke of this same phenomenon, how the level of devastation which the Native community faces privileges those mixed race individuals who have managed to obtain any of the benefits which accrue from fitting well into the mainstream. At the same time, the basic egalitarianism which permeates much of Native culture still operates within the Native community to enable these individuals to also circulate in poorer and less privileged circles to a degree unheard of in the mainstream.

The Native community in Toronto is not so much a community as a series of....circles... And the thing about the circle that I sort of run in—I wouldn't say it's part of a nation or community, so much as a certain class of Native people. I mean, probably those who, once they finish working, go home to a relatively stable environment. As opposed to a lot of our people, who are not so lucky. Toronto has a lot of people who are really in a bad place. But you know—I always feel welcome

with them. I mean, I can walk into Council Fire. It's a rough place, if you've ever been there. I can walk in there and sit down with a bunch of people—and sometimes there'll be some angry young man who won't like you because you've got dress shoes on, or something. But for the most part I feel...comfortable with them."

Another participant spoke of the economic benefits accruing from her white upbringing, and how it enabled her to protect herself from the more negative aspects of urban Native life:

I think I grew up with a lot of privilege. From being with white parents and...you know, access to education, access to lots of different opportunities. So I know how to protect myself. I take care of myself. I don't get involved in the politics, and that's how I always take care of myself. I don't live at the housing cooperative which I work at. I wouldn't live there for a million dollars, right? I don't need to listen to the gossip, I don't need all that stuff. I do my work, I go home, I have another life. And that's what's always been really important to me. So I can get involved as much as I want—and I can also remove myself."

The above perspectives encapsulate a major contradiction which many mixed-race urban Native people are negotiating. On the one hand, they are heavily involved in work which addresses the social problems of the community. On the other, the privileges of having an education, and a steady income (from those jobs) in many cases is used to remove themselves from the daily stresses of Native life—so they will not have to negotiate the devastated circumstances which, on a fundamental level, is still the lot of so many urban Native people in Toronto.

One individual talked about people who come to the city who are so intent on upward mobility for their children that they appear willing to jettison their children's access to cultural knowledge in the process.

"You know what pisses me off? These people from the reserves that put me down because I grew up off-reserve, and not in touch with my culture—they want their own children to go to university and become graduates and move to urban centres—to become me! That's what they want for their kids—but still, they put me down for who I am. And

then sometimes, I get the sense that they resent me. Like saying "who the hell do you think you are?" Because I'm already there—I have an education, and I'm comfortable in the middle class. And they want that for their kids."

This issue—the kind of goals the urban Native community ultimately wanted to aim for, and their implications—was discussed in depth by one participant:

"The worst case scenario for an urban setting is to have a permanent underclass of Native people who are anomic—they are not allowed into the mainstream, and they are estranged from their traditional selves. That's the worse case. One tendency which could challenge that is the emergence of an Aboriginal middle class, a middle class that is promoting cultural pride. But the problem is—are they promoting values which are really Aboriginal? We've got lots of artifacts. Everybody's got an Indian name, we've got the tikanagan in the corner and the beaver pelt on the wall—but you know, how much depth does that really have? Do we have the collective values anymore?"

I mean, class is the great cultural equaliser, you know. I can sit at my kitchen table, which is a middle-class kitchen table, its not altogether different from a middle-class kitchen table in Tokyo or Bombay, or my white neighbour. We're speaking some different languages, eating some different foods, but what do we aspire to? A bigger house, a bigger car, a better school for my kids, you know, these are the things that concern me. So we're not really making community because we've got some vested interest in maintaining a certain standard of living, which becomes a higher priority.

I think a lot of successful, middle-class Aboriginal people distance themselves from other Aboriginal people because there's a lot of problems in Indian country. I have had opportunities to take jobs in the north, and I've chosen not to, because I don't want my children to have to deal with a lot of the stresses that go on in northern communities. And I want them to be able to enjoy the kind of benefits that are available in Toronto.

In a sense we're doing what our parents did with us. The only difference is that our parents were closer to the hardships than we are. I mean, my parents were drinkers, and had no education, and all that shit. I wasn't middle-class growing up. But I've become middle-class now."

With this individual's words in mind, it appears that unless significant efforts are made by the Native middle class to address the implications of their own investment in class privilege, then the egalitarianism and collective values which have characterised many Native communities will continue to be the first things sacrificed by individuals when entering an urban environment, as the price of upward mobility. At the same time, in a community which is so devastated by dysfunction and poverty, really attempting to encourage collective values cannot be an individual issue—it is a structural problem which needs to be addressed organisationally, as well as personally. The need for co-operative income-generating projects which encourage individuals to think collectively, is one approach—there are probably many more.

15.5 SUMMARY:

This chapter has demonstrated that most of the participants, even those from backgrounds of considerable assimilation or who are very mixed-race, have taken some form of ownership of the issues which urban Native people face. As a rule, those who feel they are only “marginally” Native have tended to take smaller roles in the urban community (although in some respects this is gender based, with the heavily mixed-race women participants often being more aware of issues of power and entitlement than their male counterparts). Other individuals, who feel strongly that the urban Native community is *their* community, have taken on leadership roles.

Apart from their public life within the Native institutions in Toronto, however, the participants' private lives told another set of stories. On the one hand is the issue of the future of urban Native families in the face of continued intermarriage; on the other hand is the

issue of growing class differences and the changes which this often brings to the collective nature of traditional Native life.

While many individuals from families with more than one generation of being mixed-race and urban had successfully reintegrated themselves into an urban Native environment, they faced situations at home where they were often still negotiating denials of Nativeness from parents and siblings. In many cases, the weight of hegemonic definitions of Indianness had made it so difficult for them to identify as Native that by the time they felt clear about their Native identities they had already married non-Natives and raised fairly white-identified families. For these individuals, attempting to reclaim a Native identity within their families was heavily circumscribed by the fact that the next generation in their families was even more mixed-race and white-identified than they were, and that in this respect, their offspring might not continue to take part in the urban Native community that they had struggled so hard to adapt to.

On the other hand were the issues which those individuals whose immediate family were still highly Native-identified were struggling with around the implications of growing class privilege. In particular, certain individuals discussed the extent to which the collective nature of traditional Native societies does not fit with middle-class lifestyles which place a high premium on individual comfort, and the pressures which urban Native people face to jettison traditional values in struggles for upward mobility.

In some respects, then, it appears as if the issues which I discussed in Chapters One and Three, related to the concern of theorists such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1998:124-131) about the individualistic aspect of urban mixed-race Native identity, and the negative effects of intermarriage on Native identity, have some grounding in reality. The nature of urban life, where most work and home environments are

organized in ways which ignore the demands of family or community, and where there are few all-Native spaces, encourages a growing individualism which only concerted struggle can challenge. Meanwhile, it is extremely difficult to overcome the assimilatory pressures of white-dominated urban environments. Intermarriage, in such contexts, cannot help but increase the pressures to ignore, or at least downplay, Native-centric perspectives. And yet we can also see that the project of attempting to “bring some Indian back into the family” (as my mother used to refer to it) through intermarriage is also fraught with difficulties, for heavily mixed-race women in particular. These problems suggest that although urban Native environments are profoundly strengthened by their flexibility in matters of appearance and intermarriage, there is a limit to the extent to which families can intermarry and still remain Native families. It also suggests that cultural values have to be promoted, particularly as a way of counterbalancing the individualistic pressures which accompany upward mobility in the city. In the next chapter, I will explore the urban spirituality movement, and its role in strengthening urban Native identity.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TRADITIONAL SPIRITUALITY IN AN URBAN

CONTEXT

“Our spirituality isn't airy fairy stuff. It's a very practical thing. If you follow it, you'll have a good life. If you don't follow it, you're going to be whiny, you're going to hurt other people, and you're going to be hurt, you know? Because the nature of the universe is that if you do harm, you are going to be harmed back. That's just the nature of the universe. And whether somebody thinks that's true or not doesn't matter, that's how it is. That's to me what tradition is all about—it's very simple. And then of course there's all the incredible beauty of the crafts and the legends and the stories and the teachings, you know. And every year I learn something new about it. It's a very, very rich heritage. Because that's what we need to know. We also need to know our peoples' history—that we were virtually put into concentration camps—and we need to be able to show people how they can recover from those experiences. We're going to do our part to create something good to build ourselves back up. To me that is tradition too. That's how I see our struggle, so that we can have a life here. And I think that for us to give up even one little bit of it, is kind of like a betrayal of ourselves, you know.”

INTRODUCTION:

One issue which the participants repeatedly emphasized throughout this study was the centrality of traditional knowledge and behavior to Native cultural identity. During discussions about this issue, the participants called on a number of different sources of traditional knowledge. In the first part of this chapter, I will explore how the participants see traditional knowledge and spirituality, and its importance to them. In the second part of the chapter, I will discuss some of the issues which arose during these discussions around various aspects of urban traditionalism.

Before taking up these issues, however, I believe it is important to consider the context in which this discussion is taking place. The traditions of all nonwestern people, in institutions founded on a belief in the superiority of western rational thought, are easily dismissed as superstition, or trivialized as “colourful” archaic folklore. Furthermore, the validity of Native oral traditions continues to be negated in Canadian courts as part of the denial of Indigenous sovereignty¹. The very notion of academia as a neutral site where “pure knowledge” is pursued must be seen as part of the secular humanist tradition, which upholds the West as a seat of egalitarianism and human rights and which insists that knowledge must be secular and separated from the knower. Secular humanism, in general, has viewed the traditions of specifically tribal peoples, or of any people who do not observe a split between the knower and what is known, or between secular and spiritual life, as “dark knowledge”—as dangerously flawed, fundamentalist, and inherently “tribalist” (meaning partial, rather than universal, and opposed to egalitarianism).

A central aspect of the attack which the Western secular tradition continuously wages on “tribal” oral tradition (when it is acknowledged to exist as a valid body of thought at all) is the notion that such traditions (and indeed, the traditions of all non-white peoples) are *inherently* oppressive to women compared to the liberal attitudes in the West.

¹ One of the more notorious instances of this was during *Delgamuukw vs. The Queen*, where the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en Elders presented excerpts from over 10,000 years of oral history as evidence of their ownership of their 22,000 mile territory—only to have Justice McEachern rule in 1991 that none of this oral tradition was valid as “history” as compared to a century of so of occupation by the British crown who claimed the territory—that Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en civilizations “if they even qualify for that description, fall within a much lower, even primitive order, and that Aboriginal life in the territory prior to colonization was, at best, “nasty, brutish and short” (Monet and Skanu’u, 1992:188). This decision has recently been overturned; however, the reality remains that it is impossible to discuss Native traditions as if a sort of neutral terrain exists within academia.

Sherene Razack identifies how this gendered aspect of the colonial encounter has persisted since the earliest days of European colonialism, and that these colonial relations are constantly being re-created in newer “contemporary forms” to maintain white superiority in Canada and elsewhere in the West:

Today, newspaper descriptions of female genital mutilation (FGM) performed on African women, actual film footage of an FGM operation in progress playing throughout the day on CNN television network, and media reports of the brutalities of “Islamic” and Asian states towards women reinforce the notion of a barbaric South and, by contrast, a civilized North... Scholars play pivotal roles in sustaining these old colonial formulas...both feminist and non-feminist scholars have actively participated in reproducing the binary of the civilized and liberated Western woman and her oppressed Third World sister (Razack, 1998:6)

In this chapter, therefore, when I discuss the participants’ exploration of Native traditions, I ask that individuals be aware of their own biases, their own subject positions. As Cree Metis writer Kim Anderson notes, readers have a role in the way a text is read—they must read it openly, accepting its premises and listening to its arguments before coming to their opinions. Above all, they must resist the temptation to “claim” the text according to a different frame of reference than it is meant (Anderson, 1997:34-5).

Because of the problematic aspects of discussing Native traditions in contemporary academic settings, this chapter will not discuss *foundational* aspects of any of the Native traditions, or how they are practiced in rural settings. This section is primarily concerned with how mixed-race Native people take up traditions in urban settings. Socially “progressive” readers must also be prepared to recognize that sometimes Elders, no matter how much they seem to embody sexist or homophobic or otherwise oppressive attitudes within their teachings, nevertheless may have access, through their Indigenous traditions, to powerful

knowledge about the world, a knowledge and a power that must be recognized on its own terms, and that cannot be explained away by western logic.

