Grounding Métis Resurgence in wâhkôhtowin: A Relational Approach to Reimagining Governance

by

Peyton Juhnke
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We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Research about Métis governance has predominantly focused on how it was shaped by Métis men, and our relationship with the settler state. As it stands currently, Métis political systems operate in a way that reflects those of colonial governments, often at the expense of our relational accountability to our First Nations kin, the land, and all her inhabitants. Through Métis approaches to visiting (Davey, 2023; Ferland, 2022; Gaudet, 2019; Flaminio, Gaudet & Dorion, 2020) and conversational methods of gathering knowledge (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2021; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019), this research aims to answer how Métis understandings of wâhkôhtowin can be applied to the (re)structuring of our self-governance using a Métis feminist lens, highlighting the significant and often overlooked social and political contributions of Métis women in the past and present. The themes drawn out from these visits highlight how we can reimagine our governance structure through matriarchal governance practices, a recentering of our responsibilities to all our relations grounded in our historic and ongoing relationship with the bison, and through operationalizing what wâhkôhtowin can look like in practice beyond colonial conceptualizations of time and physical space.

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Dedication

George Pelletier, Sera Desjarlais (née Lavallee), Roger Desjarlais, Elizabeth Pelletier (née LaFramboise), Robert Pelletier, and all those that came before me since time immemorial. I call my ancestors into this space and as different realms are brought together, we are all here together as one. I am nothing without kahkiyaw niwâhkômâkanak (all my relations). Our relatives do not leave us when they finish their earth walk. I did not get to know many of you here but I can build a relationship with you now. I hope you see this work, one way I am trying to step into my roles and responsibilities, as a way of honouring you all. To the reader, I am placing myself in my kinship network so you know who I am accountable to for the way I move through this world, the way I am sharing knowledge and what knowledge I am sharing.

While all of my immediate family (Mom, Dad, Lauren, Mads, and Sadie), much of my extended family, and my close friends have supported me in a multitude of ways throughout this process, I want to take special care to thank nikâwiy (my mom). On one particularly difficult night, I came out to our living room and sat with her. I am not sure if she knew how close I was that night to quitting and just how much I was hanging onto every word she shared with me as the strength I needed to continue. What started as a conversation about navigating family dynamics, and understanding my roles in upholding protocols and relational accountability, became stories about my mom's life – the greatest form of teaching and one inherent to us as Métis. We ended the night laughing and doing the dishes together. The ability she has to be gentle while teaching me and calling me in to consider where I may have misstepped is what keeps me grounded in an ethical framework rooted in our ways of being, knowing and doing.

I am grateful for the many hands that hold me and remind me who I am and why this all matters.

Introduction

Contemporary Métis political structures bear many similarities to Western political formations. Departing from statist and rights-based frameworks, and responding to the call for Indigenous peoples to conceptualize our political efforts through the notion of 'grounded normativity' (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017), this research examines Métis political resurgence on our homelands, from the ground up, and in relation to the concept of wâhkôhtowin[1]. This research seeks to understand how Métis embodied understandings of wâhkôhtowin can be applied to the (re)structuring of our self-governance through a Métis feminist lens. I begin chapter one by providing an overview of the related literature other scholars have put forward, focusing on conceptualizations of Métis kinship and wâhkôhtowin in relation to Métis governance. This included an overview of historic Métis governance frameworks including the Laws of the Hunt and the Laws of the Prairie, an exploration of current Métis governance, and aspirations toward Métis self-governance. By using a Métis feminist lens, this work recenters the political and social contributions of Métis women while also thinking through how our matriarchs and the cultural teachings and values they model can be recentered as we think through self-governance moving forward. In chapter two, I explore how I grounded this work in visiting with Métis kin, specifically in Treaty One, Four, Five, and Six territory, as a methodology informed by Davey (2023), Ferland (2022), Gaudet (2019), and Flaminio, Gaudet and Dorion (2020). This approach was employed in conjunction with conversational methods of gathering knowledge (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2021; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019), and Bouvier and MacDonald's (2019) spiritual exchange inquiry. I approached these visits with a

[1] There are various spellings of this word, but I stick with this one (Plains Cree dialect) because of the language teachings I have received, unless directly quoting the work of another author who spells it in another way. I make note of different spellings between authors.

handful of questions, but let the conversations flow naturally, ensuring I was acting in reciprocity by being an active participant. These visits occurred with human relatives, as well as bison and the land. I move onto a discussion of the protocols I upheld in doing this work with my relatives, and the relational accountability I embedded throughout the process. I go on to present what was discussed during the visiting that took place in chapter three, entitled kiyokêwina. The insights gleaned from the questions that guided these visits were organized into broad themes that explored stories of Métis women's leadership and the rejection of colonial gender roles, the progress we have achieved but concerns that remain within current Métis governance structures, key strengths of historic Métis governance structures, how we can uphold our responsibilities to all our relations, and the future priorities that Métis governance should tend to. I named the following chapter nipakitinikânân, or we give an offering, as I offer a deeper understanding of what came out of these conversations by putting my relatives' insights into conversation with relevant literature presented from the field, as well as my own thoughts and reflections. The themes that were drawn out highlight calls for a revival of matriarchal governance and recentering our relational accountability or the responsibilities we have to all our relations, and how this necessitates a renegotiation of how we are in relationship with the settler state. I go on to connect how our relationship with the bison can give us an indication of how we might reimagine Métis governance moving forward. I end this chapter by focusing on the models of wâhkôhtowin that have been modeled to me by matriarchs within my family including how we bring our relatives into circle, and mending our relationship with our First Nations kin. I chart the deeply personal journey I went on throughout this work using visioning as a way of healing, and rejecting colonial understandings of the constraints of time and of the physical realm. To conclude, I draw out considerations for the future of Métis self-governance from insight gleaned

from the literature, the visiting, and my own life experiences that all came together at nôhkom's kitchen table.

Literature Review

Literature analyzing Métis governance has primarily centred upon articulating the impact of colonialism on our legal organization, Métis resistance efforts, and the political contributions of significant Métis men who served as historic leaders such as Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont, and in later years, James Brady, Malcolm Norris, Pete Tomkins, Joe Dion, and Felix Callihoo (Teillet, 2019). While some scholars have made concerted efforts to highlight the political contributions of Métis women (Adese, 2021; Allard, 2023; Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2022; Forsythe & Markides, 2024; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Pigeon & Podruchny, 2022; Racette, 2012; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019), what remains absent from the literature, and what I aim to answer in this research is how Métis understandings of the teachings embedded in wâhkôhtowin can be applied to the (re)structuring of our self-governance through a Métis feminist lens. This research first explores what has been written about Métis governance, Métis political resurgence, Métis conceptualizations of wâhkôhtowin that can be applied to governance, and contributions of Métis women pertaining to relationality. The data from this literature review has been organized under the five major themes of (1) Métis understandings of kinship and wâhkôhtowin, (2) the history of Métis governance, (3) current Métis governments and governance structures, (4) employing a Métis feminist lens to articulate the political and social contributions of Métis women, and (5) barriers to the assertion of, and considerations for, Métis self-governance moving forward.

Métis Understandings of Kinship and wâhkôhtowin

How a nation chooses to govern itself says much about how they collectively view the world and what holds value to them. It is not surprising, therefore that Métis kinship can be understood as foundational to both our Nation and our governance. As Teillet (2019) writes, "The Métis Nation created only two institutions. One was the self-governance they developed on the buffalo hunts. The second was a central and lasting Métis Nation institution: the family" (p.

90). As will be explored in more depth in the following section, the buffalo hunt[2] is often viewed as the foundation of our governance structure as Métis (Dubois, 2015; Gaudry, 2014; Lavallée-Heckert, 2019; Nault, 2022; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Madden, 2008; Poitras, 2009; Saunders, 2013; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019). However, as the latter part of that quote demonstrates, so too did our kinship and the way we understood our responsibilities to one another and to the natural world through the teachings of wâhkôhtowin.

Countless scholars have written about the importance of wâhkôhtowin and its meaning from Cree and/or Métis perspectives. Gaudry (2014) writes at length about the meaning of wâhkôhtowin and associated responsibilities that this outlines, however put simply, "*Wahkohtowin* is the responsibility of being related to other beings as family, embodying collective obligations to one's relatives, as well as an ever-expanding network of kin" (p. 78). To build on this, Teillet (2019) writes that "reciprocity, mutual support and the sharing ethics were central values of the Métis family" and that wâhkôhtowin[3] is "the relationship […] around which all life revolved" (p. 90). Reder (2022) also states how wâhkôhtowin, which is described as an interconnected system of responsibilities in all our relationships, underpinned all aspects of how our communities functioned. The research that follows explores the following themes: Métis diplomacy being informed by wâhkôhtowin specifically in terms of our relationships with various First Nations, the importance of visiting and of being a good visitor as ways of upholding our responsibilities in our relationships, and the connection between Métis kinship, geography, and our relationship with the bison.

[2] When referring to the buffalo hunts or brigades, I use 'buffalo' to stay consistent with other Métis scholars' work, though elsewhere I use 'bison' as this is the correct name given the geographic location of this relative.
[3] Teillet spells it wahkootowin.

McCreary puts Andersen, Gaudry and MacDougall (2019) into conversation with one another, and of particular importance to this discussion is Andersen's contribution that, "When you begin with the perception that Métis are equally Indigenous to all other Indigenous people, it radically changes the lens through which you can understand what Indigeneity is, because it's always relational" (pp. 166-167) emphasizing that our kinship relations cannot be separated from our identity as Métis people. In the same article MacDougall writes of how our communities were "actively built through relations of kinship and networks of mutual responsibility" (p. 153). This demonstrates how the basis of how we lived with and related to one another is grounded in wâhkôhtowin, our relationships to one another and the responsibilities that are inextricably linked to these relationships.

The responsibilities that the Métis have always held towards to our First Nations relatives are commonly written about in terms of the Nehiyaw Pwat, or the Iron Alliance (Gaudry, 2014; Innes, 2013, 2021; Teillet, 2019; Voth & Loyer, 2019). This was a strategic "economic, social, and military alliance among the Plains Cree, Assiniboine, Salteaux, and Métis peoples" (Innes, 2013, p. 43). Putting this alliance in the context of Métis governance, Gaudry (2014) writes that "Métis politics never functioned in isolation, but that they were always informed by the political needs their allies, treaty-partners, and family—even if their family was from a different nation" (p. 134). Pigeon and Podruchny (2022) echo these thoughts when they describe how Métis diplomacy, enacted specifically by Métis women, was guided by our kinship connections and responsibilities, or wâhkôhtowin. In the same vein, Todd (2020) writes that, "Métis legal principles […] centre relationality, kinship, and care across time and space" (p. 177). Ross (2022) also frames understandings of Métis kinship in a political context through miyo-pimatisiwin which "encompasses the four elements of the emotional, mental, spiritual, and

physical ways of living one's life on the land and in community" (p. 53). In unpacking how miyo-pimatisiwin manifests in Métis daily life, they references ethics of sharing, reciprocity, community care, working together, and maintaining our responsibilities to all our relations including those that are more-than-human (Ross, 2022). Ross (2022) asserts that these teachings of wâhkôhtowin and miyo-pimatisiwin are embedded within one another and that both wâhkôhtowin and miyo-pimatisiwin have historically been, and continue to be, integral to our self-determination and self-governance as Métis people.

Another common example given to demonstrate the responsibilities that were upheld in relationships between Métis and other First Nations on the plains is what happened when the settler government began signing treaties with First Nations communities. Gaudry (2014) and Innes (2013, 2021) examine how in some contexts, First Nations relatives of the Métis would vocalize their disagreement with the exclusion of the Métis from treaty and the ways the government introduced subsequent legislation that attempted, and in many ways succeeded, to fracture the ways we could be together with those that lived on what became reserve land. Innes (2021) and Reder (2022) explain this as a tactic of the government to absolve itself of any more financial responsibility to Indigenous peoples by including the Métis. It is worth noting that these tactics were not always successful and that there are instances of Métis living on reserve as we and our First Nations relatives demonstrated how treaties could not supersede our kinship ties and the ways we collectively upheld principles of wâhkôhtowin (Innes, 2021). However, Voth and Loyer (2019) take up an important angle of inter-Indigenous relationality to examine an often misunderstood dimension of wâhkôhtowin[4] or 'all our relations', which is that everyone, specifically every Indigenous person, is a relative and therefore we must uphold the same

[4] Voth and Loyer spell it wahkotowin.

responsibilities or accountability in all of our relationships. We know from the development of Iron Alliance, which did not include every Indigenous nation in that geographic location, and other historic Indigenous wars and alliances that this is not true. However, what the teachings of wâhkôhtowin do tell us is that we still have a set of ethics, morals, and responsibilities to maintain even in our relationships with those who are not in our kinship web (Voth & Loyer, 2019).

Voth and Loyer (2019) approach an important perspective as they explain the ways in which wâhkôhtowin is understood from the vantage point of Métis women, emphasizing the importance of both the practice of visiting, and of being a good visitor outside Métis homelands. Drawing on the work of Gaudet (2019), Flaminio, Gaudet and Dorion (2020) also articulate how wâhkôhtowin,[5] which they state encompasses the teachings of responsibilities to other humans and the land, includes visiting as one of these responsibilities. Allard (2023) builds on this notion of visiting as being linked with wâhkôhtowin, and offers a different framework for understanding bannock as modelling kinship. They write about the association between Métis women's labour in passing down cultural knowledge and teachings, the political nature of the conversations that took place through visiting at the kitchen table (a site for sharing bannock), and the baking of bannock itself (Allard, 2023). Bannock, in this way, is understood as "a key link in the chain of Métis female kinship and knowledge production" (Allard, 2023, p. 56). Pigeon and Podruchny (2022) similarly take up this analysis of bannock when they write of its utility in maintaining peaceful relationships with other nations.

Various academics discuss the interplay between Métis identity, the land, and wâhkôhtowin. These interventions have primarily been centered around what it means to be

[5] Flaminio, Gaudet and Dorion spell it whakotowin.

Métis as an identity, but less so on how the understanding of these intersections inform how we constitute ourselves as political actors. Drawing on the work of St-Onge, Podruchny and MacDougall (2012), Adese (2016) writes about "kinship and relatedness, mobility, and geography" (p. 61) as integral aspects of what it means to be Métis. Angie Tucker (2024) makes this intervention as well when she writes that, "Place, and the experiences within it, therefore shape one's identity and belonging" (pp. 29-30). Adese (2016) later goes on to elaborate that wâhkôhtowin[6], which cannot be separated from who we are as Métis, outlines "ethical and respectful principles for living in a good way and in balance with the natural world, with the earth's other inhabitants, and with other Métis and with one's ancestors" (p. 63). This reference to being in good relation with the ancestors requires us to think beyond the here and now, the natural world and the realm we live in and to tap into the spiritual nature of our relationships. Macdougall (2010) echoes this when writing, "Just as wahkootowin mediated interactions between people, it also extended to the natural and spiritual worlds, regulating relationships between humans and nonhumans, the living and the dead, and humans and the natural environment" (p. 8). Adese, Todd, and Stevenson's (2017) thoughts on the matter are brought into conversation when Todd writes that "Michif really demonstrates those ongoing, reciprocal, kinship-based responsibilities we hold to specific people in place and time throughout the prairies" (p. 18). This intervention further emphasizes these important tenets of kinship and geography that the aforementioned authors discuss. Bouvier (2019) adds to this when writing about the importance of tending to all our relationships including those with the land and our more-than-human relatives, noting that being Métis is a relational practice that encompasses "specific political, historical, cultural and linguistic ethos, with specific ties to complex kinship

[6] Adese spells it wahkootowin.

systems with humans, earth and cosmological beings" (p. 32) which again stretches our understanding of relationality to exist beyond the confines of our earth walk and those that are physically with us.

