

M A R I A M A Z Z O L I

Michif loss and resistance in four Metis communities

Kahkiyaw mashchineenan, "All of us are disappearing as in a plague"

Abstract

Thirty-three years ago, Crawford (1985) described Michif use in four Metis communities in Canada and the USA, and singled out Michif as a stable language, common to several communities in the North American prairies. This paper focuses on four Metis communities as of 2017, and describes patterns of Michif loss and strategies of resistances within those. First, I describe the different varieties of Michif and locate some communities within central Canada and the USA where Michif is still spoken. Then, I focus on the communities of the Turtle Mountain Reservation (USA), Boggy Creek and San Clara (Manitoba), Muskowekwan First Nation (Saskatchewan) and Brandon (southern Manitoba).

Résumé

Il y a trente-trois ans, Crawford (1985) a décrit l'utilisation du Michif dans quatre communautés Michif au Canada et aux États-Unis. Il a distingué le Michif en tant que variété linguistique stable, commun à plusieurs communautés dans les prairies nord-américaines. Cette contribution se concentre sur quatre communautés Michif en 2017 et décrit les modes de disparition du Michif ainsi que les stratégies de résistance de la population. Dans un premier temps, je présente les différentes variétés de Michif. Ensuite, je me concentre sur les communautés de la réserve de Turtle Mountain (États-Unis), de Boggy Creek et de San Clara (Manitoba), de la Première Nation Muskowekwan (Saskatchewan) et de Brandon (sud du Manitoba).

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1. Introduction

In 1985 John Crawford published a paper in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* in which he describes Michif use in four Metis communities, of which three are located in Canada (San Clara and Boggy Creek, Camperville and Duck Bay, and St. Lazare) and one in the USA (Belcourt, Turtle Mountain Reservation). He concluded that the Michif spoken in the four communities was essentially the same language, a coherent language variety that pointed to two recognizable sources for its lexical composition: nouns were mainly of French origins, while verbs had mainly a Plains Cree (Nēhiyawēwin) origin. Although the language appeared to be spoken in slightly different dialects in the different settings, Crawford claimed those were indeed varieties of a unique language and therefore stemmed from a recent common ancestor. Crawford also claimed that these varieties of the Michif language must have developed prior to the Westward migration of the Metis following the Red River (1870) and the Northwest (1885) resistances. Crawford's work was instrumental to the recognition of Michif as a distinct language spoken by different Metis communities both in the USA and in the Prairie Provinces of Canada. In 1983, Crawford had also edited a Michif-English dictionary authored by two Turtle Mountain Michif speakers, Patline Laverdure and Ida Rose Allard (cf. also previous work on Michif, e.g. Rhodes 1977). In 1997 Peter Bakker published the first monograph focusing on Michif, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*. The book was a milestone which contributed to spreading the awareness of Michif as a stable language common to several communities within the Metis homeland. In July 2000 Michif was adopted as the historical and official language of the Metis Nation through a resolution passed by the Metis National Council in Canada (Barkwell 2004, 1).

Michif formed as a stable variety in the first decades of the nineteenth century and received the first mentions in literature in the late 1970s, thus very recently. Bakker (1997, 26 and 162) notes that the language was not mentioned in historical sources by fur traders, travellers or missionaries in their notes and reports. Apparently, its earliest mention is found in the St Boniface newspaper *Le Metis* of 18 November 1875¹ (cited in Gillon/Rosen 2018, 1-2). Michif developed as a language of internal communication among the early Red River Metis, and it therefore was rarely used with outsiders.

The term "Michif" as used today by both speakers and scholars refer to at least three distinct languages, as exemplified in Figure 1 (Bakker 1997, 119-139; Rosen 2007, 3; Bakker 2013; Mazzoli accepted-2):

1 " [...] surtout les Métis français qui, en parlant Crie entre eux, ont pris l'habitude d'y mêler une foule de mots française [sic] – A vrai dire ils forment leurs phrases, moitié français et moitié Crie – c'est en quelque sorte une autre langue, qui parait bien risible à ceux qui n'y sont pas habitués."

- *Michif* (southern Michif, or mixed Michif) is the mixed language Plains Cree/ Metis French, that is spoken in the communities described in this paper. It is mostly spoken in Manitoba, southern Saskatchewan and North Dakota. It is indicated by stars in Figure 1. Its speakers refer to it as *Michif* or *Krii* (*la laang Michif* or *li Krii*). This is also the language referred to in Crawford (1985), and Bakker (1997).
- *Michif Cree* (northern Michif, indicated by filled triangles in Figure 1) is basically Plains Cree with extensive French noun borrowing, including in the basic lexicon, but not as extended as in southern Michif. It is spoken mainly in northern Saskatchewan (e.g. Ile a la Crosse, Saskatchewan), and it was called *Nihyawiwini* or Cree (in English) by its speakers until the 1980s.
- *Michif French* (empty triangles in Figure 1) is a variety of Canadian French with great Algonquian influence in the phonology, syntax, and lexicon, mainly spoken in southern Manitoba (e.g. Saint Laurent, Manitoba). Its speakers refer to it as *Michif*.