16.1 THE MEANING OF “TRADITION” TO THE PARTICIPANTS:

For the individual who had grown up in a northern Saskatchewan Metis community, being traditional meant living off the land:

“I can say that I’m traditional coming from being raised by my grandparents, having them raise me in their traditional ways—a Metis way. But it’s not like, traditional with the sweetgrass, or other things. We were traditional in that we were isolated. There were not a lot of white people we were exposed to. We didn’t have electricity, or running water. In that way, it was like growing up the Native way, that’s the way I knew it—the Metis way. But the way I see it now, in Toronto, when people ask me am I traditional, it means a different thing. It’s like they’re asking me if I practice sobriety, do I go to powwows, do I used sweetgrass, do I follow the traditional medicines, and all this and that. This is what the urban Indians mean when they ask “are you traditional?”. And to me, in that way I’m not. But I am traditional in my own way. I grew up with trapping. So for me, I’ve seen skinning, I’ve seen meat smoked, fish smoked. I grew up with fish and traditional meats, and they passed all that on. And the uses of certain teas, and bear fat, that’s good for certain things. But it’s also the way I was raised, right? The language was passed on, the way of raising children—I grew up in an extended family, where children are never hit, you are taught by example. You don’t realise until you’re an adult, the values you’ve been raised with. My grandmother would teach me things. Like, if I did something bad, she would say “you shouldn’t do that—think about how that person’s feeling now”, right? So we were taught to put ourselves in the other person’s position, so that we would not do something to hurt somebody. And we were taught by example—they gave us verbal examples, that’s the way our morality was taught. So they taught me a lot of things, even though I didn’t realise it until I was an adult.”

One woman called on her memories of practical childhood teachings from the elders of her small east coast band, as well as her family’s long association with the land, for her sense of traditions and what was

important as a Native person, despite her own urbanisation and the assimilation she and her family had experienced:

"I didn't have any depth of knowledge. Living in an extended family was important—like in my early days, when the Elders were around and told people things. They taught you how to set the traps, that sort of thing. Practical things too, like putting them on a matchbook, so you'd remember where you set them, you know? My uncle used these terrible leghold traps, raccoon traps that clamp the legs. We used to set the traps, but he'd always have a book of matches, and we'd keep track of where the traps were by writing it down on the matchbook—so when you went out the next day you wouldn't be stepping on them. And then we used different roots. It's blurry now, in my mind, because there's nobody to talk to about it. For tonsillitis, we used the root of the skunk spruce. Now, today I probably couldn't figure out which was the skunk spruce. But you'd drink that black tea made from the root, and it tasted terrible. You had to gargle with it. But I did it. I was the only person who ever had her tonsils removed in our family, and that's probably because I didn't keep up with the gargling! My mother knew some of those things, and I guess I learned when I was young, so every once in awhile I get a snatch of it back.

The part I like about having Native roots, or whatever, its that—when I think back—we were here in the beginning. And it is the natural side, in our family. Like, one of my sisters is in court today, getting a divorce, and its been very traumatic for her. I was tempted to go out there, out west, to support her, being the mother figure in our family. But I couldn't go. So, what I said to her last night, and I don't mean a Christian spirituality here, its a Native spirituality—I said "spiritually, I will be there with you tomorrow!" I know that spiritually, when any one of us is ill, or that sort of thing, that the others of us are there, spiritually. And I think its more from the Native side than anything else. It's not that you're able to move outside your body, or anything like that, but I just think that you can focus. I don't think it's the same with the Christian religion. Like, I think that there's a powerfulness that comes with praying, but I don't think you can do the same thing, with Christianity. It's from my Native side. I don't understand a lot of it. But there's a natural association with the earth, to us—the earth, air, fire, and water.

There is something to it, the valuing of the land. I mean, we've fought for the land, when the town tried to take it away from us. And I remember my older brother saying "don't get too excited. We've had this land for two hundred years...and we're not going

anywhere". I mean you know, two hundred years—that's a lot of ancestors! I've never had visions, and I don't really feel the power, you know—some people really do feel the power from the earth. For me, its more that I gain comfort from it. I gain great comfort, sitting on the rocks in my community, watching the ocean, touching the ground."

Another woman described how she learned what she knows about Native traditions from teachings she has received both from urban Elders in Toronto, and at ceremonies in the United States and Mexico:

"I think what's important for Native identity is the way of life, and the medicines, and the ceremonies, and the connection with the Creator, and everything that the Creator has given to Aboriginal people. I believe that that has not been lost, especially with the Aboriginal people that are still living in the Amazon. Their traditions are still very much alive and practiced. And everything that they do—the whole family structure is still there, the medicine structure. I think that we have something to learn from them, and they also have something to learn from us. What we've gone through already in the last 500 years—that's what they're faced with—the bulldozing, the mining and everything that's getting so close to them. There is an exchange, going on there, in Mexico and Brazil. I don't know what the prophecies say, but I know that we're physically living in a way that's much higher than I can grasp. I guess the most...authentic experience, for me, has been in ceremonies with my brothers and sisters in Mexico. And their medicine people have done ceremonies over here. I don't know that I would have gotten this far, in life, if I hadn't gone through the things that I went through in their ceremonies. I went through some major breakthroughs. I've gone through stuff that therapy wouldn't have touched in some of those ceremonies.

Being traditional, for me it means being....kind. It means respect. I think it means helping and caring....working hard, working really hard. I really believe in visiting and spending time together, and...no matter where I am, my home, wherever I am at the time. I love having people over. I think that's something that was always practiced and always done. You didn't visit for a day, you visited for a month.

The loneliness is so...deep, and I think its been my generation, and my mother's generation, and my grandmother's generation, and further back. There's a lot of work to be done, getting past the loneliness, and working and sharing together again."

One individual who grew up urban, off-reserve and alienated from his traditions, who had re-entered Native life after following an extremely self-destructive path, follows the teachings of the traditional elders of the Six Nations Confederacy:

"I'm very, very lucky, because you know, over the past ten years, I've been travelling with the elders, and doing ceremonies with them, having traditional counsel and learning what's important to our nations, and our communities. There's a lot of things I was taught. The elders want us to know the most important thing—that the Earth is our mother, that the Creator gave us a lot of gifts, and that our Creator gave us the sacred journey. They want us to eat traditional foods, they don't want us to destroy ourselves on sugar, they don't want us to smoke, they don't want us to drink. They want us to do our ceremonies, use the medicines, and understand the clans. They don't want us to swear, or hang around stupid places. They want us to speak for the earth, because as you know, the earth is in trouble.

Learning your culture will help you. Knowing how to call onto our Creator, how to ask our Creator for guidance, and how to give thanks—that's also important. If you don't know how to give thanks, then you don't know how to be Native. You have to know how to give thanks to all creation, to really know where your strength is, and to really feel good about being on the earth."

A woman who has primarily followed the Ojibway Midewewin teachings described how she lives a traditional life:

"For me, being traditional means that I have a ceremonial life—that I have a lodge that I go to, that I have my name, and my clan, my colours....that I carry a drum...that I carry eagle feathers...and that I have responsibilities that are based on that. And so the whole issue around sobriety was originally a matter of scheduling around the ceremonial stuff. But now, my sobriety is specifically because of the responsibilities that I carry as a traditional person. Last night, for example, when somebody called me who was sick, I had to be able to just stop what I was doing, pray, put down tobacco and sing for them."

For this woman, and others, choosing to follow a traditional life was a way of reclaiming what had been taken from them, through their having been adopted, or taught little about their heritage.

One individual described the tremendous difficulty of following traditions while living in a busy, contemporary middle-class urban world:

For me—you can cut your hair, put on a suit, you know, sell insurance, and look completely blond and blue-eyed—and still be traditional. It took me awhile to realise that fact. I do try and understand and respect traditional teachings. I've been trying to understand and learn about them for more than ten years now, with sweat lodges, and that. Its been something that has given me so much strength.

When you're working for a government that has a very British kind of...post-industrial approach to things—it's not very compatible with traditional values. I remember being very upset with a manager in the government who was really very rigid. Everything had to be in a box—and I was wanting to be honest, and saying "there's this constant conflict going on, this can't be done this way, these communities won't respond this way". And he was really inflaming a lot of people out there, making them angry. I talked to an elder about it, who's been doing this kind of thing for 35 years—and the one thing he said to me was "you have to be kind to this man". That advice really helped me. It helped me to see that—well, he's not going to come around to our way of doing things, necessarily—but the only way he's going to respect us, and give us some distance, is if I'm kind.

I think, especially for modern people, being traditional is an internal state, more than anything. It's not a perfect state—it's an ability to be able to slow down a bit and see things very clearly and carefully. To try and respect everything that is in my path, and try and see things as clearly as I possibly can. And to have some sense of trust developed, or an emotional relationship developed to whatever I am encountering in my environment, before I really open my mouth. To me that's what it means to have traditional values. I mean, there's obviously traditional economies and traditional ways of living—and those are disappearing for a lot of people. But the values, I think, are still there."

For one woman, the traditions provided her with balance in her work in the Native community. She saw the traditions as being vital to the task of rebuilding damaged communities, as well. For another, learning about the traditions has been a long process of rediscovering suppressed family history, as well as developing herself:

"We have medicine in our family. We have it in a number of different ways. My grandma always went out gathering medicines—

she used to have a whole storehouse—people used to come to her and get medicines from time to time. But then, over the years, my grandmother really got into drinking. There was a lot of different pain, I guess, in her life. And she died in her early fifties, with a stroke; a lot of which was because of drinking. There was so much there, and so much that was lost.

So for me, I always felt an ambition to link with spiritual people, and to learn more in that area, because I felt that was where I needed to develop myself as a human being, to get to know myself more. What I find, in all these years, is that myself, and other people that I know, who have had more of an urban experience, have been searching, in a way, you could say, for a lot of that identity. And that's one of the places where you go—you go to the elders' conferences, and you get exposed to some of that stuff. And you eventually start to assess a little bit more, and then it becomes part of your own identity. I think being traditional means Pimaatsewin—practising a good spiritual way, on a daily basis. To me, that's really my philosophy now, and has been for the past few years.”

One woman described how in school she had constantly faced pressure to “explain” traditional perspectives within academia—to constantly translate them, and render them acceptable to, Western academic theory. She resisted this not only because of the collision of disparate worldviews, but because of the power imbalance between a dominant western academic tradition which constantly claims the authority to define “the other”, and the need for Native peoples’ perspectives on traditional practices to be accepted *on their own terms*:

“I consider myself to be traditional. You know, I’m on a path, where I’m trying to learn more about those ways that we come from, in particular, the ways that we can develop our spirituality. The spiritual tradition is something that stands in opposition, first of all, to Christianity, I guess. It’s also about who I am working with in the community. If you stuck me in a community, am I going to go to the person who conducts ceremonies, or am I going to visit the individual who wanted to have the use of sweetgrass banned in the community centre? Am I going to be the one showing up with the palm cross at the funeral, or the one with the tobacco tie? So in that sense, I am traditional.

It isn't just something that we're making up for political reasons, or adopting just because it sounds good, or is romantic, or whatever. It's something that means something to us, right? Its like when we were talking about those profound emotions coming up—they come from somewhere. That's where the traditions are based. Its not based in trying to construct something. But in the academic world, tradition is something constructed—a vision and a paradigm made by drawing on those pieces of the past that we scattered along the way, that is particularly Native, and it isn't necessarily traceable far back. Some of it we can, and some of it we can't. Like I think something like sweetgrass, which is a traditional person's tool, is one of those things that was scattered along the way, and we picked it up, to use it as part of our vision for re-claiming a different paradigm, a different world view. That's what tradition is, in the academic sense....All this stuff that I'm grappling with—if I talk to the Native women that are advising me about this, they'll just say 'well why is this something that you have to think about? Why is it important?'"