Vellino (2020) brings bison into the conversation to connect our relationships with these more-than-human and the land by drawing on Amanda Strong's *Four Faces of the Moon*, and how their reintroduction to the geographic landscape of the prairies is a way of reviving the responsibilities embedded in Métis understandings of wâhkôhtowin. In this way, the author is grounding wâhkôhtowin in our historic relationship with the bison and prairie lands, while at the same time acknowledging its utility in the present in the resurgence of our ongoing relationship and commitment to this relationship. This can otherwise be understood as grounded normativity (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017) which Coulthard (2014) explains is an "ethical framework provided by these place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge" (p. 60). Similarly, Scudeler (2021) builds on understandings of wâhkôhtowin through the work of Marilyn Dumont writing that wâhkôhtowin[7] is our "relationships with other people and other-than-human beings [which] are based on reciprocity, and integral part of kinship responsibility" (p. 171). One such relationship is between the Métis and the bison which Scudeler (2021) uses to demonstrate relational accountability[8] in action with the way the bison sustains us as a people, and how we as Métis honour and respect their sacrifice and their spirit.

[8] This is a term popularized by Wilson (2008), whose work will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter, to articulate the ways we need to uphold cultural teachings of accountability, respect, and reciprocity in our relationships.

History of Métis Governance

The history of the Métis Nation's governance, as well as those of the settler state have been well documented by Métis and some non-Indigenous scholars alike. This history includes Métis resistance efforts and battles fought, the development of provisional governments, the traditional laws and systems of governance, the tumultuous relationship with the settler state which encompasses the historic struggles for recognition from the colonial government, and the early beginnings of contemporary Métis governments.

The Métis have had a long history of active resistance against the settler state and have engaged in many battles to defend our rights. Teillet (2019) arguably provides one of, if not the most, thorough and extensive overviews of this history including the Battle of Seven Oaks, the Battle of Grand Coteau, the Battle of Duck Lake, and the Battle of Batoche, as well as the two primary resistance efforts – the Red River Resistance and the Northwest Resistance. What these historically significant events all have in common is the way the Métis have actively fought to protect our lifeways which includes the way we govern ourselves, our right to do so, and our relationship and responsibilities to the land (Saunders, 2013; Teillet, 2019).

The government established on the buffalo hunt, otherwise referred to as the Council of the Hunt, was the foundation of Métis governance while the associated Laws of the Hunt formed the foundation of our legal order (Dubois, 2015; Gaudry, 2014; Lavallée-Heckert, 2019; Nault, 2022; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Poitras, 2009; Saunders, 2013; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019). We can glean many insights into how Métis people viewed the world from understanding how the buffalo hunt was structured and functioned in our communities. Saunders and Dubois (2019) provide an expansive run-through of how the hunt operated although of particular note to Métis governance is how leadership was selected. They write that "On the eve of the commencement of the hunt, heads of families would gather in an assembly to elect a chief and

council and to decide upon the laws that would govern the hunt. The laws agreed to by the assembly sought to ensure the success of the expedition as well as the protection of all those involved" (p. 20). Also touching on the selection of leadership, Poitras (2009) writes that "Traditional Buffalo Hunt Councils used the gifts and strengths of an individual during the hunt in a manner that was consistent with success of a hunt. Therefore, leadership was not only shared, it even rotated within the day or the hunt" (p. 240). There was mentorship embedded in the structure of the buffalo hunt, leadership was collectively decided in the community, and perhaps most notably, women were also seen as leaders (Poitras, 2009). Both of these authors show that the hunt reflected Métis values of collaborative decision-making. Gaudry (2014) moves this conversation toward how the buffalo hunt reflects our understandings of kinship and how we understand our collective identity as Métis, and how these directly inform our relationship with the bison stating that, "Buffalo hunt political protocol, like Métis political thought more generally, hinges upon two foundational principles, *kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk* and *wahkohtowin*. *Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk*, which translates to "we are those who own ourselves," can be understood as an ideal state of being where Métis are autonomous and independent political beings, free from external coercion, capable of being their own masters. *Wahkohtowin* is the responsibility of being related to other beings as family, embodying collective obligations to one's relatives, as well as an ever-expanding network of kin" (pp. 77-78). Nault (2022) also writes about the way wâhkôhtowin is evidenced in the hunt as "Métis neighbours worked together for mutual benefit" (p. 13), while Oster and Lizee (2021) recenter the role of Métis women in the hunt when they assert that it is the women who "played a pivotal role in the connection and kinship ties that was the foundation of the brigades" (p. 27). Speaking more directly to how the hunt created the basis for our governance, Gaudry (2014) asserts that the

buffalo hunt was the first constitution of the Métis and its importance to the Métis arises in part because of the way we economically relied on the hunt. Lavallée-Heckert (2019) elaborates on this discussing the importance of the Laws of the Hunt, writing that they "played a critical role in Métis governance as the survival of the Métis were contingent upon these laws" (p. 12).

When the hunt was over, the laws that governed the Métis were the Laws of the Prairie (Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019), which "recognized the importance of organization as a way of protecting Métis interests: the centrality of family and the well-being of the community, the democratic selection of leaders, and the enforcement of agreed-upon rules" (Saunders & Dubois, 2019, pp. 21-22). From the foundation of Council and Laws of the Hunt came the various provisional governments that the Métis established. The provisional government established in Fort Garry in 1869 that was led by Louis Riel, formed the first List of Rights (Dubois & Saunders, 2017b; Teillet, 2019) which "outlined three primary concerns: "political status, language and land" (Bumstead, 2011, pp. 43-44 as cited in Dubois & Saunders, 2017b, p. 882). Dubois (2015) otherwise writes that "the two key objectives identified by the provisional government of 1869 [were] self-government and land" (p. 209). Riel would form another provisional government in 1870 and a second List of Rights that included participation and agreement from the English Métis (Teillet, 2019). In Saskatchewan, Gabriel Dumont led the formation of the St. Laurent Council in 1872 which went on to create a constitution and the Laws of St. Laurent as the beginning of a more formal Métis government (Dubois, 2013; Saunders, 2013; Saunders & Dubois, 2019). Saunders (2013) writes that these laws "covered nearly the entire life of the community including the responsibilities of the council, the conduct of the buffalo hunt, the collection of tax" (p. 345). A little over a decade later, the "little" provisional government was established which "demanded parliamentary representation, responsible

government, and local control of public lands" (Dubois, 2013, p. 437). Another provisional government was established in 1885 in Batoche "to regulate the various aspects of daily life in the settlements but more importantly to secure title to the lands to which the Métis laid historic claim" (Dubois & Saunders, 2017b, p. 883).

As evidenced by the many acts of resistance against the settler state, the Métis have had a tumultuous relationship in seeking recognition of our rights from the settler government (Lavallée-Heckert, 2019; Logan, 2022; Teillet, 2019; Vellino, 2020). These can be understood in one way through the various accords including the Métis Nation Accord, the Charlottetown Accord, and the Kelowna Accord, as well as through notable court cases that sought recognition of Métis rights including *R. v. Powley*, which pertained to harvesting rights (Dubois & Saunders, 2017a; Dubois & Saunders, 2019) and led to the Métis National Council's definition of who constitutes as Métis (Teillet, 2019), *Manitoba Métis Federation Inc. v. Canada and Manitoba*, which addressed Métis rights to land (Dubois & Saunders, 2019; Teillet, 2019), and *R. v. Daniels*, which reinforced the federal government's responsibilities to the Métis (Dubois & Saunders, 2019; Teillet, 2019). In terms of the accords, Pulla (2013) writes of the, ultimately unsuccessful, lobbying that the Métis Nation Council engaged in to pass the Métis Nation Accord writing that it "provided a framework for transforming Métis organizations into governments, clarifying the criteria for Métis citizenship and identification within the new Métis Nation, and setting up a relationship with the federal, provincial and territorial governments for negotiating self-government agreements, and land and resource-sharing protocols" (p. 420). This accord was unsuccessful as "the Canadian public voted the Charlottetown Accord down in a referendum and the Métis Nation Accord went down with it" (Teillet, 2019, p. 458). However, what followed was the signing of the Métis Nation Framework Agreement through the Kelowna

Accord and eventually the Canada-Métis Nation Protocol (Saunders & Dubois, 2019) which "establishes a bilateral process to address jurisdictional issues including land and harvesting rights as well as economic development" (Dubois, 2015 p. 203) although this "approach is limited insofar as it does not provide a means for the Métis to advance those interests that are not shared by the state" (p. 204). This bring us to the signing of the Canada-Métis Nation Accord in 2017 which "lays the foundation for a new government-to-government relationship based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership" (Dubois & Saunders, 2019, p. 124) This was considered to be a significant step toward Métis self-governance, though not a guarantee as will be explored more in the final section of this literature review.

This history leads the discussion to the early beginnings of what became the five provincial Métis governments: the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), the Métis-Nation Saskatchewan (MN-S), the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), and the Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC), as well as the national Métis government, the Métis National Council (MNC). Most of the research focuses on the development of the MMF, MN-S, MNA, and MNC, and therefore the discussion below reflects this. As for the timeline of their emergence, it was "the early 1930s through the mid-1960s, [that] Métis regional organizations were largely focused on the Prairie provinces, with associations in British Columbia and Ontario forming in the late 1960s and early 1970s" (Pulla, 2013, p. 409). What preceded the MMF was L'Union Nationale Métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba (L'Union) (Ens & Sawchuk, 2016; Madden, 2008; Saunders, 2013; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019). After the Battle of Batoche when morale was particularly low for the Métis, L'Union was formed "With the stated aim of preserving and protecting Métis culture and traditions" (Saunders & Dubois, 2019, p. 30). Further, it was created "to find some way to restore pride and meaning to

being Métis and to rehabilitate the reputation of Riel […] to further the life and history of the Métis Nation, and make the Métis more influential in public affairs and politics" (Ens & Sawchuk, 2016, p. 114). L'Union developed multiple locals and representatives from each local would participate in the general assembly as a representative of their community (Ens & Sawchuk, 2016). In Saskatchewan, there was the formation of both the Saskatchewan Métis Society, which primarily served the Métis in southern Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Métis Association, which focused more on northern Saskatchewan who eventually merged together to create MN-S (Dubois, 2013; Poitras, 2009; Saunders & Dubois, 2019). As for the MNA, this began as L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest who succeeded in getting the Alberta government to pass the Métis Betterment Act, and establish the Métis settlements in Alberta which remain the only recognized land base of the Métis (Madden, 2008; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019). This was done by the Métis petitioning the provincial government which led to "the Ewing Commission [being] tasked with preparing a report on the health, education, housing, and territorial conditions of Alberta Métis" (Saunders & Dubois, 2019, p. 31). While the Métis participated in the Native Council of Canada[9], which also included status and non-status Indigenous peoples, a point was reached where the priorities of each group no longer aligned, and the need for Métis-specific lobbying with the government became necessary (Pulla, 2013). This is reflected in Saunders's (2013) assertion that "Métis leaders from the Prairies began to question whether the NCC could – or should – represent the interests of the Métis Nation, or whether the time had come to form a Métis-specific national representative body" (p. 353) which led to the creation of the MNC (Teillet, 2019).

[9] Formerly part of the National Indian Council, see Pulla (2013) for a broader discussion.

Current Métis Governments and Governance Structures

In order to map potential paths forward toward Métis self-determination through the transformation of our political systems, it is important to understand the current structures of Métis governments. Many scholars have put forward comprehensive overviews of the different levels of provincial Métis governments (Dubois, 2015; Lavallée-Heckert, 2019; Madden, 2008; Saunders, 2013; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2022). Madden (2008), a prominent Métis lawyer, states the two overarching goals of the five provincial Métis governments: "(1) to politically represent the Métis people within their respective province by advocating for and negotiating on their behalf and (2) to undertake cultural and socio-economic programming and services for Métis people living within their respective province" (p. 334). It is important to note that the MNC does not manage either of the aforementioned responsibilities (Saunders, 2013). This is accomplished through a multi-level governance system that, "bears many similarities to the Canadian division of powers between the federal government, provinces, and municipalities," (Lavallée-Heckert, 2019, pp. 10-11) that can otherwise be thought of as a pyramid where locals are at the bottom, regions are one step above, then the provincial Métis governments, then the MNC (Madden, 2008) which "is composed of an elected President and the Presidents of all five provincial Métis organizations" (Lavallée-Heckert, 2019, p. 11).

However, an important piece of this discussion that cannot be left out is that, in 2021, the MMF left the MNC following a series of disputes, specifically with MNO, over Métis territorial boundaries and Métis identity, which are arguably interlinked concepts (Akerman & Bidwell, 2021; Manitoba Métis Federation, 2021). As such, the MMF asserts that it is the National Government of Red River Métis. This decision did not come without backlash, particularly from the MN-S and the MNA who expressed their disapproval of the decision in public statements (Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, 2021; Métis Nation of Alberta, 2021). In terms of processes of

accountability to Métis community members,, Métis governments tend to this through organizing general assemblies every year (Madden, 2008). However, “some Métis citizens have expressed concerns that this enhanced power [particularly of the regional level of provincial Métis governments] has not been accompanied by mechanisms of accountability” (Saunders & Dubois, 2019, p. 67).

Locals are seen as integral components of current Métis governance as they connect more directly with community members (Dubois, 2015; Madden, 2008; McCreary et al., 2019; Saunders, 2013). From these direct, grassroots interactions with community, locals are tasked with communicating to upper levels within Métis governments (Madden, 2008). Teillet (2022) writes that “The use of the term ‘local’ began back in the 1930s when Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris were organizing the Métis in Alberta” (p. 23). They take on different names in different provinces including chartered communities or “communities” in British Columbia, “locals” in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and “chartered community councils” in Ontario” (Dubois, 2015, p. 191; Saunders & Dubois, 2019). MacDougall notes how the development of locals connect with Métis understandings of wâhkôhtowin as “the ways that locals tried to organize in urban spaces were initially built on kinship relationships” (McCreary et al., 2019, pp. 156-157). As for regions, Saunders (2013) writes that “Each region is governed by some type of regional council, consisting of a regional president, vice-president, and/or regional directors” (p. 356). While there is some variation in terms of the provincial Métis governments, these largely operate as non-profit structures (Dubois 2015; Dubois & Saunders, 2013, 2017a; Poitras, 2009; Saunders & Dubois, 2019).

The main challenge of this structure is the economic reliance on the colonial government and therefore accommodating to their agenda rather than our own as a self-governing nation

(Dubois 2015; Dubois & Saunders, 2013, 2017a; Poitras, 2009; Saunders & Dubois, 2019). Further, due to the not-for-profit structure, which was initially considered necessary in order to function within the colonial system, Métis governments are "legally accountable to the provinces under which they are incorporated rather than to their own people" (Saunders & Dubois, 2019, p. 89). However, as Poitras (2009) astutely points out, "Government language must also change. Monetary transfers should be seen for what they are: rent, or the cost of living in Canada for non-Indigenous people. They are a legitimately owed debt to Métis or other Indigenous Nations to compensate for loss of land and resources, and for harms done to individuals, families or communities by dispossession and racism" (p. 244). One Métis government that has made strides to break away from this structure is the MN-S through the creation of their constitution in 1993 and the passing of the *Métis Act* and by creating a system of governance that is reflective of Métis ways of being, knowing and doing (Dubois, 2013 as cited in Dubois & Saunders, 2013; Saunders, 2013) for instance through "Indigenous practices such as relying on elders' councils and the participation of women to guide their political activities" (Dubois, 2013, p. 196).

Alberta operates uniquely from the other provincial Métis governments, particularly since it is the only province that has a recognized Métis land base. In addition to MNA and the Fort McKay Métis Nation, there is the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC) who is responsible for governing this land base (Bell & Robinson, 2008). The MSGC is significant in that it is "The first and only Metis self-government in Canada, recognized constitutionally as a distinct and protected people" (Métis Settlements General Council, n.d., para. 4). They situate Metis Settlements as "a vital and rich part of our Canadian cultural identity" (Métis Settlements General Council, n.d., para. 1). Some key elements of the governance structure of the settlements are the Métis Settlements Act (MSA) and Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal (MSAT) (Bell &

Robinson, 2008). While they do have the ability to enact their own policies, this is limited because "Policies inconsistent with provincial laws, subject to a few exceptions noted in the MSA, are of no effect to the extent of being inconsistent with provincial law" (Bell & Robinson, 2008, p. 450). This shows that even under alternate systems that appear from the outside to function more as self-governing entities, there is still a power dynamic at play whereby the settler government has the final say.