The emergence of the Metis nation is related to the dynamics of the European settlement in what are today Canada and the USA. In the second half of the eighteenth century, in the context of the fur trade, marriages between fur traders, or *voyageurs* (mostly of French origin), and Indigenous women became common in the Great Lakes region (present-day southern Ontario and Michigan), where the early mixed communities developed (Peterson 1978). However, the origins of the Metis nation as a contemporary political/ethnic entity have been traced back to the Red River settlement (around present-day Winnipeg, Manitoba) and are related to the resistance organized by the Red River Metis to the expansion of newly formed Canada in the second half of the nineteenth century. The specific language blend in mixed (southern) Michif was also created in this context (Bakker 1997, 274ff). The years of the resistances and the final political defeat of the Metis forced the population to disperse towards the West, which resulted in pockets of Michif speakers today primarily located in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and North Dakota (and some moved as far west as Alberta, British Columbia and Montana).

In this paper, I will describe four Metis communities in Canada and the USA where Michif is still spoken or has recently vanished. In section 2, I will portray the sociolinguistics of Michif, the level of endangerment and its structural outline. In the further subsections, I will describe four Metis communities and discuss issues related to the language or cultural identity. In section 3.1, about the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation (North Dakota – USA), I address the issue of the State borders and the identity of the Michif community in the southern side of the Medicine line. In section 3.2, about San Clara and Boggy Creek (Manitoba – Canada), I tackle the Metis land related harvesting rights by discussing the court case *Langan* 2011. In section 3.3, about Muskowekwan First Nation (Saskatchewan – Canada), I discuss colonial violence and language loss in this community, where Michif has recently vanished. In section 3.4, about Brandon (southern Manitoba – Canada), I report on

current efforts in reclaiming Michif through adult language learning and Mentor-Apprentice immersion programs.

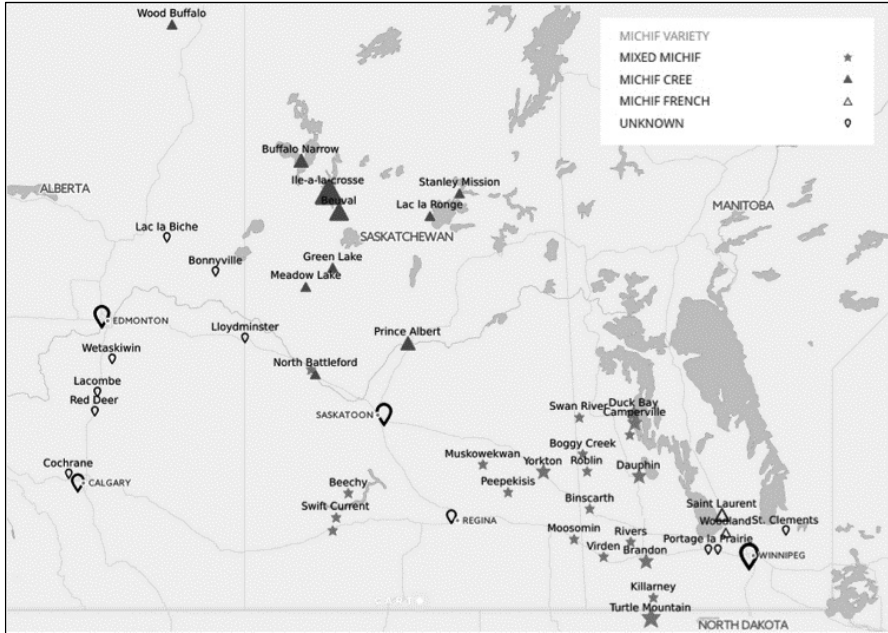


Figure 1: Communities where Michif speakers are present as of 2016 in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and North Dakota²

2. Michif general linguistic structure and sociolinguistic situation

Michif is a mixed language that shows a clear etymological split in the source of its lexicon. Among the speakers interviewed by Peter Bakker, the percentage of French nouns ranged from 67 to 90 % of the total number of nouns used, while the percentage of the Plains Cree verbs ranged from 86 to 99 % of the total number of verbs (Bakker 1997, 137-141). In fact, Michif is classified as a Noun-Verb mixed language in Bakker (2017) that combines Plains Cree verb phrases (e.g. taash-

2 Figure 1 is mainly based on data from Statistics Canada 2016 (and the *Kitchitwa Ondweve Nooding report for North Dakota*, 2011). The map gives the approximate location of the speakers who identified themselves as having Michif as a mother tongue in the Canadian 2016 Census, as well as information on the Michif variety they speak, according to the available information on each community. Archived version at <https://tefra.carto.com/builder/d8e5de34-7b69-4b00-b971-75c5e0101186/embed>. The online version gives access to the number of speakers in each community (all numbers are subjected to rounding to the closest multiple of five).