One individual discussed his difficulties with a “traditional” spirituality that included Catholicism:

“The traditional Metis spirituality is fairly orthodox Catholicism. And actually, I was really happy to hear that when Yvan Dumont brought his contingent to the Constitutional talks, he brought a Catholic priest as his elder. I was happy because he was being true to his culture. He didn't pretend to have more of a traditional Native spirituality than he did—he brought, unabashedly and without apology, a Catholic priest. I thought that was the right thing to do. Now, we can criticise to death the Church—I mean, I was raised more by Jesuits than anybody else, so I have my own stories. But you know, he was true to his historical context, and that's the tradition. But I'm not living that tradition, I'm not going to orthodox Catholicism. I go to sweats. I guess I'm pursuing my grandfathers—or grandmothers, I guess, in my case, through Aboriginal spirituality.

To me, the tradition was rural, and I'm urban. I'm the first generation off the farm, off the subsistence farm, and where you went to church. It's impossible to live that life. But in the Native traditions, I see myself as a visitor. Because that's maybe part of this whole question of legitimacy, right? The tradition I grew up was strongly Catholic. The tradition of my Indian grandmothers before that? I don't know what it was. What were the Dakota doing in 1842? Were they in sweat lodges? Probably—I don't know.”

For a handful of individuals, their sense of themselves as Native people was not premised on learning about Native traditions. In general, they demonstrated great respect for traditional people, but did not think that this was the route they would follow in life.

Two women demonstrated considerable impatience with the emphasis on “traditions” which they had encountered in the Toronto Native community. They saw the teachings as restrictive, too rigidly ritual-bound, and denying of their own life experiences. A third woman felt ambivalent, because of the uncritical manner in which “traditions” are taken up in many settings.

For one of the women, the defensive and judgmental attitudes which urban Indians demonstrated around certain rituals was difficult to negotiate, compared to her experiences of living a traditional life on the land in northern Saskatchewan:

“I don't know where urban Indians get their ideas about what it means to be Indian. Because, I walk around, and I don't see Indians around—unless I go to the Native centre. So I'm wondering where they get the idea that this is the way you do things, right? There's a few people that judge me really harshly. And I was so offended. Like here they are—they've never lived in their community, they don't know the language, and they're going to judge me? I mean, I've lived in the city for fifteen years, but you can't erase how you were raised. Like, I was totally raised in traditional ways, right? They're so insecure. These people, they go through anything that they can to try and grasp something to identify them. But for me I don't have to go through this. I know who I am inside. I know how I was raised. And I think I'm so lucky. It's sad when urban Natives don't know the struggles of the north, and don't care. They think they're doing so much over here—but it doesn't mean anything to the north. I can do all the traditional singing I want here, or anything else, but that doesn't affect my home at all. It means nothing to the north.”

Another woman spoke to the same issue—the slavish manner in which some individuals who have grown up alienated from their culture take up

urban traditionalism, and the manner in which newcomers are sometimes treated within these environments:

"I've always said 'there's nothing worse than a born again Indian'. You know, they just embrace this stuff, and that's all there is to life. And I really believe that if, you know, I just try my best to live a good life—that's all I can hope for, at any given time. I'm just trying my best. So that's to try to not be judgmental against others who are on their paths. I don't have any traditional teacher or anything like that. Like a lot of people go to a teacher, but, you know, I've picked up different things along the way. And I listen to my mother! She's my biggest teacher. I don't think there should be any secrets in the Native community around tradition. You know, "you shouldn't know this, because....". Nobody owns those teachings or practices—they're for everybody. So I have a real hard time with people who act like that. And I also have a really hard time with people who are perceived in the community as elders or who are elders, who show a real impatience towards people who don't know. They yell, or get sarcastic, when people make a mistake. That really, really makes me angry when that happens—and I see it so often".

For one of the participants, the emphasis on strict adherence to rituals and a rather dogmatic sense of what constituted "the Indian way" (always constructed as a homogeneous purist experience) denied both her personal experience of growing up alienated from her heritage, and her desire to express a Native identity which was multi-faceted and complex:

"I'm quite agnostic, you know what I mean? And I feel it is false. Like I won't go and sit in on those sacraments. Neither do I feel like I want to partake in a sweat lodge or a women's ceremony. Because I feel the same—I really feel there's something lost to me. I don't have the comfort of believing in my Catholic religion anymore. And this isn't gonna do it for me either. Its not my way, and its not going to BE my way. Yes—we can't lose sight of the past. I know we have to hang on to that traditional thing. But don't let it become a goddamned yoke".

This woman challenged the historical accuracy of notions of "the Indian way" as an ancient, timeless universal experience. Another participant concurred with this perspective, and spoke of the trend in certain Native

circles to romanticize and essentialize much of what is considered “traditional” Native society:

“I have a real problem, in my academic program anyway. A lot of Native people that come in tend to be very essentialist. ‘Native people are like this, white people are like this, these are Native values, these are non-Native values’. Or they say things like ‘A woman would never get beaten in a real Native community’, or things like that. There’s this sort of idyllic picture.”

One of the male participants openly disparaged what he referred to as the contemporary “pan-Indian” spirituality movement with its emphasis on “tradition” as false and irrelevant:

“I don’t take those kind of labels seriously. I think that there’s just so much variation, so many different things going on that—you know, to try and put a label on someone and say “are you traditional?”—I think it’s ridiculous. I could say I’m traditional—that I’m Roman Catholic, and the Roman Catholic church has a lot of tradition. I know lots of traditional Indians who like to sit down and chat and drink a beer. And lots of traditional Scotsmen who like to do the same. You know, I think, unfortunately, it’s kind of a creation of the “pan-Indian” movement—this creation of the “traditional Indian”. All this pan-Indian dogmatic crap.

Like, the most traditional Indians I knew were old guys, who had short hair, wore a hat all the time, shoes and pants and their shirt buttoned all the way up to the top. Very, I guess, white in their mannerisms and their dress, and the kind of things that they thought were important, I guess. But what made them traditional is the fact that they WERE traditional. That they were functioning, real members of their community, of their families. The language, the culture, the knowledge—everything was there. These people had never read a book about how to be a traditional Indian. No one ever came to them and gave a seminar on how to be a traditional Indian. They didn’t go and take a course, or attend a summer experiential learning process to learn how to be a traditional Indian...”

Others engaged more gently with the phenomenon of urban-based “pan-Indian” spirituality, viewing the conscious choices made by individuals to embrace and recreate certain aspects of teachings from the past as an

inevitable process in the rebirth of a people's culture and identity—mistakes and all:

"I think that people think that culture is static. Even traditional people, sometimes say that. "It's always been done this way". No, sorry, it hasn't. There's this elaborate sacralising sometimes, of various rituals, to make them special. We can take the most mundane things handed down, and we can make them into something great, when really, they were nothing.

So what constitutes our culture? Art Solomon used to say that if we're gonna pick up everything that we come across, we won't be able to move much, will we? We'll be all heavy and loaded down with so many things, that we won't know what to do. We listen to everybody, but we only take what we need. But what do we carry from the past to the future? What's important? I think communities have to be able to decide that for themselves. It all goes back to the concept of nationhood, again."

Another individual concurred with this perspective, that the rebirth of Aboriginal nations requires a "reinvention" of culture and tradition. He challenged the contemporary tendency to romanticise pre-contact society, calling for a more realistic, deeper appreciation of Native identity and culture:

"A lot of what we're doing in the contemporary reality is reinventing culture, eh? And it might have a strong similarity to traditional culture, it might not. I don't know. I know we're often quick to stand up and say "the tradition says that we never abused". Well, I don't buy that for a minute! Everybody abused! You know—human nature is such that the human being almost universally is capable of.... I'll believe that there wasn't the kind of abuse that goes on now—but let's not pretend that it never happened at all. So we're reinventing culture, we're reinventing tradition."

The issue of abuse in Native communities, and attitudes to women surfaced in the ambivalence which some of the women raised about traditionalism. They noted the uncritical manner which certain individuals, both men and women, adopted towards the notions of "women's traditional roles," attempting to adhere to what they saw as pre-

contact concepts of gender relations without considering either the validity of their ideas of pre-contact life, or the implications for contemporary women of being told that they must adhere to certain rules which may not be appropriate to maintain in the highly sexist and racist environment which we live in today.

Several women challenged the exclusion of menstruating women, from a number of different perspectives. The woman below notes that in her Metis traditions, it was impossible for menstruating women to ever stop being involved in everyday activities, since so much depended on their labour:

“When I went into my first circle, I didn’t know that you couldn’t smudge if you had your period, you know, with sweetgrass. Or that you had to step out of the circle, stuff like that. That’s not our culture, the Metis. I went to a naming ceremony one time, and that’s the first time I realised that I couldn’t go into the tent if I had my period. And I go ‘why not? It’s a natural thing’. But, like, they consider it too powerful, like the medicine men could get sick. Here, there’s a lot of things that I find out that I didn’t grow up with. Even the word they use—like I’m saying to myself ‘what does this mean, being ‘on your moon’?’ And I kind of figured it was your period, but I hadn’t heard it. It’s too much. My grandmother would never have heard about this stuff, right? And for a Metis woman with her period, we can do anything if we’re on our period. I mean, we weren’t ever able to stop, because what would happen, to the family, if we couldn’t do the things we had to do?”

At the same time, some of the women also were interested in revitalising certain ceremonial practices, such as the menstrual lodge, rather than adhering to the current practice of simply excluding the women. They saw the menstrual lodge as being about acknowledging the power of women to give life.

“When I talk to my Mom about that stuff, one of the things that came out, which blew me away, is that her grandmother, that’s my great-grandmother—she was raised strictly with the lodge—the old menstrual lodge. And they strictly adhered to that. They were still living in teepees at the time. And the way she was raised was that all

the woman who were on their moon totally left the community for four days. It didn't matter what was going on—they had four days to spend in the lodge. When my grandmother was very young, for the first few years, she was learning about the ceremonies. But after that, they had to move around too much, so they seemed to have left that practice behind. I've always asked Elders that I've met here in the last several years—do any of them do the moon lodge ceremony? And I haven't found anyone who does that. So I do it on my own. I've had no one to teach me—I've gone out and done my own thing. And I'm always thinking, this is really odd, because first of all, it doesn't feel right that I'm by myself. I would feel better if I was doing this with other women. And also I would like to be able to do this in a place where it would be our place to do this. Because I've just gone out to conservation areas, and found a little place and sheltered myself off a bit, and hoped nobody came along, and stuff like that. And somehow, I want to reinstate some of those kinds of things.”

The potential for homophobia, and the need for women to challenge where “traditionalism” often situates them was raised by another individual:

“You know, there's a real movement down in the States—I don't know about here—but a lot of the Native women are going to Sun Dance and sweats on their moon time. They say ‘its misogynous to take women out of these things when they're menstruating’. There's one woman that I know, from down in Arizona, she holds sweats and Sun Dances. And she lets women who are on their time go into the sweat. She says ‘I don't believe that political bullshit, that's all it is’. She always causes a big stir, wherever she goes. I think its great, because it gets people thinking. Was it always like this? Its like two-spirited people. How many elders have I heard over the years saying ‘no, there weren't any two-spirited people here before contact’. And you look into it, and realize “Well there were—and that's your own homophobia talking”.

One of the adoptees also raised the issue of homophobia in the Native community, and her need to be vigilant, to ensure that in embracing traditional teachings she was not subscribing to her own marginalization:

“I not only had to come back to the Native community as a Native person, but I also had to come back as a two-spirited person. I have definitely experienced homophobia. I've gone out to Six Nations and

I've been told by one of the traditional women teachers that she was going to get flak for teaching me because I was two-spirited. So I've had that gambit. But I've had mostly positive experiences because, first of all, I'm out, but I'm not, like, overtly out. People know me first through the work that I'm capable of doing, before they know that I'm a two-spirited person—that's been my experience. But I've also looked for role models. And I've found them. I figure that if they can make it, I'll make it. You know, I found out recently that Peter O'Chiese has a teaching—one of the oldest living Indians in Canada—a teaching about two-spirited people. So I align myself with those people, and that keeps me strong, and not so paranoid.

But you know, when I was up in Thunder Bay, I had like a little rainbow on my car, and I would back my car up at the Indian Friendship Centre, because of the homophobia up there. So Toronto's much more accepting. I feel like I'm really well-connected, and doing all the work that I'm capable of—and you bet there's homophobia, but you know it doesn't really affect me here in Toronto as much as it affected me when I lived in Thunder Bay.