Little research has been written in the last few years regarding progress or changes being made in terms of Métis constitutions, self-governance and self-governing MOUs or agreements with the federal government. As such, a scan of the Métis National Council and the five provincial Métis governments' websites provides some insight into the current state of affairs. In 2019, the Métis Nation of Alberta signed the *Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement* which was "the first ever self-government agreement between Canada and any Métis government" and was followed by "The Métis Nation-Saskatchewan and Métis Nation of Ontario [signing] similar agreements" (Métis Nation of Alberta, n.d., para. 6). The Manitoba Métis Federation then signed its own *Self-Government Recognition and Implementation Agreement* in 2021 (Manitoba Métis Federation, n.d.). As for the Métis Nation British Columbia, no self-governing agreement has been signed yet with the federal government (Métis Nation British Columbia, n.d.). In 2023, the Métis Nation of Ontario, the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan and the Métis Nation of Alberta signed Bill C-35 which is an Act recognizing the self-governance of Métis governments in these three provinces (Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, 2023; Métis Nation of Ontario, 2023). However, as of April 2024, the three aforementioned Métis governments have retracted support for Bill C-35 starting with the MNA and MNO, followed by the MN-S, although they have all expressed a commitment to continuing to work

toward the inherent right of self-governance in their respective provinces (APTN National News, 2024; Métis Nation of Alberta, 2024). In a joint statement issued by the MNA and MNO (Métis Nation of Alberta, 2024), they write:

> For the past 10 months, our Métis governments, citizens and communities have endured a legislative process—not of our own making— that was often unfair, delayed, disrespectful and demoralizing. This process enabled, and at times encouraged, misunderstandings and division between ourselves and other Métis and First Nation communities. We have seen Métis youth, citizens and Elders insulted, denied, and harassed based on misinformation and misconceptions. It has allowed opponents to deny our very existence and rights, and even the attempted erasure of our lived experiences, history and identity. We would not be in this position today if Canada had historically and honourably recognized our people, communities, and governments. (paras. 2-3)

Part of the ongoing self-governance processes is the development of a constitution, which have been published for their respective provinces by the MMF, MN-S, MNA, and MNBC (Manitoba Métis Federation & the Manitoba Métis Federation Inc., 2023; Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, 2023; Métis Nation British Columbia, 2022; The Government of the Métis Nation within Alberta, 2022). The Métis Nation of Ontario has not yet developed its own constitution.

Political Contributions of Métis Women

Knowing the context in which Métis history has been told and wanting to move forward with a more comprehensive understanding of it, before moving onto the final section of this literature review, it is necessary to recenter the perspectives, contributions, and experiences of Métis women in the past and present of our nation. Much of the literature presented in this chapter has been put forward by women who are the ones that are primarily writing about Métis kinship and governance and the way they intersect in Métis lives. This work is grounded in an understanding

that the patriarchy has infiltrated our communities as Indigenous peoples (LaRocque, 2007), notably in the ways that we retell our history, and in the way we have structured our political formations as reflections of how we have internalized these ideals (Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Voth, 2020). An antidote to begin moving away from this is to employ a Métis feminist lens on our governance. When speaking of Indigenous feminism, Green (2007) writes that it "is a theoretical engagement with history and politics, as well as a practical engagement, with contemporary social, economic, cultural and political issues" (p. 25). As the authors described in this section will demonstrate, the way that the history of our governance has been told does not mean that Métis women were not active in the social and political formation of the Métis Nation. LaRocque (2007) summarizes how this retelling has transpired when writing, "Native women are 'honoured' as 'keepers' of tradition, defined as nurturing/healing, while Native men control political power" (p. 66). Similarly, Adese (2021) and Voth (2020) write about how even though Métis women are known for their artistic and material contributions to our nation, their skillsets extended far beyond this. To obtain a more well-rounded understanding of this history, there have been calls to examine the political contributions of Métis women that have been overlooked and ignored (Adese, 2021; Flaminio, Gaudet & Dorion, 2020; Pigeon & Podruchny, 2022; Voth, 2020).

In building on the earlier historic exploration of the buffalo hunt, what tends to be glossed over in many accounts of this very significant part of Métis history are the roles and responsibilities of Métis women; only in more recent years have scholars taken up this work to ensure these stories are told (Adese, 2021; Forsythe & Markides, 2024; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; St-Onge, 2021). Adese (2021) is one of these scholars and writes that Métis women's involvement in the buffalo hunt was integral to the success of the hunts. In a

similar way, Oster and Lizee (2021), whose book centers the perspectives and stories of Métis women, assert that "women played a pivotal role in the connection and kinship ties that was the foundation of the brigades" (p. 27) and emphasize the involvement of Métis women in the development of the political landscape of our nation. Aside from maintaining and passing down these kinship connections, "we know of the pivotal role collectively played by Métis women in the transformation of prodigious amounts of bison meat, fat, and hides into marketable and profitable pemmican and robes" (St-Onge, 2021, p. 50) indicating the profound ways that Métis women economically sustained their communities and ensured the hunt could run smoothly in conjunction with the roles other members of the hunt took on.

Other accounts have broadened this conversation to include more examples of the ways Métis women participated politically in our nation in the past (Adese, 2021; Allard, 2023; Forsythe & Markides, 2024; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Pigeon & Podruchny, 2022; Racette, 2012; Saunders & Dubois, 2019). For instance, Indigenous women who became the mothers of the Métis Nation were seen as an integral part of the fur trade (Adese, 2021; Pigeon & Podruchny, 2022; Racette, 2012; Saunders & Dubois, 2019). Pigeon and Podruchny (2022) go on to write about other contributions of Métis women's that extend beyond the buffalo hunt, such as that "Women worked as guides, interpreters, traders, hunters, or warriors, whenever the political climate required such contributions. […] [W]omen were not mere subordinates; in fact, they exerted considerable power and initiative toward protecting their families and communities" (pp. 32-33). One example of this is during the Battle of Grand Couteau where "Métis oral tradition notes that Métis women were excellent shooters, willing and able to engage in battle and defend themselves from the ongoing attack" (Pigeon & Podruchny, 2022, p. 39). This counters assertions that Métis women were "cowering in fear and waiting for the conflict to end" (Pigeon

& Podruchny, 2022, p. 41). Women's contributions were not also overt, however, such as the political participation that occurred at the kitchen table (Allard, 2023), and as Saunders and Dubois (2019) write, "The power held by women in Indigenous societies cannot solely be measured by the political positions they hold but should also take into account their role in the governance of the community as a whole" (p. 118). When recounting stories about the political participation of Métis women in the mid-1900s, Adese (2021) notes that, "Although Métis women remained primarily concerned with their important role within the domestic sphere, they also began to have clear roles in the public life of Métis activism" (p. 128) which indicates that while there was an ever-growing shift during this time, there were still dominant social pressures Métis women had to work up against.

This leads the conversation into the articulations of the political participation of Métis women into the present (Adese, 2021; Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2022; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Saunders, 2013; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019). In recent years, there have been a few scholars who have taken up the work of profiling notable Métis women in politics to demonstrate the ways in which we have actively participated (Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2022; Oster & Lizee, 2021). Of this work, an important point that Bellehumeur-Kearns (2022) makes is how when Métis women operate in these political positions, they make it part of their mission to create more space for the increased representation of key issues that matter to our communities by "showing a range of perspectives on history, spirituality, education, work, life, mental health, and sexual and gender identities" (p. 114) which reinforces the complexity of our identities and how much we have to bring to the table in these spaces. In creating more space for the voices and perspectives of Métis women to be addressed within our governance, Métis women have also established our own organizations (Adese, 2021; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019).

On a national scale, Adese (2021) writes about how Métis women organized alongside First Nations women through the Native Women's Association of Canada, but how their priorities differed enough to necessitate the emergence of Métis women's organizations which included the Women of the Métis Nation, and the National Métis Women of Canada, the latter of which became the Métis National Council of Women. There was then the creation of the MNC Women's Secretariat which eventually joined the Women of the Métis Nation and "re-emerged as an autonomous, national collective of Métis women working both inside and outside of MNC structures" (Adese, 2021, p. 136) under the name Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak—Women of the Métis Nation. Aside from the divergence of priorities with First Nations women, these organizations were also developed as a way of communicating our own concerns rather than relying on the MNC do so, as they were "being disregarded by the men, who continued to dominate the MNC structure" (Adese, 2021, p. 131). Now, each of the provinces have established an associated Métis women's organization including the Métis Women of British Columbia, the New Dawn Métis Women's Society, Les Filles de Madeleine Association, the Infinity Women Secretariat, and the Women's Secretariat of the Métis Nation of Ontario (Saunders & Dubois, 2019). Similar to how the presidents of each provincial Métis government have a seat at the table with the MNC, "the heads of each provincial Métis women's organization (or its designated representative) serve on the board of a national Métis women's organization, Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, which operates under the working title Women of the Métis Nation" (Saunders & Dubois 2019, p. 107).

Within the provincial Métis governments, Saunders and Dubois (2019) write that "Women play key roles in Métis politics and governance; they run the majority of local and community organizations and hold almost half of all elected executive positions in Métis governments" (p.

105), however it is important to note that they, and (Lavallée-Heckert, 2019; Saunders & Dubois, 2019) agree that power tends to not be concentrated at the local levels within current Métis governance structures. However, Bellehumeur-Kearns (2022) and Saunders (2013) note the increased representation of women in provincial Métis organizations particularly in upper level leadership positions of authority in decision-making. While this is great news, as evidenced in this section and the one that preceded it, contemporary Métis governance has internalized, both in its past and present, patriarchal ideologies that are embedded in its structure (Saunders & Dubois, 2019). No amount of women in leadership positions can change this without addressing the systemic undertones that inform our relationship to the settler state. That is where the work of Voth (2020) comes in to help us begin imagining that an alternative to our self-governance "that is explicitly oriented toward defying structures of gendered violence, a culture of disobedience needs to be nurtured such that the expectations of a patriarchal national unity are not mobilized against Métis and other Indigenous women" (p. 106).

Considerations for the Future of Métis Self-Governance

Within communities, and in the world of academia, there are undeniable calls for the self-governance of Métis governments**.** This brings us to an analysis of the recommendations scholars have made to Métis governments in looking ahead to the future of self-governance. Arguably the most prevalent topic that comes up in political spaces and within the literature is the importance of defining Métis identity, as there has been a growing emergence of false claims to Indigenous identity, largely Métis identity, stemming from Métis being conflated with being of mixed ancestry (Adese, Todd & Stevenson, 2017; Dubois & Saunders, 2017b; Leroux, 2019; Teillet, 2019, 2022; Voth & Loyer, 2019). Teillet (2019, 2022) relies on the definition laid out by the MNC which is that "'Métis' means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis

Nation" (Métis National Council, n.d., para. 2). MMF takes on a slightly different definition in that in order to be considered Métis, one must be 'Red River Métis' and be able to trace their genealogy back to the Red River Valley (Manitoba Métis Federation & the Manitoba Métis Federation Inc., 2023). Further, there has been a call to create consistency among registration processes for the provincial Métis governments (Bell & Robinson, 2008; Caron, 2008; Madden, 2008; Saunders, 2013). Although, Teillet (2022) states that each process is trustworthy as they "require objective evidence for citizenship to be granted" (p. 46). Another recommendation has been to delineate the territorial boundaries of Métis homelands to establish a more broadly recognized Métis land base (Dubois, 2015; Dubois & Saunders, 2013; Vellino, 2020) which is not only an important component of discussions about Métis self-governance, but also about identity, "because it recognizes that we have time- and place-specific relationships, laws, stories, and histories through which we approach the world" (Adese, Todd & Stevenson, 2017, p. 16). However, this discussion about land would not be complete without also acknowledging the responsibilities we have to other Indigenous communities and nations, particularly the First Nations with which our homelands overlap or were historically shared, but also those who we remain guests on their land. As Voth and Loyer (2019) state, there has been a legacy of harm done to First Nations by Métis claiming territory that is not our own.

As mentioned above, in recent years, the MMF, MN-S, MNA, and MNBC have all developed their own constitutions. Though there remains a call for the MNC to develop a national constitution as a necessary step toward self-governance (Dubois, 2013; Lavallée-Heckert, 2019; Madden, 2008; Saunders & Dubois, 2019). Of the importance of having a Métis Nation constitution, Saunders and Dubois (2019) write:

> Constitutions contribute to Métis self-government in two significant ways, from both an internal and an external perspective. First, constitution building represents a type of nation-building exercise that calls upon Métis citizens to reach a political consensus on such foundational questions as citizenship and boundaries of the Métis Nation Homelands. It thus contributes to nation building by providing a vehicle for Métis leaders and citizens to design institutions, rules, and procedures that are consistent with historical Métis governance practices. Second, the development of Métis constitutions helps to position Métis governments to negotiate with provincial and federal state actors. Significantly, the adoption of a constitution is a necessary prerequisite to the successful negotiation of self-government and land rights with state since Canada requires Indigenous groups to have constitutions prior to concluding self-government agreements (p. 75)

In any case, a constitution alone will not be sufficient to attain self-governance, nor will it resolve every concern within current Métis governance structures, but rather "the importance of generating consensus across the Métis Nation through a bottom up approach should not be underestimated" (Goodin 1996 as cited in Dubois & Saunders, 2017b, p. 893). This reflects the assertion of other scholars that consensus is a key aspect of Métis governance (Madden, 2008; Saunders, 2013; Saunders & Dubois, 2019).

Departing from statist and rights-based frameworks, and responding to the call for Indigenous peoples to conceptualize our political efforts through the notion of "grounded normativity" (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017), some scholars have taken note of the ways in which we need to interrupt the cycle of seeking recognition from the settler state as a way of having our inherent right to self-government recognized (Lavoie, 2019; McCreary et al., 2019;

Poitras, 2009). There are already instances where we, as Métis people, are rejecting the politics of recognition (Allard, 2023) and continued asserting our sovereignty as a self-determining, self-governing people regardless (Dubois & Saunders, 2013, 2017b; Saunders & Dubois, 2019). At the foundation of the settler colonial project is dispossession of land and undermining the self-determination and self-government of Indigenous peoples, so we cannot therefore turn to these systems to forge an alternative path forward (Coulthard, 2014).

Responding to Coulthard's (2014) resurgent scholarship to critically reflect on our dependency on the settler state and capitalism by reinventing a social, political and economic reality independent from them, some scholars have begun the work of theorizing approaches toward the future of Métis self-governance (Ross, 2022; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Voth, 2020). As a response to the ways that the contributions of Métis women have been historically excluded from dominant narratives, Voth (2020) has theorized frameworks for Métis self-governance that tangibly center women's orientations of identity, land, kinship, and governance. Voth (2020) writes that "Two interrelated governance frameworks informed by the reimagining of Métis nationalist roots are developed here: indignant governance and indignant disobedience" (p. 87). Other authors such as Saunders and Dubois (2019) consider other principles to ground Métis self-governance such as freedom, kinship, democracy, the rule of law, and provisionality, and how "For the Métis, self-government involves exercising their right to live according to what they refer to as *ka ishi pimaatishiyaahk* (our way of life)" (p. 3).

In considering how the social lives of the Métis operated historically, we can look to various scholars' accounts. Macdougall (2010) writes about how the ways we interacted with one another and behaved in our communities was grounded in "reciprocity, mutual support, decency, and order" (p. 8). In the same vein, Teillet (2019) writes that Métis life and family were centered

around “Reciprocity, mutual support and the sharing ethic” (p. 90). Gaudet and Rancourt write about the intersection of governance and living a good life or our way of life when they observe that “A social and economic understanding of the kitchen table situates Lii Taab as a simple yet complex form of governance, an expression of practising our sovereignty in respectful relationship to pimaatisiwin” (Forsythe & Markides, 2024, p. 175). This centering of the kitchen table also coheres with Métis feminist understandings of our ways of life being informed by “female kinship relationships” (Forsythe & Markides, 2024, p. 206) often nurtured at these tables. Structuring self-governance in a way that reflects our ways of being, knowing, and doing might take shape in what Ross (2022) offers up about how we can root Métis self-governance in the teachings embedded in miyo-pimatisiwin which “encompasses the four elements of the emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical ways of living one’s life on the land and in community” (p. 53). This model would contain elements of our cultural worldview such as a strong ethic of sharing, storytelling, reciprocity, and intergenerational learning and mentorship processes (Ross, 2022).