kinikaateew, kaa-ohpikihaat, cf. 1 and 2) and Metis French noun phrases (e.g. *la rom*, *la faam* cf. 1 and 2).³ In the examples, French-derived Michif language is in italics:

(1) *la rom* taashkin-ikaatee-w *aa'n deu pchit rom*.
 DEF.F room.F.INAN beat.TI-MID.II-IND.0 in two little room.F.INAN
 'the room is divided into two small rooms' (adapted from Laverdure/Allard 1983, 77)

(2) *la faam* awa kaa-ohpikiha-aa-t Cinderella kii-wiihkom-ikaasho-w.
 DEF.F woman.F.AN this.AN CNJ-raise.TA-DIR-CNJ.3→4 Cinderella PST-invite.TA-MID.AI-IND.3S
 'the woman who raised Cinderella had been invited for the feast' (Fleury & Bakker 2004)

There is of course leakage on both sides and material from other languages as well, mainly Saulteaux/Ojibwe (Nahkawē) (Bakker 1997, 264-274; Rhodes 2008), and recently English. Plains Cree features are attested in the noun phrase. There are a few Plains Cree nouns quite steadily used also for those speakers who show close to 100% French nouns in their speech, e.g. *koohkom* – “granny” and *tahwahiminaana* – “chokecherries”. All French nouns agree in gender with their article and also retain the animacy features of their Cree cognates, and these features pop up in their occurrence with Cree-derived demonstratives (*ae'n kriyoo'n anima* – INDEF.M pencil.M.INAN that.INAN “that is a pencil”, *ae'n zwazoo ana* – INDEF.M bird.M.AN that.AN “that is a bird”). Moreover, in clauses relating two animate third persons, both the verb and the noun may be inflected for obviative agreement (cf. *-iyi-* and *-a* in the sentence *o-paapaa-wa kii-wiikim-ee-iyi-w onhi'n la faam-a*, POSS-father-POSS.OBV PST-marry-DIR-OBV-IND.3S this.OBV DEF.F.S woman-OBV “his father had married this woman”), although the way obviation works in Michif appears slightly different from Plains Cree. Also, most of the personal pronouns are of Cree origin (*niiya*, *kiiya*, *wiiya*). Moreover, the possessive marking on the noun includes both Cree-derived elements that attach to Cree nouns (*ki-mooshoom* – “your grandfather”), and French elements that attach to French nouns (*ma pchit fiyy* – “my little daughter”, *ta blonde* – “your girlfriend”), but it also features mixed inflectional devices combining Algonquian and French-derived components as in *mo'n liiv-inaan* (1S.POSS.M book.M.IN-1PL), translating as “our (exclusive) book”.

3 List of abbreviations: 0 = inanimate subject of II; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; AI = animate intransitive; Ait = animate intransitive, but syntactically transitive; AN = animate; ART = article; CNJ = conjunct order; DEF = definite; DIR = direct (for TA); EXCL = exclusive; F = feminine; FUT = future; II = inanimate intransitive; IMP = imperative; INAN = inanimate; INCL = inclusive; IND = independent order; INDEF = indefinite article; INT = interrogative marker; INV = inverse (for TA); M = masculine; MID = middle; NEG = negation; NI = noun inanimate; OBV = obviative; PL = plural; POSS = possessive; PST = past tense; S = singular; TI = transitive inanimate; TA = transitive animate; THE = theme. In the Michif excerpt in section 3.4, I use a few transcription conventions: square brackets [text] signal inserted text, round brackets (text) indicate unhearable speech, and the slash text/ indicates a suspended sentence. The apostrophe ' indicates nasalization.

On the other hand, French elements too are attested into the verb phrase. The French copula is used in equative, ascriptional and attributive sentences (as in: *site li mon rish* – “it was the high society”, *site ae’n pchit orfalin* – “she was a little orphan”, *ili gro* – “(s)he is big”, *si zhalii* – “it’s nice”). The copular verbs also appear inflected for tense and mood but in lexicalized forms, e.g. *si* vs. *site* vs. *savayet* – “it is”, “it was”, “it will be”. However, the French verb “to be” is not usually used in locative and existential contexts, where Michif speakers prefer Cree-derived alternatives. The French verb “to have” is also often used in Michif, as in e.g. *ilave trwaa fiyy* – “she had three daughters”. Other constructions, such as *sapraa’n* – “it is necessary”, are common and govern Plains-Cree structured dependent clauses (*sapraa’n chi-VERB*). All French verbs are only possible in the independent order. Moreover, there are attested occurrences of French-derived elements integrated as INITIALS in the Michif verb stem in combination with certain FINALS, such as *-iwi-* (“to be”, “to become”) and *-ihke-* (“to make”) (Mazzoli, Bakker and DeMontigny in preparation).

The intersection between the two systems of Metis French and Plains Cree is distributed throughout the grammatical system, although latest works account for a mainly Algonquian-derived phonology and syntax in both the noun and the verb phrases (Stewart/Meakins accepted, Gillon/Rosen 2018).