I make a real point, that if I go to an elder, or if I've chosen somebody to be my teacher, I'll come out to them right off the bat—because that's who I am. Otherwise they'll start doing those traditional teachings about the women's role and the men's role, right? Which is fine—I wanted to learn that, but that's not my role. That's not who I am and that's not my identity. I find out where they're at...and then they have to go away and start dealing with their homophobia. And then they either come back, or they don't. Or they're already well-advanced enough to accept me for who I am.”

16.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRIT NAMES:

The participants demonstrated a wide range of responses around the issue of spirit names. For a number of people, particularly those who had only entered the Native community as adults, or who were non-status and living off-territory, their spirit name provided them with a sense of validation—a sign that they truly were Native people, as well as a sense of validation in the Native community.

“To me, my spirit name is a helper to me, a teacher, and it gives me a sense of recognition, that the spirits recognise me. And it does mean something to me to be able to sit and say that in Ojibway—you know, that little address where you say, you know, “Booshoo”—and to be

able to say my clan—it's a feeling around identification, socially. And in the sense of my identity, it makes me able to say "you have to recognise me as a Native women, you can't fight that! You can't argue with that, because I have my spirit name." Then there's this other sense, of "yeah, that's my spirit, and that's who I have been for all time. And it reminds me of my responsibilities. Because sometimes when I don't feel good, somebody calls me by my spirit name, which is a very positive name, and it reminds me that there's this other part of me which is really positive, which is something that I carry."

For others, the spirit name helped them reclaim pieces of a damaged self, or spoke to the journeys they had made in life. Some individuals spoke of how their name had provided them with a distinct direction at crucial points in their lives.

"Having a spirit name makes me feel more connected to the spirit world, as a Native woman. Just having that, being acknowledged by the four directions, being recognised for who I am as a spiritual being, has given me back a sense of my dignity. Your spirit name also talks about who you are as a person, all around. And that name is given to you by observations that the person who's giving you the name makes of you. It's not just handed out, like something out of a bag. It's given to you based on what they see, and what best fits you. The elder that named me saw certain qualities in me, and named me after those qualities. So there's real significance to these names. And they are names you can also grow into. They tell you who you can become. "

Three individuals had names given to them from their home community, or from family members. As one woman related, in her culture being given those names came with a high level of responsibility.

"I have three names from my community. One that I was born with, and the second name, which means Cherished One, and the third name is the name of a very important figure from the past. Having those names gives me a sense of responsibility...I guess in my culture there is some sort of a belief in reincarnation, and that names are partially given on that level...of expectation...So in a sense, it's a bit of a pressure, to have been given these names, and to, at this stage anyway, not be fulfilling them in a traditional sense, for sure. In another sense, they are something that I'm very proud of, something that's very personal, at this stage anyway, a source of pride. And it's interesting that I'm actually considering changing my last name. I

really hate my last name. I think its just the sound of it, but it's also that the name really has no cultural significance, it was given to members of our community because white people couldn't pronounce the names. I've been told that my second name would be an appropriate last name for our family, so I'm considering changing my name. Now that I'm realizing that I may not marry somebody with a wonderful last name, so maybe I should just take the situation into my own hands. So yeah, the names are definitely important, but they also come with that sense of responsibility. So they are a little bit scary in that sense."

Another individual had been given his name by his great-grandmother; however, he had had to look outside the community for validation of its significance, to white people who had studied old Ojibway communities and spoke about the significance of naming in a historical context. It was only at that point that he really believed in its value.

For a third individual, having a Haudenosaunee name was part of a process of bringing traditions back in her family:

My Mom has an Indian name. The way it works with the Iroquois people is that your names are passed down through your family. Like, if my Mom was to die, I would maybe name a daughter her name. That's how it was passed down. But now, what's happened, since people have lost the names, because of Christianity and residential school—so now we have to go to the elders to try and give us a name. And names, they're a very important part of life. Because if somebody else took your name, like in your village, or even in another village, you'd have to do a ceremony. Like you'd have to go bring a basket and put it on your porch and say "I claim the name, and this basket you can take in exchange for it, because I'm taking back my name. So they'd have to rename the child that they'd given your name to. I could go to whoever I wanted to, right, but I would prefer to try to get an actual Haudenosaunee name, preferably a Mohawk name, and try to keep that, and start up those traditions that have been lost, so that I would have a Mohawk name that my family could maybe pass on later on."

Two individuals were uncomfortable with the naming process going on in some parts of the urban community. One felt that certain individuals might be handing out names in ways that possibly trivialised the whole

process. The other individual, who had planned to visit an elder simply for healing purposes, was unprepared for the manner in which a name was just “handed” to him the moment he asked for it. He worried because he did not understand the process well, and he did not want to engage in “spiritual shopping”—in gaining some kind of thrill from dabbling in traditions he did not know enough about. In both cases, the individuals were clear that they respected the notion of having a spirit name—they simply wondered if some of the individuals who gave out spirit names might not be pandering to the spiritual neediness of the more rootless individuals in the urban community who needed a sense of connection to some aspect of Native heritage, and were seeking it solely through a name. As if to highlight these individuals’ doubts, one woman reported that her naming ceremony seemed false, that the individual who named her appeared to have given another individual the exact same information.

Finally, a few individuals had no interest in the concept of having a spirit name—indeed, they considered the whole concept as being laced with hegemonic notions of what constituted Indianness—and treated it accordingly.

Throughout the broad range of responses of the participants, it is obvious that traditional spiritual practices, including the practice of having a spirit name, play a strong role in the lives of the participants. In the next section, I will discuss some of the issues which their words raised.

16.3 TRADITIONALISM IN URBAN COMMUNITIES:

As we have seen in the previous section, the pursuit of Native traditions and spirituality appears to be playing a significant role in enabling the participants to develop and maintain an Aboriginal identity, in the urban setting of Toronto where Native people are so marginalized as

to be virtually invisible in the mainstream. From those who feel strongly that the traditions they participate in should be those that their immediate ancestors actually practiced—be it Catholicism, the Menstrual lodge, or the Sun Dance—to others, who partake of local ceremonies different from their own because they are a long way from their own land base and there is no other way in this city to practice Native spirituality—in some form or another, revitalization and practice of traditions was important to the majority of participants. At the same time, the above accounts raise a number of issues, around the importance (and indeed, the validity) of traditionalism in the urban Native community, and how “tradition” is being applied, by whom and to whom.

A few individuals raised concerns about the kind of real grounding in Aboriginal culture which urban traditional teachings were actually providing. Those individuals who were intent on pursuing the actual traditions that their grandparents and great-grandparents had followed were of this mind, tending to want to keep their spirituality as grounded in lived (or historical lived) cultural reality as possible. They strongly felt that Native spirituality had to remain rooted in the lived experiences of a people. Others appeared to have little concern about this—they simply trusted in the elders they encountered, and tended to follow whatever they were taught. There was quite obviously a class line here—in general, the participants with a university education, especially those with post-graduate degrees, tended to have subjected the notion of traditionalism to a much more intense scrutiny than those who had only a high school education or less. In some respects, this is a function of the nature of western academia, which dissects and analyses in order to understand. In other respects, it is indicative of the chronic “low intensity warfare” against nonwestern knowledge which each university-educated participant had had to negotiate within university. Finally, the fact that university tends

to provide individuals with a more accurate language with which to discuss identity issues obviously enabled the individuals with higher education to discuss issues of tradition in greater detail.

One of my own concerns, within the urban traditional movement, has been precisely the relevance of some aspects of an urban, and for the most part Ojibway set of cultural practices, for Native people from other Indigenous nations residing in Toronto. With this in mind, I frequently asked individuals who were not of Ojibway heritage how relevant they found it to have been given a clan by an Ojibway elder². When I attempted to ask different individuals this question however, few took up the issue as relevant to them. Most believed that the elder who had named them, no matter what their Indigenous nation, had managed to access spiritually what their actual lineage was within their own culture, because it was something that they carried inside them today, not only as part of their nation's past history somewhere else. They therefore believed that the elder had secured for them some aspect of their own nation's collective identity, in addition to providing them with personal spiritual guidance. At stake here is a clash of worldviews—between a fairly linear sense of historicity, and a more flexible view of how the past and the present

² My reason for this was that I had been taught by a Mi'kmaq elder that in the centuries-long struggle against invasion and domination, Mi'kmaq clans had been lost. It seemed valuable for me, as an off-territory individual of Mi'kmaq heritage, to respect and to honour that fact—that the Mi'kmaq nation had survived as a distinct nation 250 years after being militarily defeated and occupied by the British, even at the cost of having our clan system die out. To ignore that, and to personally seek out a clan from an Ojibway elder seemed to devalue both the notion of what a clan was—in the sense of it being a very real organization of lineage—and my own Nation's extreme feat of survival. And yet, going through the process of searching for a spirit name and clan had a seductive appeal to me as a non-status and off-territory person—particularly in settings where every other person in a circle would give their spirit name and their clan, and I would be left with only my English name and no clan or community to identify with. There is an implied division, in such a circumstance, between the personal spiritual growth that a spirit name offers and *collective* cultural survival, which demands a remembrance of and an honouring of, a particular Nation's history of resistance to genocide.

interrelate—as well as the need for the participants (the author included) to maintain a coherent narrative of identity.

One of the participants, however, spoke of his sense that urban traditional spirituality is so highly oriented to the needs of the individual that it leaves little space for focusing on collective identity:

“The defining element of Anishnabe religion is that it is a personal, intimate connection with the earth, with the spirits, you know. There were no priests, there were no churches...Different families believed different things, different families formed different rituals. Like, it was something that was family. I mean, it is a personal and intimate connection that you have—but the reason you have that connection, and the reason you want that connection, is not for yourself, it’s for your family. It’s for all the others, all the relations. Which is something very different from the predominant Indian “religions” that you experience in an urban environment now, which are, you know, based on “healing ourselves and....” you know, all these things “Oh...my energy level is down, and I have to strengthen it....”. Which on one level is fine—but the focus unfortunately, is all about the individual.”

16.3.1 Urban Traditionalism and the Indigenous Nations:

“I don’t know where urban Indians get their ideas about what it means to be Indian.”

When exploring different attitudes towards what constituted “traditions” among the participants, a schism was immediately obvious, between those who were raised in Native communities and those whose families had been urban for more than one generation. Reserve-based or northern participants were more focused on the role which land-based living—hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering berries and medicines—played in the maintenance of their traditions, as opposed to the more spiritual aspects of traditionalism which a number of urban participants were involved in. This is only to be expected, given that for urban Native people, access to the land is usually restricted to walking in a park, observing the flourishing of weeds in an alley, or cultivating a small garden. In such contexts, it is inevitable that the bulk of cultural practices

related to living on the land might seem irrelevant to urban Indians. And I am also mindful here not to draw the kind of extreme distinctions between the “spiritual” and the “physical” which are often observed in Western culture.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the strength of Indigenous spirituality lies precisely in its rootedness to the physical world we live in, as compared with religions such as Christianity, which are rooted in a body of thought largely divorced from any real connection to the living world. For urban Native people, an index of their alienation from the land might well be expressed in the extent to which an abstract spirituality, increasingly divorced from the physical world, becomes their mode of traditional cultural activity.