This literature review has taken a scan of how Métis understandings of kinship with our human and more-than-human relatives has always played an integral role in how we understand our place in the world. The history of Métis governance including the sacrifices made to resist against our erasure and to reemerge after defeat, laying the foundation for an understanding of how Métis governments have adapted into the current day. Furthermore, the political participation of Métis women in the past and present was explored to recenter this often overlooked dimension of how our nation came to be and how it exists today. Finally, the contributions of scholars to reimagine the future of Métis self-governance were explored to draw out potential insights and applications. Thinking about how our governance used to operate and

what has been sacrificed or lost in the process, looking backward might be our best tool for how to move forward.

Methodology

This project aims to explore how Métis understandings of the teachings embedded in wâhkôhtowin inform critical engagements around the (re)structuring of our self-governance through a Métis feminist lens. The idea for this gathering of knowledge emerged from a growing consciousness among Métis kin of the ways in which we need to look inward at our governments, our community, and our families, and assess the ways we are (and are not) living out our responsibilities as Métis people. As a way of continuing to move beyond research that seeks to extract, exploit, and approach research within Indigenous communities from a deficit perspective (Gaudry, 2015; Kovach, 2021; Teves, Smith & Raheja, 2015; Tuck, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019; Xiiem et al., 2019), it seems only fitting that this research should be led by our own people.

Various Indigenous scholars have written of the importance of locating oneself within our kinship networks as a way of honouring and upholding our responsibilities to all our relations (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2021; LaVallee, Troupe & Turner, 2016; LaVallie & Sasakamoose, 2021; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). It is a powerful way of calling our ancestors into the space we are in and honouring the relationships we have with them, and the knowledge we carry and share since, “From an Indigenous perspective, we do not think alone. Whether we are imagining the universe in relation with the spirit, nature, or group, we are perpetually in-relation” (Windchief & San Pedro, 2019, p. 25). I want to take the opportunity to do so now.

My name is Peyton Juhnke. I am the daughter of Paul Juhnke and Carrie Juhnke (née Pelletier). My grandparents on my paternal side are David and Mildred Juhnke (née Els) who both have German ancestry. Nôhkom (my grandmother) on my maternal side is Jeanne Pelletier (née Desjarlais), a Michif speaker, the first female jig caller in Saskatchewan, and a pillar of the

Métis community in what is now known as Regina, Saskatchewan, Treaty Four Territory where I was born. Her late mother, nicâpân, was Seraphine Desjarlais (née Lavallee), a Cree woman from Cowessess First Nation. We have connections to Cowessess through her, and a couple of my other late great-grandparents, Roger Desjarlais and Robert Pelletier. Nimosôm (my grandfather), George Pelletier, was also Métis, but since he and my great-grandparents all passed on to the spirit realm before I was born, I only know them through the stories I have been told by my mom, my aunties and uncles, and nôhkom Jeanne. I was raised on the homelands of Wolastoqiyik[10] in Wolastokuk or what is now known as Fredericton, New Brunswick. Although I do not have ancestral ties to this land or to Wolastoq[11], I feel a deep love and connection for this place. I hold many teachings, wisdom and guidance from Elders, Knowledge Keepers and community members who I am lucky to have been taught by, and many of whom I consider to be good friends. On this land, I grew into a woman, experienced my first ceremonies, and learned invaluable teachings about what it means to be a good visitor when on the ancestral homelands of others. Ironically, even though I was not on my homelands, I also learned a lot about what it means to be Métis and how I can enact my responsibilities in my various relationships.

The methodologies that I employ in this research and that I will explore in this chapter are Métis approaches to visiting (Davey, 2023; Ferland, 2022; Gaudet, 2019; Flaminio, Gaudet & Dorion, 2020) and conversational methods of gathering knowledge (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2021; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). These methodologies are undertaken through a Métis feminist lens (DuPré & Fowler, 2023; Flaminio, Gaudet & Dorion, 2020; Gaudet, 2019). Further, Bouvier and MacDonald's (2019) spiritual exchange inquiry underpinned this work, and the

[10] Translates to the people of the beautiful, bountiful river.
[11] The name of the river that flows through Wolastoqey territory (Wolastokuk) which translates to the beautiful bountiful river.

visiting that occurred with my more-than-human relatives specifically. I sought and received approval from the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria to visit with my human relatives, ensuring that my application met both the requirements of the university, while also balancing the distinct culture responsibilities that I was taught to uphold and explore more in a later section on protocol and relational accountability in this chapter.

Métis Approaches to Visiting

In recent years, visiting as a methodology has emerged as a culturally-specific and culturally-relevant data gathering tool for Métis scholars. In their research, Flaminio, Gaudet and Dorion (2020) bring together "Métis kinship roles and responsibilities—whakotowin—and Métis-specific ways of visiting with each other—kiyokewin—as integral Métis methods to conduct research that involves ethically honouring our community relationships when gathering and visiting with Métis women" (p. 58). In this way, visiting is framed as an important way that kinship responsibilities are upheld (Gaudet, 2019; Flaminio, Gaudet & Dorion, 2020). Flaminio, Gaudet and Dorion (2020) specifically show in their work how visiting, a vital component of how Métis people organized ourselves socially, used as a methodology can serve to uphold an inherently Métis feminist research agenda by recentering the voices of Métis women while also improving the well-being of our people. Gaudet (2019) adds that visiting, or *keeoukaywin*, "is a relational obligation, [and] a spiritual responsibility" (p. 48). Wilson (2008) also takes up the discussion of relational obligation or accountability, and relationality at length, writing that an Indigenous research paradigm hinges on these two practices being upheld.

How we conceptualize all our relations and our responsibilities in these relationships will vary depending on our cultural contexts as Indigenous peoples. Many scholars have talked about the importance of building respectful and reciprocal relationships as a necessary precursor when employing Indigenous research methodologies. However, what is often not stated is the

importance of nurturing the relationship we also have with ourselves as researchers which involves being present with ourselves and others (LaVallee, Troupe & Turner, 2016) and being accountable to the ways this research has impacted us as individuals and helped us to grow (Wilson, 2008). In my adult life, I have been taken across the country for various commitments to family, work, and school, as well as for pleasure which my auntie Cindy always tells me is reflective of my "Métis traveler's spirit." This mobility was and is not uncommon for us as Métis, and as researchers we have to contend with the challenging dynamics of not always being able to employ visiting as a methodology in person, but rather this needing to take place at times in a digital space (Ferland, 2022; Flaminio, Gaudet & Dorion, 2020). From my experience, what is important is prioritizing always coming home and spending time with those you are in relationship with while you are in those physical spaces to build and maintain that foundation.

This research intervenes on these topics using a Métis feminist framework, as it is at its core shaping something. Indigenous feminism is always a falling away; a reclaiming and restoring, (G. Starblanket, personal communication, September 21, 2024) and in this case its of our ability to be self-governing independent of state influence. This work takes account of grievances shared by Métis relatives and then plants seeds of what may grow into opportunities to organize around them. In this way, this Métis feminist framework is "a lens through which to analyze, critique, and transform current standards, reimagining society using Indigenous worldviews" (Forsythe & Markides, 2024, p. 202). By privileging Métis women in my work, I am problematizing a history full of stories of Métis men which "by way of omission, [mean] Métis women and two-spirit, queer, and/or non-binary Métis persons are relegated to the private sphere" (Forsythe & Markides, 2024. p. 155). Furthermore, the practice of organizing ourselves through visiting around the kitchen table is an inherently feminist practice as it is reflective of

and recenters the "ways in which women engaged in important conversations in the private sphere versus the public sphere largely inhabited by men" (Forsythe & Markides, 2024, p. 201). These conversations were often also political in nature, as this has never really been able to be separated from our identity as a nation. Lindquist, Jobin and Letendre write about the utility of the kitchen table with respect to Métis governance stating that "Kitchen table governance centres Indigenous women's roles in governance and blurs the discussion between the public and private" (Forsythe & Markides, 2024, p. 160).

Conversational Method

When visiting with my human relatives, I utilized a conversational method of data collection inspired by Kovach (2010; 2021) who writes that "When researchers use a story or conversational method, their task is to respond intuitively to the stories, to share as necessary their own understandings, and to be active listeners" (p. 166). This conversational method, established by Kovach (2010; 2021), was also employed by Flaminio, Gaudet and Dorion (2020) as well as Ferland (2022) with the latter stating that "The interviews were dialogic and relational," (p. 56) emphasizing the importance of that underlying relationship between the researcher and research participants in order to effectively establish this conversational dynamic. Absolon (2022) articulates this further by stating that, "The differences between interviewing – a Eurocentric research method – and having conversations are embedded in the worldviews guiding them. Indigenous knowledge gathering is relational" (p. 132). Although I prepared some questions ahead of time, these conversations contrasted research interviews as I was as much an active participant in the conversation as the people I was visiting with. In this way, the knowledge shared is collectively held. I feel a deep refusal to try to own anything I have learned, but resonate with Wilson's (2008) words that we are in relationship with the knowledge gathered

and we cannot own something we are in relationship with. Additionally, some of the questions did not even need to be asked explicitly as they were already explored or answered due to the nature of how the conversation flowed naturally. This was all done in line with Métis approaches to research, because as LaVallee, Troupe and Turner (2016) write, "Reciprocity in a Métis research context may involve sharing stories, life experiences, events, and family history with individuals involved in the research—the act of storytelling and story listening. This is seen as an act of giving oneself physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually" p. 172. Speaking more broadly, Gaudet (2019) "add[s] that an Indigenous research methodology is concerned with both the feelings you leave with, and the feelings you leave behind" (p. 57).

When reflecting on the conversations that took place in my research, there was a shared experience that was articulated by each participant at the end of our conversations that there was this sense of joy and hopefulness. We are united by our identities as Métis people, but also by our shared desire to improve the lives of our nation. Even talking through some of the less desirable aspects of our governance and the harsh realities of our communities, the overwhelming feeling was a deep gratitude of knowing and remembering that, in our own unique and distinct ways, we are each working from this place of deep love for our people and our way of life. It is important to keep returning to this place of joy to sustain our efforts.

These visits ranged from one to three hours and took place through multiple modalities including in-person, digitally, and over the phone. All my visits began with an exchange of how life was going, what our respective families were up to, and how we were doing. Many laughs were shared over the course of these visits, but also many difficult and brave things were shared. For the particularly challenging conversations, I made sure to circle back to ensure my relatives were okay, and embedded a thorough review process of contributions and themes that emerged

from these visits to ensure my relatives were comfortable with what I was sharing and how I was representing it. This research was qualitative in nature seeking to answer questions pertaining to my research question through these conversations, as well as primary and secondary written sources relevant to the subject of inquiry.

Spiritual Exchange Inquiry

In my research I also employed the spiritual exchange inquiry as a methodology in which Bouvier and MacDonald (2019) state that

> First, there needs to be a belief in the presence and intelligence and spirit of all beings and that we are all active subjects interacting to create knowing. Second, we need to acknowledge the ritual, the repeated continuous behaviors of honoring our connectedness to all of creation. To truly honor the ritual of this inquiry, the process requires continuous reflection and a temporal commitment to enact ethical relations in our everyday as to become a way of life. Third, gifting, the practice of proper protocol, based on the specific research context (i.e., offering tobacco, food, prayer) ensures that we are engaging in reciprocity as these actions are the tendons of our relationships. Lastly, the key in enacting this inquiry is the recognition that we are always in, and working through, kinship relationships with all beings. (p. 8)

Through visiting with more-than-human relatives such as the bison, land, and water, I was actively recentering these relatives as having an important voice and perspective to contribute to this collective gathering of knowledge. These practices of being in relation and strengthening these relationships were not embodied exclusively within the context of this research, but rather were intentionally brought into the research context from my daily life. This methodology was embodied throughout my research through embedding ceremony, meditation, and prayer, strengthening my relationships with my more-than-human relatives and the ancestors. I refer to

this all as visiting, though I distinguish it from visiting with human relatives due to the nature of these encounters.

Visiting with the Bison, Land, Water and Ancestors

During my master's degree, I found myself on the west coast for my coursework, and on the east coast where my immediate family lives tending to my familial responsibilities while writing this thesis. Although I visited Métis homelands on the prairies during summers growing up and lived for brief stints in my adult life, these geographies have not been a permanent fixture in my life. This research led me to study the history of my nation in ways I had not previously done. Throughout this process I was reminded of, and inspired by, the words of Haunani-Kay Trask (1993) who wrote, "To know my history, I had to put away my books and return to the land" (p. 154). I know there is a particular depth of knowledge that comes from living in community in our territory, and I want to remain humble and honest in the fact that this has not been my lived experience. I have not gone through much ceremony on these lands, I have not yet hunted, prepared our traditional foods or smoked a hide; but when I was in Treaty Six Territory, pulled over and looking at the lone bison grazing along the grass, I know our spirits knew each other in ways that maybe I could not see, but I could feel. I felt a deep love that survived hell at the hands of a settler colonial state that separated our nations for so long, preventing us from being in relation in the ways we were always meant to be on this land with one another.

I sat there on that sunny Wednesday afternoon in October, and as the world felt quiet and still, with no other cars in sight on that winding road through the park, tears streamed down my face as I imagined my ancestors joining me in that place. I imagined knowing what they know, seeing what they would have seen, and I know that paskwâwi-mostos and I do not know each other in the same way my ancestors knew them. I know our relationship is different now. But maybe it does not have to be a devastating thing that it is and maybe we can build something

new and generative together. Scudeler (2021) writes that "the buffalo don't distinguish between the human and other-than-human worlds, the land on which they travel, and the larger cosmos. Everything is connected, especially the Métis and our buffalo kin" (p. 177). In this way, "The past, present and future are a circle" (Ferland, 2022, p. 51) and I find comfort and healing in knowing that my ancestors and I get to share our different but important realities of being in relation with the bison across time and space. The bison is a reminder of the relationship that has always sustained us, the root of our governance, and an intergenerational inheritance of responsibilities and commitments. I understand now that that land was a site of knowledge co-generation (Bouvier & MacDonald, 2019) between myself and the bison I visited with that day.

I then found myself back in Wolastokuk in the spring at my parents' home. Seeking guidance and a renewed desire to continue this work after a difficult visit in Treaty One Territory, I did what I had intuitively done many times growing up. I sat with Wolastoq, the river that has known me nearly my entire time on this earth, though just a small fraction of the time she has flowed here. I offered her medicine, and I thanked her for always giving me a place to come home to here, even as a visitor, and for sharing her wisdom with me. Then I sat with the land in my backyard as I worked to prepare seedlings for our garden. I put down some tobacco and I gave thanks to the sun, the wind, the water, the earth, and the seeds. I lit a smudge and prayed for direction in this work, that I may contribute something of value to my nation. As I continued to work through this plateau in my research, I found myself in my garage or on my deck every day for weeks in ceremony, continuing to build and nurture my relationship with the land, understanding that the "relationship between ourselves and the environment is sacred, and [doing] ceremonies to bridge that space or that distance" (Wilson, 2008, p. 87). Visiting with

more-than-human relatives was as much a critical part of my research praxis as visiting with human relatives.

The last encounters I want to reflect on are what I refer to as visiting with the ancestors or visioning. Throughout this research, I would often find myself listening to music, primarily by Indigenous artists, and praying to my ancestors to assist me in imagining alternative futures[12] for our people as a way of interrupting the colonial reality we find ourselves in. It can be easy to take for granted just how far we can get, and have gotten, from our cultural ways and to not fully understand the depth of how we have internalized our own oppression. This process of praying and listening to Indigenous languages through music helped to pull my headspace out of the here and now, and move me into an alternate space where anything is possible and where our freedom to enact our self-determination is a given. During one of these instances, I had been working through some thoughts on the divisions that exist among our people and where we see ourselves going forward. As I prayed and left myself open to listening, I saw my people joining hands together in a circle, and saw this circle getting continuously bigger, effortlessly making space for all our ideas and perspectives. It might seem small, but the tears this important vision brought allowed me to say kiyâm[13] and to continue moving forward with renewed hope. I cannot think of a better gift my ancestors could have given me. Although words were not spoken, "Our dialogue does not only envelop verbal or written modes of engaging but relies on the intuitive and emotive modes that are often silenced in research agendas" (Bouvier & MacDonald, 2019, p. 6). As I continued to pray throughout this work, many of the words came to me through the wisdom shared from what I can only understand as my ancestors in the great beyond.