Michif is not a case of synchronic code-switching between French and Cree since most of its current speakers do not speak Cree or French (Bakker 1997, 132). However, the communities where Michif is or was spoken rely on complex repertoires involving knowledge of French, English and Indigenous languages such as *Saulteaux* and *Plains Cree*. In addition, knowledge of German is often reported about Michif speakers who lived in the early nineteenth century, especially on the Canadian side.

Michif was probably never spoken by more than a few thousands speakers (Bakker 1997, 3) as a mother tongue. Today, it is very difficult to estimate the number of speakers, mainly due to their geographical spread. In fact, the Metis Nation consists of a non-contiguous group of speech communities spread throughout western Canada and the northern plains of the United States. Even within their Metis communities, Michif speakers are always a minority, and within their age group as well (in Figure 1 most of the dots indicate between 1 and 10 speakers). The Canada and USA Census Statistics give a total number of 805 speakers for Michif (730 in Canada and 75 in the USA). According to these data, the language is declared “in trouble” by Lewis et al. (2016), based on a cline of endangerment that goes from “institutional” to “extinct”. However, the actual number of speakers of the mixed Michif variety (stars in Figure 1) today is likely to be around 100 people in Canada and the USA. Most of today’s Michif speakers were born in the Fort Qu’Appelle Valley, Camperville, Duck Bay, Turtle Mountain, Boggy Creek and San Clara areas, and probably many of them live in the cities. Most of them are in their 70s or older, with just a handful below 70 years of age. No children or people in the child-bearing age speak the language fluently, although several young people are trying to learn the language

and a few of them have reached fluency, especially participating in the Mentor-Apprentice programs organized in Camperville and Brandon (Mazzoli accepted-1). The communities' shift towards the European languages has been complete, and today, all Michif speakers are also fluent (if not dominant) in English, and Metis adult and youth speak English (or French and English) as their first language(s).

As described in Crawford (1985), Michif varies considerably depending on the location where it is spoken, showing a greater influence from Metis French near French-speaking communities or where missions were established, or showing an influence from Indigenous languages such as *Saulteaux* or *Cree* near the reserves. Also, although language loss is a common experience, each of the communities underwent a different development. In the following sections, I will describe four Metis communities where Michif is spoken or has recently disappeared.

3. Michif loss and resistance in four communities

3.1 The Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, Belcourt, North Dakota (USA): border and identity

Crawford (1985, 50) reports that Michif was the dominant language in Belcourt until replaced by English. The Turtle Mountain Reservation was established as a reservation for the Chippewa⁴, who took in their Michif relatives and kin at the time it formed. "Metis" is a Canadian term and people in the USA reservation refer to themselves as "Michif". Crawford observed in 1985 not only that Michif was spoken by more people than Ojibwe, but also that a shift from Ojibwe to Michif had occurred in certain groups. This shift notwithstanding, the pattern of language loss for both Ojibwe and Michif was already evident and abrupt in the community: in the early 1980s, people over fifty years of age generally knew the language, but the level of use would reduce quite rapidly in the younger population, and young persons familiar with Michif were already rare. Crawford also observed that among the Michif speaking communities he visited in Canada and the USA, Belcourt was the location where Michif was best preserved and with the greatest likelihood of survival due to the fairly continuous effort to initiate and support programs for the preservation of the language started in the 1970s. At the time of his writing, this emerged as a sharp difference between the language situation in Belcourt compared to that of other Metis communities in Canada.⁵

Michif people in the USA have never had any autonomous status, but have been included into Indian reservations especially in North Dakota and Montana with the Chippewa. Although this certainly caused attrition within the reservation, at least in

4 Chippewa is the name for Ojibwe in the USA.

5 However, in Canada the Metis would receive official recognition as a distinct Indigenous group in 1982, after being ignored for more than a century. This recognition determined in Canada a resurgence in Metis awareness and reclamation that involved the Michif language as well. This did not happen in the USA.