Two of the more rural-based participants (as well as a number of other reserve-based Indians outside the interview space), voiced the opinion that urban Indians are adhering slavishly to highly ritual-bound spiritual practices because they have nothing else to ground them as Native people. From this perspective, urban traditionalism has little to connect it with land-based traditions. Disregarding the condescension which one participant demonstrated towards urban-based people (but taking seriously another woman’s experience of the rigidity which urban Native people demonstrate around notions of the traditional), it is important to consider these comments carefully. For many urban Native people, elders are providing them with precisely the information they need to keep themselves strong as individuals in an urban setting. If the purpose of urban ceremonies is to strengthen the Native identity of the individual, and nurture their spirit in an environment which is extremely hostile to Native cultural survival, the elders are taking this up admirably. The question is, however, whether urban Native people, with this kind of exposure to a traditional life, are learning what they need to

know to uphold and further the cultural traditions of their own specific nations—which at present is the only real way out of the gridlock of holding to a generic, hegemonically-constructed “Indian” identity. One participant expressed this succinctly:

“If what we’re saying makes you Indian is a connection to the community, and a connection to family, and a connection to place—which is what I see as Indian—then the notion of there being an all-encompassing, continent-wide, Indian religion that I have to conform to if I’m going to be an Indian is a ludicrous thing—it’s ridiculous. Especially with the people that are touting these pan-Indian ideas. Maybe it is an urban thing that’s gone back to the reserve. Because it’s on the reserve now, too. A large part of the rhetoric is “down with religion, down with the Church, down with the Roman Catholic church. You know, it’s the Church that’s done this to us, it’s Christianity.” But then they’re dogmatic—“this is the way you do it”. And, oh, “you didn’t do it that way—Oh, you’ve gotta go and smudge yourself and...” What’s the difference between doing that and saying fifty hail Marys? It’s a very strange concept to me.

I see some elements in there that may be good. I’m not suggesting that there was never a connection of information or sharing between various Native groups. I think that’s a positive thing. And I see it as being of benefit to some people. In the sense that maybe somebody is Indian but doesn’t have those connections. Maybe that’s what’s going to give them the strength, and the sense of who they are. But I think urban traditionalism should be used as a stepping stone. It will give you the strength to realise who you are. But—use that to find out where you’re from. Use that, you know, to find out who you REALLY are.”

With the above comments in mind, the relative lack of emphasis in most urban settings towards relearning Indigenous languages becomes a serious issue. While several of the participants had sporadically attended language classes, most of them seemed to settle for learning a few phrases, generally to identify themselves in traditional terms—and then leave it go. Their approach to traditionalism in this sense, is highly individualistic—they tend to adopt only the trappings that can help them to create an “Indian” identity for themselves, while ignoring the much

more daunting (but necessary) task of attempting to relearn their language—a life-long task, but one which, as any Native language speaker will attest to—is vital to any understanding of what it means to be a member of an Indigenous nation (rather than simply an “Indian”). In this respect, the comments of reserve-based participants—that urban spirituality appears to have little to do with the traditionalism of land-based communities—appears to have some relevance, insofar as the land-based communities currently are carrying the cultural life of the nation, particularly in maintaining use of the language.

It is important to realize, however, that the lack of attention paid to language in urban settings, given the present context where the leadership on many reserves and in urban settings do not often collaborate, is not surprising. There needs to be a certain critical mass of effort devoted to reviving language use—the presence of many elders who are fluent in the language, the availability of other individuals who are learning the language to practice with, and the will to see this as a priority. Urban communities, where large numbers of people do not speak the language, are not well-suited to this task—they lack the human and cultural resources which many of the land-based communities are capable of accessing, to revive language use. The fact remains, however, that if urban and reserve communities were working in unison towards the goals of regenerating the languages of specific territories, then urban-based Native people of whatever Nation could at least have the option of beginning to learn a Native language—even if it was not their own—through organized access to reserve settings to practice speaking the language, for example. This would involve, however, a new way of conceptualizing nationhood, which encompassed both reserve and urban realities as distinct and different, but related.

The second issue which seemed to come up among participants with increasing frequency was how women, as well as gays and lesbians, were situated within the traditions. What also was at stake, here, was the issue of authenticity and the role of change in traditional thought.

16.3.2 Gender and Sexuality in Traditional Thought:

...as women we must be circumspect in our recall of tradition. We must ask ourselves whether and to what extent tradition is liberating to us as women. We must ask ourselves wherein lies (lie) our source(s) of empowerment. We know enough about human history that we cannot assume that all Aboriginal traditions universally respected and honoured women. (And is “respect” and “honour” all that we can ask for?)...culture is not immutable, and tradition cannot be expected to be always of value or relevant in our times. As Native women we are faced with very difficult and painful choices, but nonetheless, we are challenged to change, create and embrace “traditions” consistent with contemporary and international human rights standards (Laroque, 1996:14).

Several of the female participants voiced their uneasiness at the manner in which “women’s roles” were being interpreted in the Native community—the most common expression of these roles being the manner of excluding menstruating women from ceremonies, and the way in which women were being told they could not play the big drum. Others commented on the homophobia they had sometimes encountered, couched in the language of “before the white man, homosexuality did not exist”. While none of the participants were disabled, it might be worth examining at some point how physical disability is taken up in traditional contexts. At present, however, it should be noted that because of the extreme levels of ill health in most Native communities—especially the rampant levels of diabetes and the resulting impairments of mobility and function—individuals with disabilities are not as easily pushed to

the margins, as in mainstream society. Further exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis.

It is significant that in the women's accounts, they could not recall any instances of proactive spaces for women being made in Native traditional circles—which would be an expected part of Native life, given the frequent statements made about the sacredness of women. Instead, the participants who had received teachings about “women's roles” saw the teachings as for the most part consisting of a package of restrictions dictating what they should wear, how they should sit, what music they could play, and what they could not do when they were menstruating. They noted that each of these restrictions was accompanied by comments that “women are more powerful than men”, or an almost ritual intonation about “honouring our women”. On the other hand, a number of these women (myself included) have found that Native traditions have provided them with a sense of empowerment in the society at large—a sense of dignity, that they are something entirely different from the degraded, contemptible images of women, particularly Native women, which circulate in the mainstream society. It is in the sense of providing an alternative space for empowerment in the white society that the traditions appear to work for Native women. The issues which the participants raised had more to do with how Native traditions were positioning them—along with gays and lesbians—in *Native* society.

Perhaps because urban Native people spend most of their lives in white-dominated contexts, where they need traditional life to empower them in the face of the dominant society, a relatively large number of the female participants appeared quite accepting of the manner in which traditions are being interpreted in ways which make them marginal within their societies. Yet challenges are often still raised, generally in small, women-only settings, and only where a high level of trust has been

generated, about punitive or belittling attitudes to women's *authority* in so-called "traditional" circles. It is the author's experience that in urban settings, particularly for mixed-race Native women who are highly vulnerable to being dismissed through having their Nativeness challenged, it is very difficult for Native women to openly resist punitive or restricting practices based on "tradition".

Numerous Native women writers (Smith, 1998; Anderson, 1997; Allen, 1986; Baskin, 1982) have challenged patriarchal interpretations of "traditional" roles of women, noting the manner in which in many traditional Native societies, women exercised considerable autonomy and indeed, authority within their communities:

Patriarchy is now firmly entrenched within most Native societies, although nonpatriarchal worldviews on gender relations still persist. Consequently women (like former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Wilma Mankiller) who strive for political leadership are accused, ironically, of not being traditional. Rayna Green (Cherokee) tells the story of an Indian conference on development at which a man gave a speech condemning the breakdown of traditional Indian values. He attributed this to the increasing number of Native women leaving home and assuming leadership positions. An elderly woman responded, "You know, I'm very interested in speech about the old days—your old days must have been really different from our old days, because in our old days, women were at the seat of power...In our old days, women were at the center of knowledge and understanding about leadership, about distribution of power, about the distribution of goods and about the allotments of roles and power...Let's talk about the old days; I say "Bring on the old days.'" (Green, 1990:63, quoted in Smith, 1998:185-6).

The issue of how colonialism reworks culture into increasingly patriarchal frameworks was taken up by Ania Loomba, who writes:

"Colonialism" is not just something that happens from outside a country or a people, not just something that operates without the collusion of forces inside...a version of it can be duplicated from within (Loomba, 1998:12).

Colonialism thrives by working at the cracks and fissures in a colonized society—by exploiting existing divisions along the lines of gender and class (depending on which societies are being discussed), and transforming them and reworking them so that they are refigured into western-style problems (in response to which the West, from a posture of superiority, then proposes its western-style solutions).

Cree academic Madeleine Dion Stout (1994), commenting on the rampant levels of wife abuse in many Native communities, has noted that in many contemporary communities, Native women are systematically exploited and abused by Native men even as rhetoric is intoned about women being the “backbone of the Indian Nation”. She writes about the necessity for women to look at notions of the “traditional” with clear eyes, and to take structural issues into account when considering the position of women. She also insists that traditionalists must become more comfortable with the notion of critical thinking:

I argue that there has been no significant movement to a new, functional pattern based on holistic Aboriginal traditions because women have been beaten out of the development equation. Women are not given space to sensitize men to their own dear and Indigenous ways...The Aboriginal conception of human relations must recognize the importance of critical social and cultural thought. It is important to recognize and name oppression that is laid on cultural lines. For instance, is the new class of young, educated male leaders hostile to the Aboriginal women’s cause? By the same token, are traditionalists true protagonists for us? (Dion Stout, 1994:10)

Resistance to challenging the place of women within the traditions, or to challenging homophobia is not only part of a heritage of patriarchy inherited from colonization—on an everyday basis it is also part of a long-standing distrust in Native communities about the nature of change and its effect on communities. And yet it is obvious that Native traditions are not simply being handed down in some sort of pure, pre-

contact state. As Kim Anderson notes, “tradition”, like Native identity itself, is not static:

When Native people call on the past to define themselves, they run the risk of romanticizing or essentializing their heritage. I recognize the risk of claiming a quintessential Native culture based on the past, and contend that many Native people are clear that “tradition” is something that is constantly changing (Anderson, 1997:51).

What is involved for Native people, however, when speaking of “traditions” are issues of ownership of their own past, in the context of having their land occupied by an immensely powerful enemy, and given a history where white academic discourse has constantly sought to define Native realities. Native people, like all colonized peoples, have a profound need—and are entirely entitled—to interpret their own past however they choose, regardless of how the dominant culture frames it. A primary concern for Native people is how that past is to be interpreted to ensure cultural continuity. As Andrea Smith notes, the suspiciousness and resistance to change which is characteristic of Native American communities has its roots in the damaging transitions forced upon Native cultures by colonization. The question nowadays in Native communities, particularly urban Native communities, is always “how much change can a community accommodate and still be traditional”—or in a sense, still be Native? Smith quotes Judith Plaskow, in exploring this question:

“At what point in the reinterpretation of Judaism,” asks Judith Plaskow, “does the Jewish tradition cease being Jewish and become something else?”. Her answer: “Such anxieties misunderstand the nature of fundamental religious change, which is both slower and less manipulable than the question of limits assumes...The Jews of the past, drawing on the religious forms available to them, created and recreated a living Judaism, reshaping tradition in ways consonant with their needs. What determined the “Jewishness” of their formulations was not a set of

predetermined criteria, but the “workability” of such formulations for the Jewish people: the capacity of the stories and laws and liturgy to adapt to new conditions, to make sense and provide meaning, to offer the possibility of a whole new life.” (Plaskow, 1990, p. xvi, xvii, quoted in Smith, 1998:186).

This fear of change appears to be at the heart of many of the issues currently dividing Native communities.

The challenge, Smith concludes, is to find a way to welcome change that may be helpful, but to root it firmly within tradition. William S. Penn concurs with Smith that change is not only inevitable, it might also be considered to be desirable:

To maintain [an unchanged way of being in the world] the Pueblo would have to rigidly fix the definition of “tradition” and adhere to it without the change that occurs simply by ceremonies being performed by different dancers, different singers, different elders or storytellers or leaders. Without change, things die...it is not...that change means that things become less—less meaningful, less “traditional”, less powerful. [Change should not be judged] as reductive, or vitiatory, but only as necessary or perhaps inevitable, or even desirable... (Penn, 1997:91-2).

He notes that it is particularly important for Native people to reject notions of “tradition” as being part of a more “authentic” past, to refuse to memorialize memorized images, stories and meanings of the past as if they were dead—because the dominant culture is highly invested in memorializing “dead Indians” and denying the existence of viable *living* Native cultures (Penn, 1997:107).

16.4 SUMMARY:

Traditionalism in the urban Native community, then, appears to be playing a central role, as the glue which maintains a cohesive sense of Aboriginal identity for people who at every turn face hegemonic images of Indianness that negate their own identity. The two concerns which participants engaged with are the issues of how women, and gays and lesbians, are positioned within urban traditionalism, and the tension between spirituality being used to promote individual empowerment, and the need for an emphasis on the collective nature of Indigenous cultural values. It is, however, difficult to even talk about these issues if individuals are made to feel at every turn that the traditions are sacrosanct, that their application in urban settings is carved in stone, and that to challenge them is to seriously threaten the existence of Native culture. It is therefore vital that individuals understand how keeping a culture alive involves not preserving it, but living it—including struggling with it, and challenging it.