[12] Borrowed from Maynard and Simpson (2023) who write about imagining an otherwise or imagining alternatives.
[13] To let things go, to find peace with what has happened and how things are.

Protocol and Relational Accountability

Upholding protocol can be a challenging practice to navigate, particularly in Métis communities (though not uncommon in First Nations communities as well) due to the ongoing impacts of colonialism causing differences in belief systems, specifically between Christianity and our traditional or ceremonial practices, and therefore competing teachings about the use of our medicines. It is worth noting that this is a spectrum with too much complexity to get into within the confines of this thesis. The important takeaway and how this impacted by research is understanding that these differences exist, and taking care to navigate this as respectfully and gently as possible. How this translated to protocol is that I made the decision to not offer tobacco to participants as I had a couple of experiences in the past where other Métis declined the offering and stated that they had not grown up with these teachings. I did, however, offer tobacco to my more-than-human relatives who I visited with over the course of this research. I had a similar experience when leading a sharing circle with a group of predominantly Métis folks where I lit a smudge and this also caused some discomfort with those that did not grow up using our medicines or, in part due to the impacts of colonization, had negative connotations with using them.

In terms of upholding respect and reciprocity in my relationships with participants, I made an intentional effort to ensure the participants knew how much I valued their sharing of knowledge by expressing this verbally as well as sending them gifts after our visiting such as homemade jam, coffee, and other small items that I knew from my relationship with each of them that they would appreciate and make use of (Ferland, 2022; LaVallee, Troupe & Turner, 2016). Part of my research paradigm as a Métis woman is centering my practice in the teachings I have learned about visiting and wâhkôhtowin. It is worth noting that I am still learning about the best practices of upholding our cultural teachings around protocols and offerings and could very well look back

on my approach in this research later in life with a different perspective. As a young woman and as someone who grew up with layers of disconnection from my extended family and community, I acknowledge that there is still much that I have to learn. I did my best to embed tangible practices of reciprocity throughout this process, of thinking deeply about the knowledge being shared to draw out deeper meaning, of taking time to visit and build relationships beyond the confines of this work. I do not claim to do everything "perfectly Métis" (if this even exists) and I make a conscious effort to humble myself when receiving direction from those that mentor me.

Once each visit was complete, I typed up a transcript from the audio recording of our conversation, organized it into high level themes, and sent it back to participants to ensure the spirit and intent of what they had shared was reflected back to them. In understanding that "An idea cannot be taken out of its relational context and still maintain its shape" (Wilson, 2008, p. 8), participants were given the opportunity to de-anonymize anything they shared to ensure it was in line with their own teachings about being accountable to the knowledge they shared and the people it might have come from (Absolon, 2022; Ferland, 2022). As a default, I chose to anonymize the data due to the potential risks associated with this research and power dynamics within Métis governments. I wanted to be cognizant of not asking for too much labour, so I worked with each participant to review their transcripts to the degree of involvement that they wanted. Returning to the thematic analysis of these transcripts, this was done again through visiting with the land, water, and ancestors (visioning), as well as bringing this knowledge to ceremony (smudging and a sweat lodge) to bring spirit into the meaning-making process (Absolon, 2022; Bouvier & MacDonald, 2019).

When I consider who else I am accountable to in this research, I always thought about my mom, nôhkom Jeanne and nôhkom Judy. I have strong tethers to these three women, and I

thought about how they would feel or think when reading this work. There is one phone call I had with nôhkom Judy in particular where I was grappling with some pushback I received from a relative outside of this research about not doing tobacco offerings for participants. I have always felt safe with her to be vulnerable and humble myself to her feedback, even when I have mis-stepped, because she has always taught me from a place of love. She reassured me in our chat that I was on the right path, and we shared some tears and laughs together. I am grateful to have strong matriarchs to rely on for support and encouragement. They have taught me the importance of doing this work from a place of love – love for ourselves, for our people, and for our way of life. From this love comes an ethic of sharing what we have and what we know. I do not want to be misunderstood, we absolutely need to uphold protocols around knowledge sharing and stewarding, but where protocol and teachings are weaponized against our relatives as a way of gate-keeping knowledge, we need to look inward and be critical of such practices. Our knowledge did not survive because we held it to ourselves.

This research is grounded in all of the relationships I am a part of, with human and more-than-human relatives. It is rooted in a love of being Métis and wanting to contribute to building better futures for our people. Employing visiting as a methodology (Davey, 2023; Ferland, 2022; Gaudet, 2019; Flaminio, Gaudet & Dorion, 2020), as well as using a spiritual exchange inquiry (Bouvier & MacDonald, 2019), this research draws out considerations for the future of Métis self-governance from a Métis feminist lens, informed by our understandings of wâhkôhtowin.

kiyokêwina (visiting)

I want to remain both clear and transparent that I grew up a substantial geographic distance from community. Though I maintained relationships with my family, visited my homelands often throughout my upbringing, and lived there for a period during my adult life, the disconnection I experienced greatly impacted and continues to impact my understanding of self, community and nationhood. I understand the critique that because I did not grow up in my community or directly involved in its governance, that I do not have a right to do this work. What I can say is that being disconnected from community did not disconnect me from the relationships I have with my Métis and First Nations relatives, it did not disconnect me from bearing witness to the harms done by our governments to our people and the ways we have always persisted despite this, and it did not disconnect me from experiencing the ways wâhkôhtowin was modelled for me. Frankly, whether I had grown up in community or not, I do not think any of us are positioned to be *the* voice of Métis governmental reform – our strength has been, and will always be, our ability to work together toward our self-determination. What I offer are collated reflections from Métis people (those that I visited with, and those I am citing throughout) that will ground an understanding of where we are and can hopefully be drawn upon for inspiration for future directions in Métis governance. This work for me was not necessarily about identifying a tangible alternative, but rather about articulating the critiques we have of our governance with a particular emphasis on the perspectives of Métis women who hold special places of reverence in our communities, and building out our capacity to imagine other paths beyond this.

While visiting, I had a handful of questions in mind that I was eager to hear their perspectives on which will be explored in more depth below. In some instances, I asked these questions explicitly to guide the conversation. However, in stepping back and allowing the

conversation to flow naturally, many times the questions were answered without ever needing to be asked. Once my visits were complete, I sat with what was shared and transcribed the conversations. I was left after those periods of visiting feeling a deep sense of joy and gratitude. Even discussing some of the less desirable aspects of our governance and the realities of our communities, I found gratitude in remembering that, in our own distinct ways, we are each working from this place of love for our people and wanting to protect our way of life. This is what I kept returning to. I then began the work of generating themes for contributions to concisely reflect the meaning of what was shared.

Once all the transcripts were coded, the major themes were identified for each question largely based on frequency of repetition. It was challenging to whittle down these conversations to themes without losing the spirit and intent of what was shared, and I hope what I offer in this and the following chapter will help to bridge this gap. I shared back the themes and quotes I pulled from the visits back to those I visited with to ensure this was done in a responsive way and to create opportunities to receive ongoing consent to write about what they shared. There are outlying contributions that were included that maybe were not repeated many times, but said once powerfully. This challenged my understanding of what makes something 'important enough' to include. I refer to those I visited with as relatives rather than participants or co-researchers as a way of interrupting the colonial framing of how research is conducted. I was having these conversations regardless of the fact that I was completing my master's thesis research, and these conversations will continue long after this thesis is completed. What I offer is a snapshot into the time I spent with my Métis relatives doing what we do best – visiting.

Stories of Métis Women

The first question was: what stories have you been told about how Métis women contributed, and continue to contribute, socially and politically in our communities? The themes that emerged from relatives were (1) leadership, and the (2) rejection of colonial gender roles. The ways Métis women were held in positions of reverence for our leadership and decision-making is reflected by relative A who shared that, "when you look at our roles prior to contact, we were always the matriarchs. We were leaders in our communities. We were the family heads." Despite this understanding, there is an acknowledgement that we have moved away from this structure, as noted by relative B who elaborates on this within the context of Treaty 1,

> We know that all of our teachings say that women are the decision-makers, but when you're looking at it from the MMF standpoint, the president of the MMF has been a man and all the surrounding circles have been men for a very long time. So I think that within the Red River Métis governance it hasn't been women as much that are doing that work so they're moving away from that tradition and they are directly in a settler mindset of how can we appease the Canadian government to get more funding and they lose their way more often than not because they end up pushing themselves away from the other Indigenous communities because they are trying too much to be like the Canadian government.

There is a lot that runs through this quote that the following questions and their respective themes will continue to unpack such as the critique of our current provincial Métis government(s), federal recognition, relational accountability, and community.

This timely and important emphasis on the recognition of the importance of matriarchal leadership is not to say this was the only work Métis women took up. On the contrary, the conversations I had emphasized the ways we engaged in what is often considered, through the

lens of Western perceptions of the gender binary and pre-assigned gender roles, to be 'men's work.' What we know tells a much different story. Relative C shared that, "What I have heard historically about Métis women is that they were working a lot of hides, they were doing a lot of stuff, they were still trapping and doing lots themselves." Similarly, relative D stated that "they all trapped and they all hunted too, [there was] just that expectation to be the carriers of everything." These articulations can be read as Métis women carrying both the mental and physical load of caring for their family, community, and nation. In Treaty 5, relatives talked about how Métis women were the power houses in our community, that they were the ones leading gatherings, and how as a community they are trying to get back to this. Moving beyond how this manifested historically, relative B shared that this continues to this day where, "they're taking on all of those roles which were done traditionally but they also have to live in a modern society now where [Métis] women, honestly they work a million times harder than the average white man. They're burning them out, they're getting exhausted, they're having a really hard time. […] everything is against them and they are expected to do that much more work to succeed." Relative E shared a few stories of Métis women in their life including Shirley Isbister, Evelyn Johnston, Karon Shmon, Louise Oelke, Laura Burnouf, Harriet St. Pierre, and Irma Klyne who are continuing to make positive impacts on Métis homelands with respect to Michif language revitalization, wrap around supports for Métis youth and families, pathways for addictions recovery, and the inclusion of Métis history in the public education system. In Treaty 1, another name that came up in a few of these visits as being a carrier of Métis culture was Paulette Duguay, the president of L'Union.

Current Métis Governance Structure

The next question was, what are your thoughts on the current structure of Métis governance, and what are its strengths and shortcomings? The themes stemming from responses

were the (1) increased visibility of Métis culture, (2) federal recognition, and (3) control, corruption and nepotism. On the topic of what current Métis governments are doing well, responses centered around language revitalization efforts, and the commitment to increasing the visibility of Métis culture among the general public, and the embodiment of it among our own people. Importantly, it was stated by relative B that "they've done a lot of positives for the community and I don't think that should be removed from them but the negative so far outweighs the positive." In a similar tone, relative C expressed that, "Métis are very lucky to have many leaders, such as Chartrand, fight in the political interests for our people. However, from that, we need people who can build community. People who think less politically and focus more on fostering a sense of inclusion."

Although there has been a growing movement toward self-governance with many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities establishing self-governing agreements and asserting their inherent right to self-determination and sovereignty, one of the threats to our Métis governments upholding these relational responsibilities that was identified in these conversations is the existing relationships they have to the federal government. The impacts of this connection to the federal government also extend to our relationships with our First Nations relatives, our more-than-human relatives, and the land is articulated by relative B who, in reference to the MMF, said:

> What they're doing is they're playing into whatever the federal government needs which I understand from a financial standpoint where you want to go where the money is. You're following around the federal government, but the federal government, when they give you money, they also want you to do something in return. So Chartrand gets a bunch of money, but then he's also against the Keystone Pipeline protests. You can't do that, you

> can't be against your other Indigenous kin and relatives, but also accept a cheque from the person who is arresting a bunch of kohkoms. It doesn't add up. It isn't worth the money. It's blood money at that point.

The impacts of our governments' decisions which are not grounded in relational accountability also extends to our own people. A few years ago, a grassroots Métis organization, Red River Echoes (n.d.), established themselves as "a collective of Métis people committed to reclaiming our sovereignty, lands, culture, and kinships in Red River and across our Homeland" (para. 1). While there have been critiques from past members of this collective and those who have ties to it in one way or another about their approach to organizing, namely the exclusionary nature with which they determine belonging within the collective, their purpose "to hold our Métis government accountable to its People" for "the decisions our government has made in our name" (para. 3) is responsive to much of the dialogue I had with relatives for this work. Unsurprisingly, they have not been received well by the MMF. As relative B speaks of this,

> Even to go to Red River Echoes and publicly, on a news report, to tell this new matriarch grassroots organization, tell them all to go to hell… you're not supporting your community. You should be accepting new outside opinions and trying to grow from that instead of just fighting. But it's a very stubborn patriarchal mentality that is just really engrained in them right now. They're really pushing this "us versus them" to push out the Métis National Council too and make it seem like "we are the only Métis people." I understand why you would do that in certain ways like there are reasons for it but it still feels very exclusive and very … elitist is the word.

The mobility of Métis people, and the ways we built communities throughout our homeland which spans a significant geographic distance, has led to a multiplicity of experiences in these communities and among our people. As relative A from Treaty 4 shared,

> Our people started, communities like Lebret, Île-à-la Crosse is another one, Cumberland House… Cumberland House is the oldest Métis community. It even precursors the Red River because it was a trade route for the Hudson's Bay Company […] we have those traditional Métis or those historic Métis communities in our midst. So when we were talking about the definition of Métis, [MMF] said, well, [Red River is] the historic Métis community. And I said, why would we negate Métis historical communities in Saskatchewan to only recognize one area?

Although similar, we would have varying sets of ethics and protocols or teachings based on what First Nations community we had the most proximity and familial connections to. Yet, there remains a disregard for holding space for the variety of experiences and perspectives we as Métis bring to these conversations. Relatives from Treaty 5 and 6 reflect on the ways we used to resolving conflict or disagreements in our communities. They talk about hashing it out and finding consensus, all the while maintaining our relationships and remaining respectful and humble as per the old ways to foster harmony in our communities as best as we can. Relative E from Treaty 6 builds upon this by asking "How are we coming together as a people? I think that's a really important thing about governance, you kind of keep it within your community if you can solve it before it gets out of hand."

While this discussion has mainly focused on the context with the MMF in Manitoba on Treaty 1 territory, similar tensions are being felt with MN-S in Saskatchewan on Treaty 4, 5 and 6 territory where what has taken shape is an exclusion of grassroots participation in governance.

The conversations I was having took place at a time where a lot of movement was happening with Bill C-53, otherwise known as the Métis self-governing bill. When it was time for MN-S to bring this bill forward to their members, they were not transparent about the contents of the bill as they did not provide draft copies to all the Métis local presidents to communicate it to their constituents to make informed decisions, stating that their hands were tied by the federal government. Relative A reflects on this questioning, “Why are they hiding this? Why can't we know what this treaty entails? And why is it on the government of Canada's timeline? And why are we following their lead? This should be us leading the charge, not them. This is our treaty, not theirs."

This approach led to distrust with the bill as a whole with the following concerns summarized in the following quote by relative A:

> I'm never going to go into a community and think[ing] that I know what they need. Because I don’t. And so that's what they've done now, is they've put together a plan that they think that we need, that is going to benefit them, but is it going to benefit the grassroots community? Is it going to benefit the local president? After this deal is signed, are there going to be locals? Are the grassroots community members going to have a voice, or is it just going to be like the Government of Canada?

These thoughts are reflective of the historic role that locals and the grassroots Métis community has played in our governance (Dubois, 2015; Madden, 2008; McCreary et al., 2019; Saunders, 2013), and the desire to recentre their positionality as leaders in our nation.