the Turtle Mountain, the perception of Michif people as Indigenous people in the USA (assimilated to the Chippewa) concurred to keep a focus on the preservation of language for cultural and political survival (Bakker 1997, 62; Crawford 1985, 51). However, this has not precluded the language from losing domains and speakers. Michif has been taught for decades at the Turtle Mountain Community College in Belcourt, North Dakota (most recently by Sandra Houle in 2016), but Michif is not offered for the academic year 2017/2018. Documents available online show that local schools have occasionally incorporated it into their bilingual programs (e.g., Dunseith Day School, Dunseith Elementary School, Ojibwe Indian School, Turtle Mountain Community School) and even in their teacher trainings. However, it appears that, as of 2017, the focus in the school/college settings is predominantly concentrated on Ojibwe, probably because it is more available than Michif outside the reservation. In the Turtle Mountain, local radios used to broadcast in Michif (Golla 2007, 62), but Michif has not been heard on Keya FM since 2007. Therefore, although Michif has once been strong in the reservation, today it is virtually unheard. A population of mixed ancestry had lived in the US territory since the first settlement and was attested in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Montana (cf. the map in Peterson/Brown 2001, 1). However, the Michif people in the US have generally not organized as a political group as they have in Canada, where they had armed confrontations in an effort to secure a territory. They consequently have not sought federal recognition as an official tribe in the United States, or as having status as Native Americans, except when they joined Chippewa bands into the reservations. The aggressive state policies, the absence of any recognition of the Metis people in the USA, and the lack of connection with other communities where Michif is spoken in Canada, determined its disappearance from the reservation. Still, as of today, the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota is probably the community with the highest concentration of Michif speakers. In 2010, a survey entitled *Kitchitwa Ondwewe Nooding* (Sacred Voices in the Wind) reported a total of 74 speakers of an Indigenous language in the reservation: 25 Ojibwe (13 fluent, 12 semi-fluent), 45 Michif (24 fluent, 21 semi-fluent), and four dual speakers. Although all the speakers are older than 60, 22 Michif speakers have participated actively in the project work. I personally reached out to five fluent speakers, and many more who had some knowledge of the language.

There is indeed a profound boundary that resulted from the affirmation of the nation states after the European settlement. The border cut through the Indigenous land irrespective of land use and community relationships among the Aboriginal groups. Although there is some recognition of the pre-colonial rights of the First Nations in both Canada and the USA, modern nation state identities and dynamics have been powerful in determining the fracture between the Michif communities on different sides of the border. For instance, the Jay Treaty of 1794 (or Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation) acknowledged that Aboriginal peoples had rights to travel and trade throughout the territory and therefore granted them the

possibility to cross the US border from Canada. Therefore, the Jay Treaty applies to Canadian-born people with “at least 50 percent Aboriginal blood” (which is an accepted way of characterizing Native American identities in the United States and yet it appears alarming in its patent racial ideology and its foreseeable extermination outcome, cf. Schmidt 2011). The Jay Treaty rights apply today to First Nations, Metis and Inuit, who are free to enter, live, work and study in the United States. Unfortunately, only Metis people who can prove at least 50% of Aboriginal blood quantum can benefit from the Treaty. Moreover, the Jay Treaty does not have legal status in Canada, although this issue is the subject of ongoing discussions in Parliament and First Nation governments. Therefore, US citizens with Indigenous status will have to go through the normal immigration procedures to live and work in Canada.

3.2 San Clara and Boggy Creek: language and land, legal issues relevant to Metis rights

San Clara is a Metis community located in rural Manitoba, close to the Saskatchewan border. It stands 465 kilometres northwest of the Red River Valley, on the southwest boundary of the Duck Mountain. Crawford (1985, 48) noted that San Clara and Boggy Creek constitute a community “almost completely Metis and probably at one time almost completely Michif speaking, in relative isolation from other French and Indian groups”. Crawford also noted that in the early 1980s, language shift to English was evident, abrupt and complete, and virtually all the people under sixty had poor knowledge of Michif. In 1957, the Manitoba Historical Society reported 950 Metis living in this area (Lagasse 1958-59), which makes it one of the largest Metis communities at the time, after Greater Winnipeg, St. Laurent and Selkirk. The community has long-term family connections to other Michif-speaking areas, especially Belcourt in the Turtle Mountain Reservation (North Dakota), with a lot of common family names and living elders remembering a history of recurrent mutual visits. Although the community of San Clara and Boggy Creek has maintained a quite vivid Metis character (Catholic church, Metis Centre and lived cultural experience, cf. Davey 2018), the Michif language has almost disappeared despite some efforts at revitalization, albeit short-termed, within the last 10 years. As of 2018, there are active efforts at language revitalization and weekly Michif language classes are held in San Clara. The area of San Clara, Boggy Creek (and Roblin) is probably hosting the highest concentration of Michif speakers in Canada at the moment, according to Heather Souter, co-director of the *Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle* that co-ordinates the revitalization activities in the region.

I will now describe the 2011 court case *R. v Langan* (and appeal 2013) that involves a Metis resident in Boggy Creek. This will be the occasion to discuss Metis and Indigenous land-related rights and the current postcolonial dynamics revealing the repercussions of the historic conflict.