With respect to the manner in which woman, as well as gays and lesbians, are positioned within traditionalist discourse, it might be valuable to think of urban traditionalism as a form of nation-building effort, with all the potential problems of nationalist discourses. As Rob Nixon points out, the idea of nationhood is usually projected through a female idiom, while at the same time, the subjects of nationalism are male (Nixon, 1995:158). “Womanhood” as sacred, as expressing the heartbeat of the nation or the backbone of the community, or as those who, if their hearts are on the ground signify that their nation is defeated—all are ways of expressing a form of Native nationalism, in which the roles of women, paradoxically, are to be more and more tightly constrained in the interests of “the survival of our nations”. Because this kind of nation-building project is generally modeled on patriarchal

values, the very existence of gays and lesbians in such contexts is either denied or pathologized.

The problem when urban traditionalism becomes a vehicle for nationalist sentiments is that Native traditions are admirably suited for expressing a tremendous double standard about women. The traditions of many land-based cultures accord a great importance to the roles of women as creators of life, which stands at sharp counterdistinction to the masculinism and profoundly anti-life values of the dominant culture. The real sense of empowerment which many women receive from urban traditionalism, and the manner in which many men who are attempting to follow the traditions develop a very real respect for women, are both linked to the manner in which these traditions affirm the power of women. It is the nationalist sentiments, which so often tend to exclude women from the body politic, which can, when carried within urban traditionalism, render its treatment of women extremely contradictory.

The other issue, the tension within urban spirituality between the need to empower individuals devastated by histories of abuse, and the need to teach specific cultural values, particularly in an urban context where a highly individualistic society surrounds us, cannot be resolved without in some way breaking down contemporary divisions between urban Native people and on-reserve communities where at least remnants of collective values still exist. It is undoubtedly urban Native people who need the traditions the most—not because “its all they have to keep them Indian”—but because unlike reserve-based Indians, urban Native people have to live side by side in intimate relations with the oppressor every day. Because of the highly specific circumstances which urban Native people face in the cities, it is likely that urban spirituality will continue to be modified to fit contemporary conditions, in order to keep them viable in urban settings. It is in this respect that we can

expect that urban traditionalism *will* vary significantly from the face of traditionalism in Native communities—and that this should not be seen as a sign that urban traditionalism is not “real traditionalism”—anymore than urban Indians should be dismissed as not being “real Indians”. But this also suggests that urban communities need to develop connections to on-reserve communities where traditional spirituality is practiced, to keep introducing an emphasis on collective values. The somewhat daunting task ahead, however, is to try and understand how links can be forged between urban and land-based communities *across* these different understandings (and experiences) of culture, tradition and spirituality, to strengthen our nations as a whole.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MIXED-RACE URBAN NATIVE PEOPLE

AND THE REBUILDING OF INDIGENOUS NATIONS

“The organisations representing on-reserve Native people—they don’t see that we have a place in rebuilding our nations at all. In fact, their perception is that people like us are dangerous, that our very presence is one more step towards assimilation. I remember a friend of mine talking about those statistics which focus on how the majority of Native people are urban—her take on those kind of statistics is to totally deny them. She’s not saying that those people aren’t in the cities, but she denies that they are urban. She’s lived and worked in Toronto for 25 years now, but she says “I’m not a resident of Toronto! I’m not an urban Indian,” There’s this fear that urbanity is sucking away the life from the homeland of the nation, right? So the attitude is that any talk about urban people shouldn’t be encouraged or fostered or generated. But we can’t go back, right? Those of us who don’t have status, or band membership—we can’t all just marry some Cree guy and go and live on a reserve and don the feathers. For most of the people that live here—its not going to happen for us. So what do we do? I think we have to rebuild that part of the nation that’s going to be living in the cities. And we have to rebuild it with a vision of how can we recapture the values and the traditions that are going to sustain us and be a source of health for everybody.”

INTRODUCTION:

This thesis has focused on the broad range of issues which have shaped the identities of urban mixed-race Native people. One emphasis has been descriptive, focusing on the family histories of the participants, the continual presence of spaces of silence within these narratives, and the efforts of the participants to create a community for themselves in an urban environment, through building an infrastructure of Native organizations, and relying on the urban spirituality movement to help

them maintain a strong sense of their identities as Native people. Another focus of the thesis, however, has been devoted to analysis, trying to understand how a legacy of legal restrictions and racial apartheid have positioned the participants—in a sense *creating* them as urban mixed-race Native people. Over and over, these analytical efforts to understand the intricate web of historical and contemporary forces shaping urban mixed-race Native identity keep returning to two central issues—urbanity, and government regulation of Indianness—which in one way or another continuously impact on the participants' lives. These issues reinforce and, in a sense, are mutually constitutive of one another.

Government regulation of Native identity has created a complex array of categories of Indianness which have been reflected in the very distinct sets of experiences recounted to me by participants who are status Indians (with “full” or “partial” status), Bill C-31 Indians (with or without band membership), non-status Indians, or the Metis. On an even deeper level, however, are the differences in perspectives between those who grew up on reserve and came to the city as adults, and those who grew up urban. Meanwhile, as my explorations have demonstrated, it is primarily government regulation of Indianness—in conjunction with other governmental policies, such as residential schooling and the removal of Native children from their families through Children's Aid—which are responsible for *creating* a large community of urban Native people, many of whom are mixed-race—in the first place.

Throughout their interviews, a number of the participants indicated that in general, urban Native people need stronger connections to reserve communities—the so-called “homelands” of Native culture in Canada. They pointed to the stronger sense of an autonomous Native identity which on-reserve Native people demonstrate, as well as the fact that some reserves represent sites where at least some traditional values

have been retained. Most importantly, however, is the fact that language use, while declining on many reserves, is still in evidence, while very few urban Native people speak their Indigenous language at all. It is obvious, then, that many urban Native people feel that they are in some ways diminished by their relative distance from reserve communities.

On the other hand, a few of the participants pointed out that on-reserve Native people may also have something to gain from stronger connections with urban Native people. When urban Native people appropriate urban spaces as Native spaces, the sovereignty movement from the reserves is inevitably strengthened. In more concrete ways, we can also see that the heterogeneity of urban Native experience might provide a valuable injection of diversity into reserve environments. In particular, the manner in which Christianity in all its multiple denominations, and especially the newer fundamentalist strains, continues to dominate the life of many reserves, dividing people and alienating them from their own traditions, suggests that the influence of urban people, who take for granted the more secular spaces of urban life, might be helpful in counterbalancing the influence of Christianity in reserve communities.

Kenn Richard (Metis) has pointed out that with the growing urbanification of Aboriginal Canada, urban communities cannot continue for much longer to rely on the reserves to “maintain the culture” for them. From this perspective, the growing numbers of urban Native people relative to reserve-based populations could mean that urban Native peoples within a few years might be bearing the brunt of cultural preservation. According to Richard, the most immediate priority should be a focus on developing vehicles for language regeneration and a collective urban landbase (Richard, 1994). In this respect, it appears that urban Native people, who lack a “critical mass” of language speakers

and who are therefore somewhat deadlocked in their attempts to teach the languages in urban settings, need to approach First Nations organizations at an institutional level, to find some way of resource-sharing that would maintain and further the use of Indigenous languages.

In many ways, it appears crucial that urban and on-reserve Native people begin to address common problems. On a deeper level, it is also important to consider the ways in which urban Native people, particularly those who are mixed-race, might be involved in struggles for self-determination. How can the sovereignty goals of contemporary First Nations, and the desires and aspirations of urban individuals who consider themselves to be members of Indigenous nations “in the abstract”, be brought together? In the first part of this chapter, I want to explore the participants’ thoughts on what roles urban mixed-race Native people might play in the rebuilding of their Indigenous nations. The second part of this chapter will focus, in a preliminary manner, on the forms of nation-building which might subvert the history of divisions imposed on Native people by government regulation of Indianness, and which could make urban and on-reserve alliances possible.

17.1 MIXED-RACE URBAN PEOPLE AND THE FIRST NATIONS:

A number of individuals spoke about their understanding of what urban mixed-race Native people are currently doing to strengthen Aboriginal presence within the cities. They referenced the daily grind of urban life which newcomers to the cities face, and saw their roles as working with such individuals towards strengthening them, so they could return to their communities as empowered individuals:

“There’s so many needs, eh? So much work that needs to be done. Right now, my interest is in women’s teachings around fertility. I’d really like to see our own knowledge and approaches come back. The

knowledge that Native women have developed, around fertility, childbirth and natural birth control is something that needs to be recovered and celebrated. And then, for women who are pregnant, we really need to celebrate that, and work on ways of supporting her in carrying and nurturing that new life. That's what I'm looking at now."

"I don't see our roles as any different in an urban setting or in an Indian community, or up in the north. I've made a very clear commitment to be part of the healing of our nation. And that's going to happen in all different ways and shapes and forms, whether its in the city, whether its in the bush, whether its in an isolated community. My role, as a two spirited Anishnabe Kwe is to continue my own healing so I can help other people to heal. That will ultimately heal our communities and our families. There are so many tools for doing that. Like the outward bound program for Native people, where you take urban people into the bush, and help them reconnect with the land, that's one tool. There's the treatment centres, the health and education efforts, getting our languages into the schools, addressing family violence...there's just so many different areas that our people are working on. That's our role. There is no other role for us, but to continue to educate people, and break down stereotypes, to do cross-cultural education, and to never give up. We have to work from where we are, with what we've been given."

"If urban Native people still have their beliefs, and are still proud of their heritage, then I think they could be very influential in uplifting the whole Native community. I am helping now, in my own little way. I firmly believe that the urban Native is the one that's going to have to help the reserve Native. The reserve Native can get that education if they want—but urban Native people are more likely to get into places of learning, and more apt to question the whole situation, saying, 'why do we have people living in these kinds of conditions? Why do we have Metis people and First Nations people so separate? Why do we have such a thing as status and non-status Indians? Let's try to bring the whole system together and work together'. Urban Native people could be a very powerful lobby group, if that happened. Because if you take the figures, the different figures that have been bandied around here for status Indians, the non-status and the Metis—I've found that in the past ten years more people are starting to come out of

the closet and say they have Native blood in them, right? So if you start getting these people together, they could be powerful. This is what I consider to be the urban Native people—whether they are mixed blood or ‘pure Native’, whatever term you want to use—the ones that say ‘hey, these things could happen.’ These people can help a lot. Like my children—they are doing their part. I think the answer lies there—that if you could get the urban and the reserve Native together, in some sort of way, we could be very powerful. Even by doing things like tutoring, it helps people to gain confidence in themselves and their culture. Then they can start thinking differently. They can go back to the reserve and say ‘hey, look, you’ve got to do something differently here’. I think the urban Native is the answer.”

Some people saw themselves playing roles as mediators or facilitators, able to use the strengths of their greater access to and comfort with white bureaucratic environments to push for greater First Nations presence within these institutions.

“Speaking as a half-breed, I think that if somebody is comfortable in an urban environment, and to some extent comfortable in working with bureaucracies, as well as with Native communities, there’s a real potential for cultural bridging. Being an in-between sort of person, physically, I think I have a role to play, not in the sense of assimilation, but in the opposite direction—pressuring the white society to come to terms with Native realities, and breaking down the institutional boundaries which Native people face in the white society. I definitely think that in my own small career aspirations, teaching Native literature in university settings, I could be helpful to Native students, as well as educating white students about Native realities. I’m capable of surviving in a university setting, you know, with the bureaucracy and the crap, and I think there’s a need for people like us in the universities. I’ve heard a lot of Native people who’ve been through the system saying ‘They’re never gonna listen to us. I’m not putting up with that crap so I’m working in a Native environment’. Somebody like myself, who might not fit that well in a fully Native environment, might be helpful in promoting understanding of Native perspectives within the white society. Any situation that you’re dealing with, there are aspects that you can take from your own experiences and your environment, that you have access to, that can be beneficial. So I think that urban Natives, and half-breed people in general can be very useful in their own ways. I think that on a personal level a lot can be achieved if that goal is kept in mind.”