The top down approach that the MN-S has taken in its governance structure is a concern for its members who are cautious about not wanting to replicate a colonial governance structure in their pursuit of self-governance. Relative D articulated this concern sharing that, “In the past,

like with our ancestors, you know, our leaders that came before us, it was always the citizens or the grassroots community that had the last say and so now what they're doing is they're turning that upside down and the grassroots people are now at the bottom of that, of that foundation. And it's not even the foundation that they're just at the bottom." Relatives from a Métis community in Treaty 5 expressed that they feel the MN-S is taking voice and authority away from community and that our own people are trying to oppress and silence us. They shared that there has been a big divide between community-based work and governance despite the fact that these two areas used to be interchangeable.

The last theme was control, corruption, and nepotism. On the topic of the MMF, contributions ranged from the exclusion they felt because they were not part of an "MMF family" or in other words from a family that had a founding member of the MMF, or from a family who has a member affiliated with the MMF. The conversations also brought about a myriad of questions around how money flowing to the MMF was being spent, particularly with respect to the marketing of the MMF with the large billboards in Winnipeg and their travel, and whether or not it was benefitting Métis people on a community level as relative C shared,

> Who paid for those trips? You know, was it Chartrand? Was it Chartrand through MMF? So does that technically mean it was taxpayers' money instead of money going to families that need it? To single mothers? To families that need housing? To families that need repairs to their homes? To families and children that need care?

Putting this lens on MN-S, concerns were also raised about their spending and the unilateral decision making, holding all the control about where we are heading as a nation.

Historic Métis Governance Structures

We proceeded to discuss the aspects of how Métis communities used to operate (socially or politically) in previous generations that have been lost but have a place in the future of our

nation where contributions reflected the themes of (1) balance of energy, (2) community, and (3) connection to land. Building on the discussion about matriarchal leadership, we discussed how this form of leadership, which remains desirable among our people, by its very nature creates a balance of energy in our governance. This balance of energy is described by relative C as, “The mix between matriarchy and patriarchy, of being able to scold a politician but also hug grandchildren [….] just like a good household, a little bit of both is necessary." This desire to return to the roles Métis women had in our governance is reflected by relative B who expressed, "That goes back to your first question, what are your stories about Métis women, you know survival being on their backs is not what I am seeing reflected in our governance. There isn’t that same representation.” What is being said is that we want our governance to be reflective of how our communities look, because within our families, we still see our Métis women carrying these responsibilities.

In thinking about how we move our governance structure toward this, relative B says that,

> The future of it is still organizations like L’Union if they can have more money and have more of a platform where they can work against our municipal, provincial and federal governments to receive more funding to help out the average person who is homeless, struggles from addiction, and try to help out our community members to kind of invest into the community in that way. Then at least you can build them up, get a platform, educate them, and find ways to give them the skillset to help them thrive in our current society who even after several generations, they are having a hard time to find their place. Not to be super stereotypical but the type of person who would be fostering that type of

> relationship in all societies are women. Those are the ones who are going to be the caregivers who are known to be the caregivers and caretakers.

One challenge that was expressed and seemed to repeat itself was how other organizations that are doing this work and modelling this balance of energy, can be recognized in the same way that provincial Métis governments are. To bring it back to the MMF's marketing, they are controlling the narrative by asserting themselves as "the national Government of the Red River Métis" (Manitoba Métis Federation, n.d., para 2) and, as relative C states, "how could anyone think of any other government at this point? Someone like L'Union, how would anyone even recognize them … based solely on billboards?"

The next theme centered around community, specifically relationships, participation, mentorship, and respect for Elders. Relative B reflects on how the importance of community was modeled in their family saying, "My grandpa was born in the Red River settlement and he had a farm nearby there and his farm was known as the safe haven for any Métis travelers to come set up camp and they would stay there for as long as they want." This reminded me of how I was raised. From a young age we learned about the responsibilities we have to care for our families. Our door was always open to visiting relatives, and vice versa. It would not just be unusual to stay in a hotel or to rent a vehicle on our travels, we never did this. To that point, we would also never have expected this of visiting relatives. Our visits always centered around spending time together because this is how we built and maintained our relationships.

In Treaty 6, relative E reflects on how the way we understand and model our relationality has evolved in the contemporary context, but that we need to get back to our cultural teachings sharing that,

> People think because we can connect with everyone so quickly and you can get information so fast they lose sight of the tradition of sitting down for a cup of tea. I heard you got put in that teatime like you need to have a bunch of different time building up you know? […] People need to slow down, meet someone, talk to them ask them how they are doing. Tell them "this is where I'm from, are we related?" you know like finding some connections before you start asking of people and then also knowing protocol because a lot of people think you just give Indigenous people tobacco but that's kind of more like a First Nations thing and that might not even be all First Nations, you gotta get to know that nation. I just had […] one of my mentors came to my school and instead of tobacco he requested jam. […] Your ability to create relationships and maintain them [is] almost like keeping a fire too, and sometimes I'm not the best at that because I have so much stuff going on, but making sure you go back and revisiting those people let them know how much you care about them even if maybe you didn't work with them for a while. You still give them a message like you know what I really appreciate what you taught me in the past.

There is a lot of wisdom that can be drawn out of this quotation, but importantly what is being shared stresses the importance of building kinship through knowing one another including who and where we come from. From this place of knowing, we can better uphold our responsibilities to one another, as evidenced by the in depth understanding of how to enact protocol in these relationships given the cultural context that individual is coming from. In other words, our responsibilities are fluid and flexible, informed by the unique and distinct relationships we have with different relatives.

If we had kin who were unsure of how they fit into the broader kinship web, we had mechanisms such as storytelling for reconnecting them to their family's lineage and stories. Relative A reflects on this practice when sharing about their late father,

> That's how he connected people to our community. It was all about the kinship. That whole kinship piece has totally gone by the wayside. And we are now using a colonial process to identify who we are. Our traditions, our historical practices are now going by the wayside. We were known as storytellers.

In this way, being part of community informs our identity; therefore, the disconnection from the ways we organized ourselves as a community has impacted our understanding of self – a contentious issue our nation continues to face. Relative D explains this when saying,

> I just don't know a ton of people in my family or friends who have close ties to the actual community structures of the past which is why I feel like there are so many discrepancies with identity and all these other things. I think it's just hard because geographically things have changed so much and like the way that society operates like under capitalism for example has changed the way our communities look so much.

The ways our community organization has changed also connects to the last theme for this question which is connection to land. These parts of the conversations centered around how colonization has impacted the ways that historically we were in relation to the land, the ways it has caused divisions through the implementation of borders, and how we might move forward in the contemporary context while still upholding the longstanding responsibilities we carry in our relationship with the land and our more-than-human relatives. Relative B shares their concerns about our health in relation to the land saying that, "Our land is so poisoned. When I heard stories yesterday of hunters harvesting geese and they're so full of lesions from all the chemical

ponds that they've been staying in, how can you safely live off the land and do these types of things when we are just polluting all of our grounds? It's really disheartening for the future of Métis people." Relative C goes on to elaborate on the ways that environmental degradation is contributing to our disconnection from the land and our traditional food sources when sharing that, "Things we would have hunted, fished or trapped back in the day maybe isn't even viable as a primary food source in some territories for sure that are part of our homeland. It wouldn't even necessarily be feasible to do that just with the way things are right now." This quotation speaks to interruption to the ways we have provided for our families through subsistence practices like hunting, fishing and trapping. This was one of the primary ways we took care of our family and community while modelling what wâhkôhtowin can look like in practice. Further to this point, relative A shared how the impact of colonial borders on our homelands impacted the bison hunt sharing that, "[The] boundaries that came in with colonialism and contact and […] that's the way that government rolled back in the day. And so what they were talking about was those false borders that we as a people made to follow the buffalo. We never had those boundaries." The disconnection we have experienced from our homelands has also meant a disconnection from our teachings. Relative D speaks to this saying that, "Urban Métis landscape just looks so different. I guess that is the future, is how those communities emulate the same values and stories and protocols and what not, and how do we work within what we have now." The contemporary context we are living necessitated our flexibility in order to persist as a nation, but herein lies the crux of the very issue we are attempting to unpack.

Responsibilities to All Our Relations

We then talked about what our responsibilities are to all our relations (human and more-than-human), how the current Métis governments are or are not upholding these responsibilities, and what a governance structure might look like that honours and upholds these responsibilities.

The conversations that were had focused on (1) relational accountability, and (2) tending to our home fire. Understanding that relational accountability is our responsibility to all our relations, including our community, the land, and to other relatives beyond our Métis communities. Relative E offers up the following wisdom:

> I think educating on ourselves about who we are is really important and to ask questions, like ask your mom and dad or your mosôm or kôhkom so you can find out more about yourself first cause I think a lot of youth don't know who they are. That's the case with a lot of Indigenous youth, Métis or other Indigenous youth. They are losing the connection to the culture and to their ancestors. So for me it's been reaching out and talking to family members maybe I haven't talked to before on my dad side and hearing the stories and hearing about why they didn't identify as Métis a long time ago and now why are they doing it and I think you can help with other people as well because you can either show them the way and tell them all this is what I used and this is who I talk to.

Since our culture is one of oral history and storytelling, these relationships and connections with one another are integral to understanding who we are and how we fit into our expansive kinship networks. On this sharing of knowledge, relative C shares that "everything is so cyclical" meaning that all we know and all that we are is connected and thus important to share. On a community level, another relative emphasizes the importance of maintaining good relationships sharing that to do so is an ongoing practices which they liken to tending to a seedling, and that it goes beyond the self to contribute to the well-being of the greater community. This understanding of relationships as seedlings demonstrating the interconnection of us as Métis and the land is expressed by relative D who says that

> The biggest thing for me is that we are not separate from our surroundings. We are not greater than, we are not superior, we are just a part of it. We are just a part of the landscape, a part of the ecosystem, a part of our surroundings rather than being above it or being individuals. That means being a part of communities is being responsible to our communities, to the land, to animals, and to everything. That's a big one for me is not seeing myself as greater than, and having that underlying mutual respect for our natural surroundings. The land has accommodated us so much.

In this way, we can understand that the land is not only another relationship that we must nurture, but our teacher of how to be in good relationship because of the way she has always cared for us. Another relative builds on this understanding of the land as a teacher and how we should be looking to her wisdom and investing in renewable energy projects. They explain that what Métis governments choose to endorse or support has the potential to undermine our relational accountability, especially when they are backing extractive industry projects which are not only harming the land but also First Nations communities. Further to this point, where Métis governments choose to spend money also has implications as relative B points out, "Why aren't we investing massively in solar energy that can help out the environment, instead of buying massive buildings why aren't you buying massive plots of land that we can farm solar and then give that back to our communities? It a non-community-based mentality and it's more of just 'we are Métis and we exist' but it is not what's needed." This concern is echoed by relative C who questions where the leadership of Métis Elders is being upheld in these decisions, and how these decisions are helping us to grow as a nation keeping in mind how we need to care for the land for generations to come.

These insights bring to light the fact that not every person in a position of decision-making leadership in our governments is making decisions from this same place of understanding about how we should be treating one another. In this vein, relative E cautions that maintaining relational accountability does not mean that we give and give until we have nothing left by allowing ourselves to be exploited by those who do not share those values of respect and reciprocity. Drawing on wisdom from our First Nations relatives, they explain that,

> First Nations talk about keeping your home fire lit and tending to that and that really is about yourself like we said. We gotta take time for balance you know? The physical, we need to exercise, we need to eat good. We need to do things that make us feel good too. Maybe it's reading a book or doing some art but taking time and saying "no", that can also be modeled and people can learn that and see that you need to create boundaries. Boundaries are huge.

Future of Métis Governance

To conclude, I guided the conversation toward thinking about the future of the Métis Nation and where we should be focusing our efforts as communities. The responses reflected back to me themes of (1) community and (2) land and language. On a community level, what was shared are the ways current Métis governments have emphasized division through an exclusionary discourse around who is and is not Métis leading to the exclusion of legitimate Métis people whose families were part of other historic Métis communities in the Métis homeland other than the Red River settlement. Foundational to any community-building work, relative B shares, is ensuring the basic needs of individuals are met including food, water, and shelter, and that from there "they can then have the bandwidth to work towards education if they choose to, and they can help out their communities."

In terms of what comes next, what I heard was a desire for fostering more opportunities to connect as a community grounded in our similarities rather than emphasizing our differences as relative C shares that they would like to see our people prioritize, "creating space for Métis to gather, for them to feel safe in our culture, for not having to pick a French or an English side, for people to be where they want to be and creating a space for that." Similarly, relative D shared the desire to "not feel like I have to be a certain way or a "certain type of Métis" to be able to participate," while also wanting to maintain their agency to continue living in alignment with their family's history and teachings. What this really comes down to is acceptance and respect for one another as relative E states, "Whether it's language, culture, or governance, listen to one another, learn from one another and respect each other, those are my three golden rules I live by and so far I've had a really good life because of that." In addition to more of this community-building within our nation and among our own people, there were connections made between engaging in this work with First Nations relatives in reimagining our governance as relative B shared, "What's a way that you can keep the Métis people in this dream concept honest? Definitely matriarchal. Staying true to your roots and knowing the history is important and when I talk about that, I mean more the governance of Ojibway, Cree … like the surrounding areas as well as the Métis."

Our overlapping geographies led into conversations which were grouped into the final theme of land and language, which are arguably inseparable from one another, and within this was an exploration of the dynamic nature of cultural teachings and traditions over time. What is not being explicitly said is the interconnection of our cultural practices and our governance. As such, concerns were raised by another relative about how we can move forward with our self-governance without land and with our rights to land still up in the air. Considering how our lives

revolved around hunting bison, relative B reflects that, “Obviously we can’t follow the bison anymore, we are sedentary now and the odds of us being nomadic are very low, but there are still other ways … There still is that mentality of every action, every single thing that you do, is going to help out the planet for the next 100 years and every day that goes by that’s 100 years plus one.” Culture is not static. It evolves over time as the landscape of societies change. As Indigenous peoples, we have adapted to the changes with colonization and its myriad of impacts. Relative A explores this sharing,

> You know we know what colonialism did to Indigenous people across this country and are we still doing that? Is our governance doing that? Or are we incorporating balancing out the old ways with the new ways. There’s other things like “oh well I’ll show up when I show up” cause back in the old times, they didn’t go by the time we use now, but it’s like we live with this standard time so we can’t be like “yeah I’ll meet with you” and then an hour later “okay I’m ready to go” and you’re like “I got other stuff to do that thing right now.” So I think that’s the thing now is finding that balance.

I am deeply appreciative of the balanced critique of our governments, and what was offered in terms of imagining alternatives. I am grateful for the labour of all the relatives I visited with, and thankful for everything these relationships teach me. In the following chapter, I will be further unpacking the meaning of what was shared in these conversations and putting these thoughts into conversation with the literature Métis scholars have contributed to this field in order to build on their work in a generative way. I will connect this all back to the teachings I have learned are embedded in understandings of wâhkôhtowin, and how this can be operationalized, specifically building on an offering from Métis matriarch Maria Campbell, to think through what practical applications might be pulled out to shape our governance structure

in alignment with foundational cultural teachings. A deeper exploration of why relationships, specifically those with the bison, are so foundational to our governance will follow. I finish by exploring what nicâpân has taught me about wâhkôhtowin.

nipakitinikânân (we give an offering)

When I started this gathering of knowledge, I had a few driving forces. The first, was to reflect the conversations I and my Métis kin were having about reimagining our governance. My hope in moving these conversations into an academic space was to begin bridging the gap between the theorizing of change that often takes place in the academy, and the work that will need to be done on the ground to see this change realized. I will be further unpacking the meaning of what was shared in these conversations and putting these thoughts into conversation with the existing literature that scholars have contributed to this field. What my visiting and personal reflections examine are calls for a revival of matriarchal governance, recentering relational accountability or the responsibilities we have to all our relations, models of wâhkôhtowin including what nicâpân has taught me about relationality, and how this all coheres with a Métis feminist approach.