On May 9, 2009, Eugene Langan of San Clara was charged with angling without a licence at Lake of the Prairies, Saskatchewan, contrary to the Fisheries Regulations of Saskatchewan. The accused Langan claimed that the charge did not apply to him because it infringed upon his Aboriginal right to fish for food as a Metis person, and thus discriminated against him, under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. Langan's defence, coordinated by Charles Vermeylen, made appeal to the Constitution-based rights granted to First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in Canada, that after the *Powley* case (2003) include the right to hunt and fish for food for Metis harvesters. As stated in *Powley*, these rights apply to the Metis *only* if there is sufficient proof that the person belongs to the Metis community, *only* in the environs of their communities, *only* if the survival practice in question represents a continuation of an ancestral practice, and *only* if the modern community has roots in the pre-Canadian time (which means, if the site is an historic right-bearing community attested before the date of "effective European control").⁶ During the trial, the judge recognized Mr. Langan as a Metis citizen and as having an ancestral connection to the community of San Clara. The court also recognized that the community of San Clara and Boggy Creek currently has a dominantly Metis population. However, the judge found Langan guilty on the ground that "no historic right-bearing Metis community existed in San Clara-Boggy Creek at the time of effective European control" (in the 2013 appeal the fine and the ground were confirmed). Therefore, San Clara and Boggy Creek constitute a modern Metis community with no connections to an historic pre-Canadian right-bearing community, according to the judge, and consequently, harvesting Indigenous rights do not apply to its Metis citizens. According to Davey (2018), this situation has created further confusion about the village and its inhabitants. I will now present some observations about this ruling.

Langan 2011 is one among dozens of court cases appealing to Metis Constitution-based harvesting rights (a. o. Morin 1998, Blais 2003, Laviolette 2005, Belhumeur, 2007, Goodon 2008, Hirsekorn 2010). In *Langan* and several other cases (especially in British Columbia), the communities could not prove that they were present at the time the European nations took control of the land, and therefore cannot affirm their "historic" right. In fact, the *Powley* test applies positively to a very limited num-

6 *R vs Powley*: Steve and Roddy Powley, both Metis, killed a moose in 1993 and were charged with contravening Ontario hunting law. The brothers argued that section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* protects the right of the Metis to hunt for food. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favor of the Powleys in September 2003, and therefore assessed that the members of the Metis community in and around Sault Ste. Marie (Ontario) have an Aboriginal right to hunt for food. In fact, section 35 of the *Constitution Act* recognizes and affirms the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Indian, Inuit, and Metis peoples of Canada. Supreme Court decisions have served to clarify these rights, and on different occasions have established "legal tests" to determine the scope and content of Aboriginal rights, and which groups hold them. *Powley* significantly modified the *Van der Peet* test which would grant rights only to those customs or traditions that were integral to a distinctive Indigenous culture *since pre-contact time*, a chronological frame that would exclude Metis by definition.

ber of modern Metis communities. The *contextual* and *site-specific* nature of Metis Indigenous rights, as of the Powley ruling, limits the rights reclaimed by many Metis citizens. The definition of the historic right-bearing communities within the Metis homeland (which is, to what land do Metis Constitutional rights apply?) is therefore currently object of general discussion with the purpose of drafting fair agreements between the local Metis nations and the Federal government.⁷ The decision about which communities are to be included in such agreements should rest on a proposal that comes from the Metis Nations only, and not be the consequence of court decisions based on arguable historical facts. Moreover, the Aboriginal communities should be entitled to a right to change, evolve, and move, without running the risk of losing their rights as a community. The “frozen rights” approach imposes a constricting view on Aboriginal identities and geographies, which keeps on penalizing those nations and citizens that were most penalized in the formation of modern Canada (Borrows 1997; Olthuis 2001).

I will now focus on how the judge in *Langan* determined the date of “effective European control” to rule out San Clara/Boggy Creek as an historic Metis community. I will also discuss what assumptions are intended when assuming “effective European control” as the main chronological factor that discriminates right-bearing communities from modern ones. After evidence was presented from experts from both the Crown (Dr. Evans) and the Langan defence (Dr. Swan), the *Langan* judge concluded that “the Boggy Creek and San Clara area was not homesteaded until about 1904, and the earliest homesteaders were not Métis”. The judge decided that sometime between 1906 and 1910, Boggy Creek and San Clara began to assume a “Metis character”. This happened when Metis people who had found refuge in North Dakota after the Metis resistances (1869 and 1885), migrated north (where they had connections) and homesteaded the area. However, according to the judge, effective European control in the area had already occurred by 1885. The judge’s decision on the exact date was based on: “(1) the efforts taken toward the negotiation of treaties; (2) the settlement and development of this area by non-Aboriginals; (3) the control exercised by non-Aboriginal government(s) in this area; and (4) Judge Rathgeber’s ruling in *M.N.R. v. Ochapowace* rejecting a suggestion that Canada had not established control or occupation over the Treaty 4 area (which includes San Clara) by 1874.” Fundamentally, the *Langan* judge based his decision on a previous ruling (as it is customary in civil cases), and specifically rejected the appellant’s expert evidence that effective European control did not occur in the area around San Clara until 1930, when the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement was signed.