One individual, however, challenged this perspective, maintaining more of a grassroots focus on how change comes about:

“There’s supposed to be this thing that we can use our education to then be a help in dealing with the political processes and legal system. I’m not sure how much that really works. Because within that system, as soon as you identify that you’re not playing their game, you become disempowered pretty quickly anyway, no matter what your colour is. I don’t know...there’s a lot of things that I just don’t buy about it, that you’re gonna be the bridge between two cultures, or that, you know, you’re gonna have these powerful white friends, or something, that are going to come and save the day. I don’t know—these, to me, are kinds of myths that I can’t really believe.”

One individual spoke of the cities as naturally complementing the reserves, and noted that historically, Native bands had always relied on their urban and/or white-trained individuals as mediators in achieving their goals:

“I think urban Native people are very critical, because in this society we live in, the power lies in urban settings. If you look at where people have been who have asserted the rights of people in the rural settings, they’ve been in the city. The AFN wouldn’t have much clout if it was up in Tuktoyuktuk, would it? Now, I think there’s a danger in that, because we can get too far away from who we’re serving. We need to be careful of that. And we also need to push governments to come to where we are. All the meetings shouldn’t be in Ottawa, some of them should be on the reserves. Some of them should be at Nishnawbe Homes, or in Wigwamen, different places where our people live in the cities. So that people who are in government see us as we are, not just at the conference table. If you look at what’s happened in the past, our movements have tended to go into the urban setting, to defend our homelands. Even the people who’d graduated from those residential schools—in the old days, the old chiefs used those people to write letters and challenge things.”

Several people referred to how an understanding of the power dynamics in the larger society was easier to see from the cities. One individual, for example, spoke of the manner in which reserve communities tend to ignore the presence of people of colour, and act as if

Canada still consisted only of Native people and white people. She noted that one role of urban Native people must be to ensure that newer immigrant agendas did not marginalize those of Native people.

"We have to establish a presence in the cities. I mean, all the incoming waves of ethnic groups—they are revisioning Canada in a way that ignores Native people even more than the whites—or the older whites—did, because we're so much more invisible nowadays. That's where I see the danger, that's why I critique the immigrant groups that I see who are playing a part in making us invisible, by ignoring us. I don't know what is so difficult to understand about this. It does not bode well for coalition-building. I thought that was the thing that we were supposed to be about these days, across all areas of oppression. I guess that's my critique. People of colour choose that, when they refuse to acknowledge Native presence. From our perspectives, all they are is another wave of immigrants, out to get what they can from this place without any concern for whose land it is—if they ignore Native people."

One individual, on the other hand, noted that because urban Native people are far more accustomed to "difference", in the sense of cultural diversity among non-Natives, that they would be more effective in introducing heterogeneous ways of thinking, which reserves sorely needed. Urban Native people are also positioned to address forms of alliances between peoples of colour and Aboriginal peoples:

"Maybe what one of our roles could be, or should be, I think, is to help set up a new paradigm of what rights are, and what entitlement is, a whole new way of looking at relationships. I think there's ways of integrating different cultures internally, and I think that can help. If people have been able to integrate different cultures internally, they're much more likely to be able to offer constructive solutions. As opposed to having only integrated the white culture in a negative way, or having only encountered Native culture through a system of misinformation or propaganda in schools. Urban mixed-race people might be able to contribute in that way."

One individual felt that urban mixed-race Native people, as individuals who have had to viscerally wrestle with dominant culture images of Indianness, might have a handle on challenging stereotypes

about what “Indianness” is which do not often get challenged on reserves. This individual also saw urban Native people as vital to creating the cities as Native spaces where reserve people might feel empowered:

“The first thing that pops into my head is that because we’ve been outside of the communities, we might have a better handle on identifying what really is Native. So when people that have been habituated to think that poverty is Native—and so your macaroni soup and your poor diet is Native—we can maybe clear that up. Or you know, all these kinds of things that reserve people tend to think is really Native—there’s a lot about poverty in it, and lack of education. We can maybe try to sort that out, because we’ve had to do that for ourselves. Another thing we can do is demonstrate how Nativeness is transferable, that we can carry it everywhere. Maybe we can make the cities a bit more safe for anybody to come here? For me, wherever I’m standing is Native land. If I gather with you here, then this is a Native apartment. We can make city spaces into Native spaces, and in that way make the cities a bit safer for people coming in from the reserves. So that coming to the city doesn’t mean that you lose who you are.”

Another participant pointed out that in a sense, urban Aboriginal people are already engaging in this process of creating Native spaces in the city which reserve people can utilize when they come here, and that as a result of this, considerable interaction is already happening between urban centres and nearby reserves:

“A lot of the stuff that’s working really progressively is happening in the cities. People come from the reserves to Toronto to go to drum class, and stuff like that, and then they bring those things back to their communities. The kind of progress that we’re making is already being taken back to the reserves. And that brings a breath of fresh air to some of the communities where the politics are so bad, where people are being really oppressed by certain powerful families that dominate the community, so there’s no ability to, for instance, challenge the Indian Act, or really be critical about it. The cities can provide some space, for reserve people to try and envision different alternatives”.

Several individuals spoke to the increasingly importance which strong urban Aboriginal communities will be playing in the future:

“Urban Indians might also be the cutting edge of moving on to whatever god-forsaken place we are heading to, here. You know—the technology, and the restructuring of Canadian society. We've got to get some economic and political strength in these places.”

Other individuals spoke of how crucial urban Native people will be to Native survival in the future:

“There has to be an urban community, because....let face it, we're living in the 21st century. There's gonna be a migration to the cities, and what kind of places are they going to be for Native people? So its a very important role. We need this community so we can still practice teachings, so we can still learn about ourselves in urban settings. Otherwise, we'll be just what the government intended us to be—scattered. With nothing.”

One individual cautioned that the urban Native community, while it has taken strong first steps in creating a viable urban culture, it is not ultimately sustainable unless a considerable investment in language teaching and acquiring some sort of urban land base become priorities:

“The foundation of Aboriginal culture is language. Language maintenance has to be our top priority. Thoughts don't form language, language forms thoughts. And I've heard it enough from bilingual Indian people who say “I think in Indian” Well, if that's the case, then those of us who are English speakers are thinking pretty mainstream, eh? So....I'm a little nervous there. I know there's Ojibway classes. But you know what? People go and they learn a few words, some animal names, how to introduce themselves and their clan—it's not day to day at all. We have to do something about language. And we have to find some kind of land base, to conduct ourselves, and start living more closely together, so we'll have that day to day relations that Aboriginal culture depends upon.”

This individual pointed out that reserves are plagued with the same problems which urban communities have—the fact that those who are trained to acquire power and therefore exercise the leadership are often those who are the most removed from rural traditional Native culture:

“Those reserves that are doing quite well, places like Six Nations—they're the ones that have a lot more say in directing policy than

Attawapiskat ever can, or Davis Inlet, or anywhere where you have the people living a much more traditional, land-based life. Its totally ironic, that those people who are most estranged from culture seem to be those that have most impact on furthering Aboriginal agendas off-reserve as well. And that's a little scary. I mean—in a sense I'm one of those people! I've made a point of learning about where I come from, and about First Nations issues and culture, you know—all those things that I didn't get as a child. I've certainly tried to follow a spiritual path. But not everybody does. And so a lot of these people who are estranged from their backgrounds end up getting into positions of authority. I don't think you get Indian responses from those people—you just get good strategic responses, in working the system. Is that Indian? Does that do something in the long run to maintain Aboriginal Canada? Maybe—or maybe not. But it has to be looked at. You can't take these things for granted. It's a little scary, the way that those who are most estranged are most influential...But then, the beautiful thing about Aboriginal Canada today is it can't be packaged very neatly. You know, it's all negotiable, and I think that's partially its strength.”

Another individual spoke to this issue, suggesting that Native communities, urban and on-reserve, had to explore their own complicity in colonial processes—how their desires for mainstream living are hamstringing their efforts at cultural regeneration:

“Even though we're in Southern Ontario, in the city—if we were on a reserve in Southern Ontario, I would say that some of the same pressures exist. The urbanisation of reserves is happening. So how do we deal with that? And is it really just about mainstream pressures coming in from the outside? I think we have to recognise the ways in which we welcome those mainstream ways, too. We buy into them. We have to recognise that.”

Coming to the heart of the problem, one individual pointed out that reserve-based people need to stop thinking of their tiny “postage stamp” bits of land as their entire nation—and that until Indigenous sovereignty is conceived in larger and more inclusive terms, the divisions between Native people cannot help but multiply.

“There is so much need for positive thinking, and ways of helping people to think beyond their little postage stamp piece of land as their whole identity as a nation. To me, that’s number one”.

Another individual pointed out that Native people as a whole had to reconceptualize what is meant by “nationhood”, to provide a broad diversity of approaches to rebuilding our nations:

“I think First Nations have to take over their own memberships, entirely—and do it in a way that the membership is comfortable with, and that basically speaks for its members. Now does that mean that some people will be shut out? Probably. But does that mean that they cannot come back in through some other means? I think that we have to rethink this whole thing. How can we adopt people? How can we welcome people back into our nation that are not blood related, through adoption? How can we anticipate problems that will arise, and that will come to our door? The whole thing that is really important is cultural integrity. And how do we maintain our culture, our history? This whole question has huge political, social, and economic ramifications. The whole understanding of nationhood, today in the latter part of the twentieth century is something that really needs to be thought out carefully.

For me, personally, I believe the Metis have to have a really broad vision of who we are as a people, to encompass people who now identify as Native but who will be losing their status in the next generation. When that happens, who will safeguard their rights and their values, and provide a venue where their voices can be heard? Now obviously for some people, they’re gonna come out of the shadows and connect with their mother nation, whether it be two, three, or four generations ago, rather than to the Metis nation. But then, the First Nations have to find places to welcome those people, too. The concept of nation where you can only be a member of one nation is really outmoded in today’s world. I think that we have to do some talking about our whole understanding of nationhood. I think that there has to be a principled way of dealing with this issue, that’s based on our rights. Because if it’s based on anything else, we will not survive. And our rights are very simple. They are based on some very basic needs. So if we can come to certain agreements about those things, then we can look forward to a long and prosperous future.

One individual felt that the contemporary generation had not managed to overcome the divisions and weaknesses created by colonial

regimes; however, he had hopes that the next generation would be much stronger and see their way clearer.

“My feeling is that nation rebuilding has to come from a very strong grounding in what I think of as a Native value system—and applying it, and respecting it. Having something to offer to other communities and other peoples other than just ‘can we have our money now’. I don’t see it happening in my generation—but maybe in the next generation. It’s not like I’m an old person, you know. But I don’t see it happening from people in our age group—maybe from our kids who are being born now. I’ve just seen too much. Politically and relationship-wise, there’s still too much damage and corruption and pain. I’d like to think that we would be able to, increasingly, bring the good things into the way we think and live and work—and begin to share that in how we relate to other nations, in a city like Toronto. But I haven’t seen any projects that have lasted more than a few months or years. I mean, you build something up, and the good stuff is there, but something happens. There’s a lot of dysfunctional management. The whole agenda is driven by government, and they divide people with money. You guys get this much, and you guys get this much, and....we’ll see how you do, and then we’ll carve it up differently. I don’t see it happening in this generation very much, but maybe, it’s starting to happen, where we’ll be able to articulate Aboriginal values. So that we can approach the problems that are facing us and say ‘well, no, we don’t agree that we should just be evaluated on your terms. We have certain needs and distinct values that we feel could be addressed in the services we develop. This is how we want to do it’”.