The title and approach for this chapter comes from Absolon (2022) who writes about reframing what is commonly referred to as the discussion as an "offering of knowledge" (p. 67). Absolon (2022) goes on to frame the meaning making process as ongoing rather than a fixed point in time where data was analyzed, since "making meaning was happening along the gathering journey […] in my own journal entries, through ceremony, in my dreams and in self-reflection" (Absolon, 2022, p. 67). I lost count of the times I would be falling asleep and have to turn my light on again to jot down a thought that came to mind pertaining to this work. Over time, I started to realize this was happening because it was the time in my day when I was calming and quieting my mind which made space to connect with the presence of my ancestors. As a result, I started to make more intentional time throughout my day to hold space for this deeply personal ceremonial practice. This chapter is an exploration of the time I spent in deep

thought, and moments I consider to be gifts from my ancestors that I experienced during this work.

Matriarchal Governance

In the stories of Métis women, there remained a noticeable gap of many detailed accounts or recognition of their contributions even within our own families. It is likely that this comes from generations of hiding who we were as a survival mechanism (Teillet, 2019). With these reflections in mind, it is apparent that although efforts have been made within academia to highlight the stories of Métis women as a way of tending to the exclusion and undermining of Métis women's important contributions as political actors (Adese, 2021; Allard, 2023; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Pigeon & Podruchny, 2022; Racette, 2012; Saunders & Dubois, 2019), there is still much work that needs to be done to share these on the ground to the everyday Métis person.

These stories of Métis women's contributions are important as they foreground the work of resurgence grounded in Indigenous feminist approaches by, as Starblanket writes, "centring that which has been marginalized, reconstructing that which has been fragmented and communicating that which has been silenced" (Green, 2017, p. 25). This is still to say that stories were brought up about Métis women today and all they are doing for our communities. One of the names that was brought up a few times was Paulette Duguay, the president of L'Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba (L'Union), a Métis community-based governmental organization in Treaty One. Thinking back to the Laws of the Hunt and how the labour of Métis women played a key role in laying the foundation for this system (Oster & Lizee, 2021), matriarchal leadership has been identified as being in alignment with historic Métis governance.

What I wish to draw out from the discussions during my visits is the way that this contemporary matriarchal, community-based, governance structure is not afforded the same recognition, opportunities or access to resources because it does not align with or embody the

imposition of a patriarchal, top-down power dynamic. L'Union serves as an example of this as relative C said it, "is heavily underfunded and it's run by women." Relative B shared that "It's very unfortunate to hear that a matriarch organization that is grassroots and trying to help out the average everyday Métis, which maybe there is some elitism in it with it being mostly French, but they are constantly weaponized and demonized." One critique that tends to be levied in this discussion is that there is a growing number of Métis women taking up positions of leadership in our current Métis provincial governments (Forsythe & Markides, 2024) as though this is synonymous with a revival of matriarchal governance, but seats do not translate to our perspectives being valued, or to the system itself changing. As relative A notes, "equitable representation is not about the numbers". This is supported by the framework Voth (2020) puts forward asserting "that Métis women require actual political power and empowerment in the nation" (Forsythe & Markides, 2024, p. 160).

Drawing on the work of Saunders and Dubois (2019) to build upon this, the way we understand and hold up the roles of Indigenous women on a community level is just as important as the role they play in our political landscape. It does not matter how many Métis women take up these spaces if the system itself, and how we treat them within our communities is still built upon and upholds patriarchal values. When I reflect on the conversations I had during my visits about Métis men in positions of power within our governance, there was a common feeling that our own men are against us or trying to suppress us from speaking up against them. Green (2017) writes about how there is often a pressure put on Indigenous feminists to not question or challenge 'traditions' despite the fact that they might be serving to uphold or reinforce patriarchal ideologies, as a way of standing in solidarity with our community or nation against the settler state. Whether our current governance structures mirror our traditional ones or not, I

feel that same message reinforced when considering what was shared in my visits of MMF's lack of support for kôhkoms on the frontlines of the Keystone pipeline protests, or their response to the predominantly female-led grassroots organization Red River Echoes. The overwhelming message is that we are not to challenge the Métis governments. This rhetoric "immunize[s] contemporary gendered power relations from critique and change" (Green, 2017, p. 14). Herein lies the success of the settler colonial project; our own people uphold cis heteronormative patriarchal ideologies and do the settler state's dirty work for them. It will not be until our own people can break free of this that we can truly be self-determining. My research grounds itself in Indigenous feminist teachings by seeking to problematize current Métis governance by questioning these unequal power dynamics and by articulating the ways that Métis governments in their very practice abandon our teachings about relational accountability, with the understanding "feminism is directed at transformative action" (Green, 2017, p. 7) that changes the conditions we live in.

Reflecting back to a comment made by a relative about moving toward a reclamation of our roles as Métis women within our communities as decision-makers and how that is a great way of modelling our cultural teachings, we need to consider the mechanisms for preparing our women to step into these roles. What does it mean to be a decision-maker? What are the unwritten and unspoken sets of ethics and responsibilities that underpin these roles? How are we equipping our women to be in these positions? What I heard from relatives is that this is where mentorship comes in. In Treaty 5, reflections were shared about how no reinvention is needed, but rather we have all the answers through looking at what we have always done. They talk about the community-based nature of teaching and mentoring Métis youth about how to step into these roles through instilling the values and skills within them, specifically leadership through gaining

respect from the ground up, and learning by doing. This once again supports the long-held notion of locals being the foundation of our governance (Dubois, 2015; Madden, 2008; McCreary et al., 2019; Saunders, 2013) and that it is through the advocacy and participation of our locals that change emerges in meaningful ways. From this vantage point, it becomes clear that these changes need to come from the ground up to recentre our locals, a key tenet of the foundation of our governance structure. There are strong female Métis Elders who are sharing these teachings. In my own family, I have seen the way nôhkom has given of herself in service to the Métis community in Treaty Four as a language keeper of Michif, as a jig caller, and as a published author of our stories. Even as her health has declined, she has always prioritized this work. This leads me to think about how much labour we are asking of our matriarchs in the process of building up younger generations to take on these roles, and if we are always acting in alignment with reciprocity, an ethical responsibility we carry. In this dream of matriarchal governance, what would be embedded within it are our responsibilities to all our relations.

Relational Accountability

Our governance used to mirror the organizational structure of our communities as Métis. I came to this work with questions around how can we adapt without losing the very foundation and core of who we are. Where do we change? Where do we push back against change to retain the ways we have always done things? I thought about how we would critique our governments and those in positions of power without undermining our responsibilities to each other. Ultimately, it is a delicate balance of wanting to ensure our needs are being met and that communities are being prioritized so that we can have better futures for our people while addressing pressing issues our people are facing. These critiques can so often turn into gossip, negativity and lateral violence. I thought about the settler colonial strategy of dividing and conquering, and how divisions are created within our communities, distracting us and preventing

us from working together toward our self-determination and sovereignty. It is important to note that none of the relatives I visited with were interested in uncritically tearing apart current Métis governments, or undermining any of the good work they have done, and continue to do for our communities. They offered a balanced understanding of what these governments have provided for us as a nation, without turning our eyes away from areas requiring attention and improvement. Furthermore, drawing on Voth's (2020) framework of "indignant disobedience", Lindquist, Jobin and Letendre emphasize that "Being indignantly disobedient and being in good relation are not mutually exclusive. Enacting kinship responsibilities also means challenging colonial and capitalist structures and practices in our communities" (Forsythe & Markides, 2024, p. 163). One of these areas of critique was how our governments are (or are not) supporting everyday Métis community members which was brought up by various relatives. I believe this is reflective of the importance we place on our responsibilities to one another, and are therefore indicative of what we are calling for in our governance. These contributions are reflective of our priorities, our morals, and our teachings around wâhkôhtowin – our responsibilities to our relatives, ethics of community care and the health and well-being of our people. What I hear Métis people collectively asking for is more accountability to ensure Métis governments are upholding these responsibilities that are embedded within our relationships with each other as Métis people, our relationships with our other Indigenous kin, and our relationships with our more-than-human relatives and the land.

One of the threats identified to relational accountability through these visits are the politics of recognition which Coulthard (2014) defines as the "expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to 'reconcile' Indigenous assertions of nationhood with settler-state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity claims in some form

of renewed legal and political relationship with the Canadian state" (p. 3). What runs deep in our relationship as Métis with the settler state is that we have been at their whim. This is demonstrated by Dubois (2015) who writes about the historic agreements the Métis entered into with the federal government such as the Métis Nation Framework Agreement that required that we cooperate with their agenda in order to garner their support. Some relatives believe this deeply paternalistic relationship, particularly between the federal government and the MMF still informs the political landscape today. We can see this in action as one relative comments about the MMF being against the Keystone Pipeline protests. What this relative identified is how this lack of support undermines our Métis government's responsibility to our own matriarchs and other Indigenous relatives who were on the frontlines of these resistance efforts.

This also brings in an important dialogue about land and our more-than-human relatives. We know that a colonial governance structure is inherently problematic when we are thinking about upholding our responsibilities to the land and all of creation, because it is built on capitalism which depends on extraction that necessitates a disregard for these relationships (Coulthard, 2014). Many scholars have written about how we cannot be self-governing under these constraints (Lavoie, 2019; McCreary et al., 2019; Poitras, 2009).

When Métis governments accept money from the federal government, we need to be thinking about the tradeoffs because nothing is ever "no strings attached." There are always implications to making these deals or entering into these agreements or relationships with the colonial government. When I think of the implications, I think about what we are co-signing, whether consciously or inadvertently. The controlling nature of the historic and contemporary interactions between Métis governments and the settler state can help us to understand how our leadership is now replicating this within our own governance in their relationship to the

grassroots and locals through the way their agency and participation are structurally undermined. Relatives from a Treaty Five local explain this well during our visits chronicling the conversations they are being left out of that the provincial representative bodies are engaging in. This lack of meaningful participation from the grassroots locals is also referenced by Saunders & Dubois (2019) and echoed by Lavallée-Hecker (2019). How is a Métis "self-government" that upholds colonial agendas any different than our communities being governed by the municipal, provincial and federal governments themselves? We have to imagine an alternative and know that it is not only possible, actually the only way forward. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) writes, "The crux of resurgence is that Indigenous peoples have to re- create and regenerate our political systems, education systems, and systems of life from within our own intelligence" (p. 226).

I am inspired by calls my relatives are making to live out our self-determination and sovereignty in the everyday, rather than waiting for a government, whether colonial or Métis, to recognize this or asking for their permission. Another threat to relational accountability is the division around who is and is not Métis. This is a deeply nuanced and important conversation that countless Indigenous peoples are engaging in. Equally important, however, is how discuss it. I think we need to take great care to ensure we are not excluding legitimate Métis people from our nation due to the multitude of ways that the settler colonial project has disenfranchised or disconnected them from being in relationship with their nation. Angie Tucker takes up this conflict when asserting that, "We must rewrite who we are as a contemporary people while resisting the prescribed models of indigeneity that are still largely controlled, manipulated, and imagined by those outside of our communities" (Tucker, 2024, p. 30) while also rejecting notions of Métis culture as a monolith that does not change. However, the other side to this is that

allowing those who are not legitimately Indigenous to claim identity with our nations has troubling impacts for our communities and inter-Indigenous relations as evidenced by concerns around the Métis Nation of Ontario's more expansive understanding of citizenship and belonging within the nation and the illegitimate "Métis" organizations in Eastern Canada and how this has impacted Wabanaki nations in the region to name a couple examples. In addition to this, it perpetuates ongoing colonialism as this act of pretending to be Indigenous is one of many "settler moves to innocence" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.1). In any case, as Metallic and Simon (2023) write on Indigenous identity, "The areas of uncertainty are far greater than those that are clear. As a result, there will always be a degree of uncertainty that must be managed" (p. 66).

What is a given is that these conversations around identity are tense, complex, and present many opportunities for conflict to arise between our own people, and between Métis and other Indigenous nations. As we continue to grapple with these questions around identity within our nation, I hope we can maintain these teachings of relationality and how they extend to the ways we resolve these and other conflicts. Relatives expressed during these visits how we used to find consensus while maintaining respect in our relationships which is consistent with the contributions of Madden (2008) and Saunders and Dubois (2019), however this is challenged by Teillet (2019) who writes that "The Métis Nation has never made its decisions by consensus. They are prepared to argue passionately for a long time in the decision-making process, but in the end, they always vote in the majority rules" (p. 176).

I sat with this gathered knowledge for many months, unsure of what I wanted the outcome of this work to be, and what call(s) to action I am asking of my Métis kin. I sat across from another Métis, Maddi, over tea visiting in a downtown coffee shop in Victoria. Far from our homelands, we found each other. As we shared about the grief we have both experienced of

inheriting the legacies of Métis people who have not been good visitors in these territories, and the loneliness of this space, I remembered that it has always been about our relationships and the building of community together. We made plans to go to the local jigging group together, and talked about our dreams of being part of a grassroots collective of Métis youth challenging our governance so they may reflect us and the responsibilities we have to our other Indigenous kin. This idea was echoed by many of the relatives I visited with, with ideas being brought forward about looking to our First Nations relatives to make treaties with them and improve those relationships first and foremost. What became clear the more I reflected on these visits is that our governance cannot be separated from our relationships with the language, the land, our more-than-human relatives or future generations. This is evidenced by the Laws of the Buffalo Hunt, one of our historic sets of laws that were grounded in our relationship to land, to the bison, and to one another (Dubois, 2015; Gaudry, 2014; Lavallée-Heckert, 2019; Nault, 2022; Oster & Lizee, 2021; Poitras, 2009; Saunders, 2013; Saunders & Dubois, 2019; Teillet, 2019). These relationships are foundational to our governance and can therefore be understood as are our legal framework. These laws governed how we were to be in relation with one another and what these responsibilities are (Gaudry, 2014). It was always relational. I struggle to see the same accountability within our current governments to uphold this relational accountability. Our relationships with the bison in particular represented balance for us as Métis.

I was driving with my partner, Dakota, by Elk Island National Park about a year after my first encounter with the bison. I shared how I had heard of them referred to as “keystone species” but did not completely understand what this meant until watching the film *Singing Back The Buffalo* where Tasha Hubbard (2024) goes into great depth about how bison care for the land and all her inhabitants in all the ways they interact and are in relation with the land. We reflected on

this and the positive impact the reintroduction of the bison has had on prairie lands, our homelands, land we hold great reverence for. What would happen if we gave the bison a seat at the table in Métis political spaces? Observing the way the bison care for the land and all her inhabitants demonstrates how we are to be in relationship with them rooted in our cultural teachings. As my relative shared in our visit, we are not disconnected from the land and we have a role to play in thinking about how our decisions now impact the land and future generations, just like the bison has always showed us.

In thinking about the resurgence of our governance, my relatives shared that we need to attend to the ways that our governments have undermined our responsibilities to our human kin, and our more-than-human kin, and how we can work to repair those relationships. In order to do so, our governments will likely find themselves dramatically renegotiating of our relationship with the settler state, whose priorities are constantly predicated on extraction. However, we must remember that resurgence is transformative, and that, as Starblanket writes, "resurgence […] emphasizes autonomy from state institutions, dispensing with the need to strategically position ourselves as homogenous in relation to outside parties" (Green, 2017, pp. 27-28). I look to our renewed relationship with the bison after years of being separated from one another through colonization for an understanding of how the resurgence of a more responsive Métis governance structure can look, because as Starblanket writes, "The term 'resurgence' implies a process of renewal or awakening from a period of dormancy" (Green, 2017, p. 25). I thought about my first visit with bison and about how I knew things would never be the same. I know a governance system based on our people hunting roaming bison is not possible but maybe pulling certain threads that were strengths of this governance system and breathing life into hem now can still have a positive impact, just like bringing the bison back to these lands. I think this is also a

powerful way that we as Métis can show honour and respect to our bison kin but grounded the way we move through the world now in the relationship we had with them.