Also, the judge in *Langan* ruled out the possibility that the modern Metis community of San Clara is the continuation or the re-emergence of an earlier Metis

7 Cf. Trudeau government’s *Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework* announced in February 2018, which includes the Metis, and the recent *Framework Agreement on Metis Harvesting* signed between the Metis Nation of Ontario and the Ontario’s Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

community, either in the Swan River District or at Fort Pelly (both about 50-80 km north), which both stand in an area comprised in the *environs* of San Clara, as determined by the judge using a definition from the Merriam-Wester Online Dictionary.⁸ Concerning the Swan River District, Dr. Evans for the Crown testified that historical records show that the District remained home to a significant Metis population from 1830 to 1850 (before the Metis Resistances), and that the permanent Metis residents of this area were intimately connected to the local First Nations, and therefore entered into Treaty *en masse* during the 1870s. The other possible historic Metis settlement in the environs of San Clara is considered by the judge to be at Fort Pelly. Dr. Evans testified for the Crown that there had been a few Metis families in or around the Fort Pelly area between 1870 and the early 1890s, but that this *was not enough* to consider them as settling the area. Dr. Swan from the defence submitted that Louison Genaille (great-grandfather of Charles Vermeyley's mother) received a discharge from the Keeseekoose Band and applied for Scrip at Qu'Appelle in 1886, with his address declared as Fort Pelly, which proves at least one direct connection between the pre-Canadian site of Fort Pelly and the modern community, but the final ruling maintained that the Metis population in the Fort Pelly and Swan River areas predominantly entered and remained under Treaty 4, and those who did not were *not enough* to be considered occupiers.

A critical reading of the various rulings reveals that international law is Eurocentric and openly refers to land occupied by Indigenous peoples as "terra nullius". This is both a general assumption underlying the Constitutional legitimacy of modern Canada, and a specific claim found in court rulings. For instance, in *Hirse Korn*, a Métis hunting case, judge Fisher found, applying the *Powley* test, that there was not sufficient evidence of an historic right-bearing Metis community in southern Alberta (and thus Metis harvesting rights did not apply to Mr. Hirsekorn) because: (1) before effective European control "no Métis group had a *sufficient degree of use, occupation, stability, or community in the area* to support a site-specific constitutional right" [emphasis mine]; and (2) the evidence did not establish a Métis group in this area "with customs, traditions and a distinct collective identity from Indians". Exactly as in *Langan*, the *Hirse Korn* ruling reifies some specific assumptions about who is Metis and who is not, and what it takes to determine land occupation (does the modern Canadian State use with stability, occupy, and populate each corner of the land on

8 In the effort of circumscribing the on-site and specific right to fish for food, the judge provides a full definition in his opinion. From the ruling (p. 4): "Mr. Langan was fishing near Togo Bridge at Lake of the Prairies, only a short distance into Saskatchewan, and a few kilometers from San Clara, Manitoba, where he resides. The Merriam-Wester Online Dictionary defines 'environs' as the surroundings of a place or as an adjoining region or space. I accept that Lake of the Prairies is located in the environs of San Clara". And (p. 5) "I consider 'environs' (the surroundings of a place or as an adjoining region or space) to in this case include the area surrounding San Clara, encompassing the Duck Mountains, the Swan River Valley, Lake of the Prairies and the site of the previous settlement of Fort Pelly."

to which they claim jurisdiction?). Obviously, the trials do not question Canadian title to the lands in the first place, because the common law presumes the legitimacy of the acquisition of territories and the assertion of sovereignty by the European nations on “terra nullius”. However, a critical perspective is emerging and scholars now question many basic assumptions. As a start, “the issue of de facto effective European control as being an element of proof for the purpose of determining Aboriginal rights” could be challenged (Chartrand 2005, 124 in a note). Even the royal prerogative assumed by King Charles to “grant such broad sweeping rights” (governance and legislative authority) to the Hudson Bay Company in Rupert’s Land could just not be taken for granted (Chartrand 2005, 113 in a note). In the case of San Clara and Boggy Creek, as in many other Metis communities in central Canada and beyond, the European-based legal framework intervenes in determining Aboriginal rights and their scope. But there are relevant biases to address. A critical view on the legitimacy of European control over Indigenous land is relevant to the issue of contemporary claims based on Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution.

3.3 Muskowekwan First Nation in Saskatchewan (Canada): colonial violence and language death

Muskowekwan First Nation is a prevalently Saulteaux (Ojibwe) First Nation located in southern Saskatchewan. It occupies a territory of about 7,000 hectares, adjacent to Lestock, around 70 kilometres north of Fort Qu’Appelle. The reserve hosts a school from kindergarten up to grade 9, a store, cattle, farming, lease land, a mine, and a bingo hall. The territory is governed by eight councils and one chief. The reserve just signed an agreement for Potash extraction that will grant earnings and work for its people up to 50 years from now. The Muskowekwan nation shares a wider territory with the neighbouring First Nations Gordon, Day Star and Keeseekoosie (also known as Poor Man, from a wrong translation of his chief’s name). The Muskowekwan band adhered to Treaty 4 on 15 September 1874 under the chief *Kaa-kiniwap* (“the one who sits like an eagle”), who was replaced by the son *Muskowekwan* “strong quill”. The band had been living on the Qu’Appelle valley before, but selected a reserve in Touchwood Hills.