17.2 RECONCEPTUALIZING INDIGENOUS NATIONHOOD:

While the participants have contributed a considerable level of clarification towards the subject of urban mixed-race people and nation-rebuilding, most were stymied by the fundamental impasse which the federal government has created—the presence, across Canada, of over 600 tiny, almost landless individual entities known as the First Nations, whose affiliations are organised according to the treaties and the *Indian Act*. These scattered communities, occupying only fragments of their original landbase, exist alongside an ever-growing body of urban, dispossessed individuals with no landbase at all, whose ties to their communities of

origin have been weakened, and in some cases obscured. This growing body of urban Native people, instead of having some mode of working from their own strengths towards common goals with the First Nations, are shut out of formal sovereignty processes, and instead placed in the role of being in direct competition with reserve communities for federal dollars in the interests of their own separate survival. In this section, I will conclude this study by briefly looking at ancient political systems which Native communities are attempting to revive, and how urban mixed-race Native people might be able to find a place in such nation-building efforts.

17.2.1 Reviving the old Confederacies:

Gerald Alfred has suggested that nationalist efforts being made by communities such as Kahnawake derive their power because of the existence of a traditional institutional framework, the Iroquois Confederacy—albeit in modified contemporary form—which has provided the Iroquois communities with an alternative framework for nation-building which has powerful cultural and spiritual resonances. Alfred asserts that other Native communities in Canada have remained fixed at what he terms a “latent nationalism” phase, because they have lacked viable political alternatives to the settler-state framework in which they exist as individual communities, affiliated only through territorial organizations which mirror the logic of the *Indian Act* (Alfred, 1995: 184-185). While others may dispute Alfred’s assertions, the fact remains that reviving the political confederacies which existed at the time of colonization—as well as creating new ones as a response to specific conditions created *by* colonization—is probably the most effective means for Native communities to overcome many of the weaknesses imposed by the *Indian Act* system. With respect to urban Native people, it also represents one of the only possible means by which truly effective political alliances can be created between on-reserve and off-reserve communities,

in that the ancient confederacies are built on older ways of understanding Native identity which preceded the *Indian Act* system and the maze of divisions between Native peoples which it has created. The old confederacies, many of which have been maintained in an almost-dormant state until recently, are also the repository of historical, cultural and spiritual practices, providing forms of continuity to peoples whose pasts have been, effectively, stolen by colonisation.

The growing movement of east coast Native peoples who are beginning to accept the authority of the Wabanaki Confederacy¹, for example, which has been underway for several years, has already resulted in renewed sovereignty assertions, particularly around harvesting². Other formerly powerful confederacies, such as the Blackfoot Confederacy, have begun to meet to discuss reunifying the former confederacy member governments in southern Alberta and the United States, and are, in a preliminary manner, asserting that Treaty Seven should not be considered valid because of the lack of representation of member governments during the signing (McKinley,

¹ The Wabanaki Confederacy, comprising the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Abenaki peoples in Canada, and the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot peoples in the United States, have in recent years been having annual gatherings, where, among other issues, they focus on the problem of U.S./Canada border crossings, a critical issue for Wabanaki people as their membership spans the border. Together with the Wampagnoag, Pennacook, Wappinger, Powhattan, Nanticoki and Leanape Confederacies (Boyd, 1998:6) which between them represent the thirteen surviving Indigenous nations and "tribes" along the Eastern seaboard, they have asserted their sovereignty over the entire Maritime and New England regions of Canada and the United States (Micmac-Maliseet Nations News, 1998:3). These confederacies, which all predate European colonization, were responsible for the almost continuous warfare which the British faced in one region or another for a century prior to 1750. It was this continuous warfare which was instrumental in forcing the British crown to ultimately recognize a Nation to Nation relationship with the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

² In July, 1998, for example, the hereditary chief of Gespegawaq, one of the seven regions traditionally governed by the Mi'kmaq Grand Council, a member government of the Wabanaki Confederacy, asserted their rights to log so-called "crown" land, resulting in a direct confrontation with the band council of Listuguj, whose chief, Ronald Jacques, refuses to recognize the authority of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council (Dow, 1998:1).

1998b:1). Other groupings of Anishinabek peoples, such as the Three Fires Confederacy, are also being revived.

The difference between the ancient confederacies and current nationhood assertions through provincial territorial organizations, such as the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, or the Anishinabek Nation, is that they are groupings primarily organized around specific treaties, which in most instances follow the logic of the colonizer, with respect to where and when treaties were negotiated, and who was included or excluded in the process. The ancient confederacies reference older realities, where (for example), the descendents of individuals designated as “halfbreed” and excluded from the *Indian Act* on that basis, or non-status Indians generally, could potentially be as entitled to citizenship as the descendents of those who were designated “Indian”. In a similar manner, there is little inherent potential for discrimination between those who grew up in the cities and those who grew up on reserves, as far as citizenship in the confederacies would be concerned, in that the confederacies are premised on the notion that the entire traditional land base, not just the reserve, is Native land. The possibility exists, however, that the individuals who are currently reviving these confederacies could “imprint” these revived frameworks with the same divisions as the *Indian Act* has created, whereby status Indians, and communities designated as reserves, were privileged over all other groups.

An interesting development, in this respect, are the efforts to create a Cree Confederacy, with member communities from Quebec to British Columbia, as well as the United States (McKinley, 1998c:1). While this would potentially be the largest confederacy, spanning six provinces, any notion of such an entity immediately cuts to the heart of one of the biggest divisions created by the *Indian Act*—the question of the status of Cree Metis communities in such a confederacy. Will Cree First Nations

consider including as members the Cree Metis communities which dot the northern prairies (assuming that these communities wished to do so), or will they simply replicate contemporary “treaty Indian/Metis” divisions, disregarding common heritage and language?

The confederacies represent a way out of the deadlock of fragmentation and divisions which the *Indian Act* has sealed Native people into for two reasons—they not only present the possibility of renegotiating the boundaries which have currently been erected around different categories of Indigenoussness, but they envision a potentially sufficient land base to do so. While Bill C-31 Indians may struggle for the right to be members in their mothers’ communities, the fact remains that the generations of individuals excluded from Indianness by gender and racial discrimination within the *Indian Act* will not all be able to rediscover “home” within the approximately 600 existing postage-stamp-sized communities which are currently called “First Nations”. The only really viable way in which urban Native people would be able to have access to Native land is through the prospect of being citizens of the original Indigenous territories—the lands which correspond to those which were held by the different Indigenous nations at the time of contact. We must be clear, though, that if First Nations genuinely want an end to the divisiveness of the current system, they cannot create new national entities which simply replicate its logic. First Nations have to genuinely be willing to work with groups which at present they ignore or disdain: the Metis, non-status Indians, and urban Native people, based on the needs of all of these groups—in ways that are premised on providing all citizens with the kind of privileges and rights which at present only status Indians enjoy. For mixed-race urban Native people, the confederacies could be sites where urban Native communities affiliate as urban Native communities—where individuals who are mixed-race

and urban do not have to fruitlessly struggle to remake themselves as “full-blooded traditionalists” in order to be considered members of Indigenous nations, and where struggles over entitlement framed as who is a “real” Indian and who is not become meaningless.

17.3 SUMMARY:

The day when large areas of what was formerly Canada have been renegotiated along the lines of sovereign Native confederacies will not be reached during our lifetimes. However, transforming how we think about Native identity does not have to wait until the designation “citizen of an Indigenous Nation” becomes a reality. Numerous interim processes could be tried which could provide individuals who lack Native status or band membership with legal rights and entitlement to at least some of the existing benefits of Indian status. All of these attempts would rupture or by-pass some aspect of the *Indian Act*, and as result, all of them have the potential to destabilise common-sense ways of understanding Native identity. In this respect, of course, all of these suggestions represent huge, difficult transitions, which in themselves would require extensive long-term struggle.

Individuals could demand that the numbered treaties (with the exception of Treaty Three which already included the Metis) be renegotiated so that the descendants of individuals who received halfbreed scrip could be admitted into treaty. These individuals could then be considered “treaty Metis”, or could be admitted as status Indians who were Metis—and could thus begin to negotiate sovereignty issues in conjunction with treaty Indian groups—in particular, the acquisition of a land base. This approach has the strength of undermining the central role of the *Indian Act*—of empowering (in a relative way) some Native people in order to disempower the rest. While there would still be numbers of non-status Indians (particularly in Eastern Canada and in

the cities) who still were not eligible for Indian status, other ways could be devised for providing access to a homeland for them—particularly given the much larger Indigenous land base which would now accrue to Native people. This approach should be seen as an interim one, a means of obtaining the maximum leverage out of the fiduciary relationship which the *Indian Act* has signified, before entering into new forms of Indigenous sovereignty.

Another interim approach is to work (with the support of status Indian organizations!) towards assuring the legal rights of all non-status people under an organization such as the Metis Nation, albeit without the cultural emphasis on the Red River settlement and a homogenous national culture. Individuals who receive their legal rights as Native people under the Metis Nation could then seek out ways of *culturally* affiliating with the First Nations—through adoption by Elders, through forms of clan affiliation—a number of possibilities exist.

A diversity of forms of affiliation—and of nation-rebuilding—could be taken up, which fit the diverse circumstances which Aboriginal peoples face across the continent. The important point is that these forms of affiliation are concrete ways of addressing the divisions which have been created by the *Indian Act*, divisions which are not going to go away simply by our labelling them as “colonial divisions”. They are ways of bringing together the very different strengths which urban and reserve-based Native people have developed out of their different circumstances, in the interests of our mutual empowerment.

APPENDIX
ELIGIBILITY FOR STATUS
AND BAND MEMBERSHIP
UNDER BILL C-31

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Those eligible to be reinstated under Section 6(1) of the revised

Indian Act include:

- Women who lost status because they married a man without Indian status, and any children enfranchised along with them;
- Children born outside of marriage to a status Indian woman, whose registration was protested because the alleged father was not a status Indian;
- Women and men who lost status because both their mother and paternal grandmother gained status through marriage;
- Women and men who were enfranchised upon application or under various sections of pre-1951 *Indian Acts*.

Those eligible under Section 6(2): Any child, one of whose parents is eligible to be registered under any of the subsections of 6(1), above.

Those not eligible include:

- the descendants of people who accepted half-breed land or money scrip, unless entitled under another provision;
- descendants of families or entire bands that were left off band lists or were never registered;
- some women who gained status through marriage and then lost it, for example, by marrying and then divorcing a status man and remarrying a non-status man
- many of the grandchildren of people who lost their status, commonly referred to as the second generation cut-off. The grandchildren of persons who lost their status and are reinstated under Bill C-31 can be registered as Indians only if both parents have status under Section 6(1) or 6(2), or if one parent has status under Section 6(1) (in other words, who never lost their status).

SUMMARY OF BAND MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY RULES:

The following are automatically and immediately entitled to be band members:

Section 11(1)

- Anyone who was on a band list or entitled to be on a band list before Bill C-31 came into effect;
- Anyone who is a member of a band that was newly created or recognized by the government, either before or after Bill C-31 came out;
- Anyone who lost status through:
 - Section 12(1)(b) - marriage to a man without Indian status
 - Section 12(1)(a)(iii) and Section 109(2) - involuntary enfranchisement of a woman upon marriage to a man without Indian status and the enfranchisement of any of her children born before her marriage;
 - Section 12(1)(a)(iv) - the double-mother clause—loss of status upon reaching the age of 21, if mother and paternal grandmother gained status through marriage;
 - Section 12(2)—children born to Indian women who lost status upon protest because the alleged father was not a status Indian
- Any children born after Bill C-31 came into effect, BOTH of whose parents are members of the same band.

The following categories of people are granted conditional membership. If a band left control of its membership with Indian or Northern Affairs, these people become band members. If a band took control of its membership, the band's membership code may exclude people in these categories:

Section 11(2)

- Anyone enfranchised under Section 12(1)(a)(iii) and Section 109(1)
 - the voluntary enfranchisement of an Indian man along with his wife and minor unmarried children;
 - or under Section 13 of the Indian Act of 1927 (in effect from 1880 to 1951)—residency outside of Canada for more than five years, without the consent of the superintendent or Indian agent;
 - or under Section 111 of the Indian Act of 1906 (in effect from 1867 to 1920)—upon receiving a university degree or becoming a doctor, lawyer, or clergyman;
- a child whose parents belong to different bands, or only one of whose parents belongs to or was entitled to belong to a band. This will include children born to Indian women who married non-Indian men, i.e. women who lost status under Section 12(1)(b)

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