Models of wâhkôhtowin

I am always learning about what wâhkôhtowin means and how it looks in practice by those that embody our cultural teachings in the everyday. As Absolon (2022) writes, "Fluent speakers say that meaning is lost when translating Anishinaabe concepts to English […] because the English language did not grow from an Anishinaabe cultural worldview or epistemology" (p. 23). Similarly, nêhiyawêwin and Michif words embed more meaning and teachings than a simple translation can articulate. At the Indigenous Relationality Workshop in Banff, Métis matriarch Maria Campbell spoke about moving conversations beyond wâhkôhtowin as a one dimensional articulation of kinship, but rather understanding it as "rebirth, chaos [and] resistance" (Campbell et al., 2024). What this offers is a conceptualization of wâhkôhtowin as always changing to respond to the context of what our communities are experiencing, what we are living through and resisting against, and the new realities we are birthing every day.

I am not suggesting that Maria is offering the ultimate definition, but there is a utility in operationalizing it in this way. What this understanding of wâhkôhtowin calls us to understand is that it is not just about being related, but a constant renewing or rebirth of how we are in relationship with one another and what our accompanying responsibilities look like in practice. I discussed how I believe we have moved to a time where we are going to have to renegotiate our relationship with the settler state. I believe what needs to happen at the same time is a renegotiation of our relationships with our fellow Métis community members, our First Nations kin, and the land we live and visit with. Through visiting, my relatives shared an overwhelming desire to show up in a dramatically different way by upholding our relational accountability, whether this is through supporting First Nations' frontline efforts in protection of the land,

making decisions with this protection at the forefront, or actively strengthening our kinship through community-building. Starblanket similarly takes up this understanding of resurgence grounded in all our relations as a dynamic practice when writing that "By contemplating resurgence as a set of living and evolving ideas and practices that are open to dialogue and reinterpretation, we stand to gain a more intimate understanding of the transformative possibilities that exist within our relations with our family and friends and within our relations with ideas and knowledge, as well as within our relationship with ourselves" (Green, 2017, p. 34). Reflecting on ways wâhkôhtowin was modeled to me, without it ever being named as such, brings several stories to mind.

Nôhkom Judy modeled wâhkôhtowin when I first moved back to Regina as an adult. She invited me over, knowing I was lonely and homesick in my apartment without my ever needing to tell her, put on a movie and ordered us Mary Brown's. She would tell me about our family connections in Cowessess and the surrounding communities even calling up these cousins to introduce me to them. She encouraged me to strengthen these relationships and to apply for my status, providing me with all the information and documents I needed to do so. This ethic of generosity and sharing our knowledge flowed so freely from her. One of the days I was visiting with nôhkom Judy, she shared with me that nôhkom Bea was having a feast for her birthday and she wanted her to bring "Anna's girl", referring to myself, as Anna is nôhkom Jeanne's nickname. I never made it to her birthday, and she made her journey to the spirit world the following year. I know I should have visited more, but even though we did not get to be in relationship in the way I wanted to when she was here, she gave me the greatest gift which was the feeling of belonging and being welcomed into our extended family. From the stories shared with me about her, she was always teaching us about wâhkôhtowin and how we bring our

relatives into circle. I thank her for that and acknowledge that expressing this gratitude is part of how I am continuing to nurture our relationship between here and the beyond. What Maria's intervention sparked for me is to understand wâhkôhtowin as a dynamic practice, and that it is never too late for things to change or be different. In my mind, I rewrite this story as a way of healing.

I am sad that I missed nôhkom Bea's feast so I close my eyes I imagine to the best of my ability what it would have been like to be there. I see her smiling face and I go up to hug her, wish her a happy birthday and thank her for inviting me. I imagine us sitting together visiting and the stories she shares me with about our family and my relatives in Cowessess. My eyes well up as I begin to see my spirit held in a web of all my relatives as if I am looking at a picture that is slowly coming into focus. This is one of the many ways I was actively "attending to the spirit, heart, mind and body" (Absolon, 2022, p. 120) on this journey.

It is impossible to talk about Métis governance today without acknowledging the tension that exists between Métis and First Nations' governments. I want to clarify that this is a critique about Métis governments, not Métis people. I often think Métis and First Nations peoples are critiquing the same thing. As Métis, we need to hold ourselves to a higher standard, to check our egos at the door, to recognize the immense privilege we walk into spaces with due to our proximity to whiteness, and to move beyond the fear we have inherited of our erasure as a nation.

During the writing of this thesis, I was connected with someone around my age from Cowessess. After introducing ourselves which included thorough self-locations of who our families are, I found out that they knew nicâpân Sera. They shared with me early memories from their life of her visiting with their relatives when they were young. Even from the great beyond,

she continues to teach me and guide this work. She showed me that even after being disenfranchised, raising her children on the road allowance community around Crooked Lake and moving to the city, her relationships from her community – her home – were still so important to her, and she made a conscious effort to maintain them throughout her life all the way to the end. She modeled exactly what I believe she wanted to see me take up in my own life. She is the tether, the connective tissue between understanding who I am as Métis, but also being First Nation.

It is nothing short of miraculous to me that this connection was brought to me at the same time that I was grappling with these thoughts of Métis and First Nations relationships. I know this was a gift from her. I am getting to know her more now through people who knew and loved her, nurturing our relationship between here and the beyond. I pray to her and thank her for everything she continues to teach me. I know more than ever that this is what nicâpân would have wanted. As it stands, myself and my Métis kin who are also First Nations will never be fully recognized by all the nations we belong to, but I reject any imposition that I have to choose. I have always been pushed and pulled in my understanding of who I am and the multitude of accompanying responsibilities based on my identity. Unbeknownst to me, this work for me was also about solidifying my understanding of how to bring the intersections of my identity to dance hand-in-hand and be in relationship together.

Concluding Thoughts

In chapter one, I explored what has been written about Métis governance in the past and present, the limited literature on Métis women's political participation, and understandings of our kinship responsibilities with human and more-than-human relatives. This began to lay the foundation for reimagining the future of Métis governance through the resurgence of cultural teachings around wâhkôhtowin. I went on to explore the methodologies with which I engaged in

this research including visiting with the bison, land, water, and ancestors (Davey, 2023; Ferland, 2022; Gaudet, 2019; Flaminio, Gaudet & Dorion, 2020), and using the spiritual exchange inquiry (Bouvier & MacDonald, 2019). Through an ongoing iterative process of receiving continuous informed consent, I presented what was shared during the visiting I did with my relatives in chapter three. The major themes I explored were stories of Métis women, the current Métis governance structure, historic Métis governance structures, the responsibilities to all our relations, and the future of Métis governance. In this chapter, my visiting, personal reflections, and contributions from other Métis scholars came together to highlight calls for a revival of matriarchal governance and recentering relational accountability or the responsibilities we have to all our relations which I argue are in a lot of ways synonymous. I examined how important the historic and ongoing contributions are of Métis women in approaching resurgence from an Indigenous feminist framework.

In putting what I have learned through this framework, I understood the interconnection between colonialism, environmental extraction and degradation, capitalism, and the patriarchy which are all predicated on a disregard of the values and teachings I have learned are embedded in wâhkôhtowin. This all coheres with an Indigenous feminist approach to resurgence because naming and challenging the ways that patriarchal values underpin our governance and imagining alternatives is an inherently Indigenous feminist practice. Employing wâhkôhtowin in reshaping our governance will therefore necessitate, to borrow Maria Campbell's words, that it is chaotic, resistant and will be transformative, creating different realities, and relationships with the land and our human relatives as a result. For an understanding of how to embody this, we can look to the bison's relationship with the land and all her inhabitants, including us as Métis. I concluded by exploring models of wâhkôhtowin including what nicâpân and other women in my family

have taught me, which began to challenge my understanding of time and how the lessons we are to learn on our earth walk can come to us from our ancestors who exist in other realms, like I learned from nicâpân about the importance of maintaining our relationships with our First Nations kin.

In considering what can be pulled out as practical applications, what I heard is that it does not always have to be profoundly "traditional" activities. A lot of the time it comes down to spending time together, sharing stories, and strengthening those kinship bonds. There is a utility to being in community in this way on our homelands. The theorizing is important, but we cannot forget that the work also takes place when we leave the confines of the university. There are clear calls for more grassroots local organizing to remind our leaders of the power that comes from the ground up, and how much further we can get if we remember that we never needed recognition from the settler state. I want to imagine a radically different alternative because what is the worst that can happen? For the Métis people who grew up along trap lines that no longer exist, or off the land in ways that can no longer be replicated in those areas because of environmental degradation, the worst has already happened.

We need to remember that the practices outlined throughout this work do not just exist aspirationally, and what I want to emphasize is that we have always had the knowledge and wherewithal we needed to govern ourselves. There are aspects of how Métis communities used to operate, socially or politically in previous generations that may have been lost or fragmented, but have a place in the future of our nation. The language, land, and our relationships cannot be separated from each other. They are all interconnected or interwoven together, because we cannot talk about governance without talking about intergenerational mentorship or without talking about the importance of upholding protocols and relationships because they all depend on

one another. The key to how we can move forward in reimagining our governance is finding ways to carry these ethics, protocols and teachings while making them conducive for the contemporary world we live in now. As Gina Starblanket writes, “Practices of resurgence emerge from a worldview that acknowledges a living relationship between past, present, and future, and makes possible the imagination of strategies of cultural renewal based on the interplay of pre-colonial pasts and decolonial futures” (Green, 2017, p. 25). To bring in further wisdom on this topic, Kim Tallbear (2022) writes, “I resist a lineal, progressive representation of movement *forward* to something better, or movement *back* to something purer. I bring voices and practices into conversation from across what is called, in English, time” (p. 22). I stood in the Qu’Appelle Valley with nôhkom Judy and my parents, and I finally understood how the past, present and future all exist in the same moment. I was taught to understand them as separate, and yet I think about my ancestors who belong to this land, nicâpân who was born here and attended the residential school, nôhkom who was born on the road allowance around Crooked Lake and who attended the day school, my family standing here now, and I envision my niece and my future children knowing and loving this land in the way they were always supposed to. All of this is happening at the same time in a way that is not separate from one another. The land remembers and holds us all at once.

nôhkom's Kitchen Table (Concluding Thoughts)

As I came to the end of this work, I found out that the Indian Status applications I had submitted with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) nearly a year prior for my mother, my two sisters, and myself had all been approved. In the aftermath of my call with ISC learning this information, I sat at my desk at work and wondered why I was not happier. After all, I know how much work I put into this. These applications represented my whole life of never feeling white enough or brown enough, years of gathering stories from extended family, compiling long form birth certificates, pieces of identification, marriage certificates, photos, and genealogies, and then another few more months completing applications, driving to a nearby band office and the regional ISC office. I was carefully tending to each puzzle piece of my history. It does not feel safe to be relieved, let alone happy, because there is a big part of me that feels that if the federal government gave this to me, then they also have the power to take it away. It is interesting to me that I can intellectually understand how federal recognition does not serve us, but in the absence of an actioned alternative, I find myself placing value in it in my own life. I sit in this contradiction. I thought about nicâpân Sera going to get her status back after the 1985 amendment and how important this was to her. I wonder if she knew the seeds she was planting in our family by doing that and that we would be here getting our status all these years later. I thought about the handful of times I have visited Cowessess in my adult life, and how it is full of people I do not know. I thought about how the only names I recognized when I visited were on tombstones of my family members that were buried there. I thought about the way my extended family is sprawled across the prairies now, many of whom I have not met. I wondered if maybe the damage of colonization had been done. Maybe too much time had passed. I ended the year travelling back to Saskatchewan and brought these thoughts and feelings to the kitchen table while I visited at nôhkom Jeanne's. I am reminded of Gaudet and Rancourt's words about

"returning to our grandmothers' and aunties' kitchen tables to understand their living experiences and therefore ours" (Forsythe & Markides, 2024, p. 174). I think about all nôhkom's kitchen tables over the years. They were joyful places where laughter between her and nicâpân would fill the room. The kitchen table was also where we would share tears, or where I would brace myself for another story that would leave a pit in my stomach that I will subsequently learn how to live with; another story I would help her carry. My understanding of who she is, and all she has lived through became more complex and multidimensional every time we sat there.

> I stop at the Tims on Vic Ave East to grab a double-double and head north of the tracks. Pulling onto her cul-de-sac, I glance over at the house across the street. I remember visiting in the summer and seeing two little girls on those front steps yelling "Hi nôhkom!" They were in one of her Michif kindergarten classes. Each time I find myself here, I know it may be the last. Inside, there she is sitting at her kitchen table wearing her visor to protect her eyes. I'm reminded of the stories she told me about lateral violence, jealousy, bad medicine and how she lost her eyesight. I grab a mug from her cupboard, pour half of her coffee into it, and I sit with her. After taking a sip, she takes another drag of her cigarette. As she exhales and the space between us fills with smoke, I tell her everything I am grappling with including the layers of disconnection I felt growing up and everything I was coming to realize that I had missed out on and will never get to experience. I tell her how I thought getting status would make me feel like I finally belonged, but that now I do not feel like I fully belong there or within the Métis Nation. As my heart is splitting open, she sits there and listens. She reassures me that it is never too late to reconnect, and in fact, I have a responsibility to do so. I tell her I love her. As I kiss her soft, wrinkly cheek, she tells me she loves me too. I know how scary it is for her

to say that, and each time we exchange those words I know it heals something in the both of us. The love between us is palpable in spite of all the trauma and ugliness of colonization that persist and that are always trying to separate us from knowing and loving each other in this way. We will always resist.

I still have a lot of work ahead of me reconnecting to community and figuring out how I can use my gifts to contribute and to be of service to the people and the land who have given so much to me, even at a distance. I learned from the wisdom of the relatives I visited with that the work we do in academia is important. I am always leaving space for things to be different and feeling hopeful that things will change even if we are not always clear what the path to changing it will be. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2017) work has helped me to think deeply about how we imagine or vision alternatives futures as Indigenous peoples. I do not always think it is necessarily about having a tangible alternative. Sometimes, it is more about building the capacity to first imagine one. I also learned that we need to remember how to be in community, how to sit around a campfire, and how to contribute to the work taking place on the ground because that is where change happens most directly.

The Métis political climate was charged when I began this work, and only became more so throughout it. One notable development within the Métis political landscape since wrapping up this work is that the MMF has begun engagements with community members to consult on revisions to their bylaw on locals. As I have learned from the relatives I visited with, this only at best has the potential to be a positive development if the outcome is giving decision-making power back to locals and that it does not end up being lip service while top down control persists. However, changing bylaws or the structuring of locals alone does not address the root of what remains problematic within our governance. Green (2017) writes that "Indigenous feminism is

extricably bound to the experiences of Indigenous peoples with colonialism, with its legitimating ideology of racism and white privilege and with the oppressive reality of the contemporary settler state that is infused with the ideology and thus enacts it in the political culture and policy" (pp. 4-5). I argue alongside my relatives throughout this research that our own governance as Métis has fallen vulnerable to the infiltration of these threads, as well as the patriarchal values that Green (2017) goes on to argue exist in relationship with these interlocking systems of oppression. Without a doubt, these conversations and critiques are tense to have. I understand this work will likely garner a strong critique, especially from those within the Métis Nation who benefit from the way these systems currently operate. If you are living this and spending even half as much time in conversation with our relatives or thinking about these things as I am, I welcome your critique. If I have learned anything from what was shared with me throughout this process it is that we are not going to get anywhere on our own, and we need to learn how to tend to the divisions within our nation in a productive way, reviving those generative conflict resolution practices that have served us in the past.

Part of the difficulty of our lived realities as Indigenous peoples, and I am sure this extends to other racialized folks, is not having the words to explain the racism, discrimination, or lateral violence we experience. I am grateful for the years of education that has given me the language to articulate injustices and to speak truth in ways that I do not always feel capable of in my body, but always do in my mind. I hope that this work offers up helpful ways of thinking and talking through these topics, always grounded in our responsibilities to one another. I want to empower Métis kin who are already talking about this to know they are not alone in their concerns and for there to be growing consciousness among us to demand something different, something better, and something more in alignment with our teachings. I want us to question

how our governance is and to reimagine how we want it to be. When we have the language to name what is not working and why, we can feel empowered to organize around an alternative.

It excites me that I might read this again in a decade or two and know so much more than I know now. I leave this work unfinished, because the work is never really done.

êkosi pitamâ (that is it for now).

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