Although no Metis ethnic population is on the record of the 2001 Canadian census, Metis have been living around the reserve, since Michif, Cree and Saulteaux people were usually part of the same families and shared common kinship. Red River Metis traders have been present and active in the area of the Qu’Appelle Lakes and Touchwood Hills since 1850 (*Langan*, p. 7, cf. also Bakker 2012, 173). Metis people and non-status Indians would usually live in logs or cabins built at the reserve’s borders, and sometimes one home would cross over the reserve border (a Muskowekwan member recalls: “at the time, if we were kicked out of the reserve, we would just go and live in our living room with our Michif relatives”).

The Euro-Canadian impact on Indigenous languages and cultures in Saskatchewan has been destructive. For the Muskowekwan First Nation, Canada Statistics

2016 report a resident population of about 410 people, of which 25 self-report as Ojibwe mother tongue speakers and 5 as Cree mother tongue speakers. The rest are English mother tongue speakers. That is, only 7% of the reserve population has an Indigenous language as their mother-tongue, and all of those are elders, only about a dozen younger than 74. Also, in the 2011 Census a few people reported Michif as a mother tongue, attesting to the fact that Michif speakers have been in the reserve until a few years ago. The stories shared by some Muskowekwan adult members show that most of the Michif speakers were of the generation of their grandparents (born early 1900), and that the dramatic shift to English occurred in their parents' generation. They also illustrate that most Michif speakers at the time were multilingual in Michif, Cree and/or Saulteaux. Elder Frank Cyr (*keekaweewihtahk kihiw*, "screaming eagle") shared a memory about his family. His mother was a Cree/Michif speaker with no knowledge of English. Only as an adult did he realize why his mother used to call him *Panank* (instead of Frank), because as a Cree speaker she could not pronounce either the English sound /f/, /r/, or the cluster /fr/. Frank *Panank* Cyr grew up in a Cree speaking environment until the age of 5, when he was taken to the local residential school for thirteen years, where he lost Cree. He is a remembrance of the language, which he can sing but no longer speak.

The Muskowekwan Indian Residential School in Lestock, Saskatchewan, was a Roman Catholic school until 1969 and was later managed by the Federal government. It opened in 1896 and closed in 1981.⁹ Many Muskowekwan families report having experienced at least three generations of abuse in the local school, in the form of psychological, verbal, physical and sexual abuses. The oppression was also perpetrated through the prohibition of speaking the maternal tongues, to favour an immersion in English. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission put together documents and testimonies about this school that indicate a lack of proper education (pupils would often just work in the field), scarcity of food, poor quality of care and instruction, frequent runaways and cases of suicide attempts. The testimonies also concern sexual misbehaviour and violence against both female and male pupils in the school.¹⁰ Unfortunately, fears about the existence of unmarked burial sites around the school area materialized on July 21, 1992, during the installation of the new sewer lines, when workers with N.I.S. Construction Ltd. uncovered three unmarked graves. On July 22, an additional 15 graves were encountered.¹¹ At that time, the edifice was home to a youth service centre, but the building was later abandoned. At present, the school building is still in place although ruined. At first, all human remains were unearthed but after the intervention of the Muskowekwan

9 A few years later, in 1996, the close-by Gordon residential school was the last residential school to shut down in Canada.

10 Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1. Origins to 1939* (2015, 564).

11 Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4* (2015, 133).

council, they were ceremonially re-interred in the same location. Currently, the community is collaborating with archaeologists and anthropologists to locate the burial sites of up to 35 missing children who attended the school. Researchers are using a ground-penetrating radar to determine how many pupils have been buried in unmarked graves near the school, although the Muskowekwan community expressed the wish not to proceed to the digging. Locating all the missing children will respond to the “calls to action” (especially number 71 to 76) issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, together with the Final Report (2015, 333-334).¹²

Metis people have lived in or around the Muskowekwan reservation since its origin, although for the most part without any official status as Indigenous people. At Muskowekwan, they have been living side by side to their Cree and Ojibwe kinship, as in other reserves in central Canada. The impact of the Euro-Canadian settlement for the Muskowekwan community has been devastating, and regarding the Indigenous languages, the schooling system caused the complete erasure of Cree, Ojibwe and Michif from the reserve.

3.4 Mentor Apprentice program in Brandon (Manitoba): young adults learning Michif

Brandon is the second largest city of Manitoba, located about 200 kilometres west of Winnipeg, and with a population of about 50,000 people. In Brandon, about 2,800 people are Metis according to the Canada Statistics 2016, but only less than a dozen speak Michif as a mother tongue and all of them are elders. The extent of language and culture loss among the Metis and other Indigenous groups is indeed great in Brandon. However, there are several initiatives currently in place within the Brandon School division to bring Michif people, culture and language closer to the children and youth, and the University of Brandon also offers courses on the Michif language. Arguably, the most urgent matter at present is to ensure the education of new speakers in the generation of young adults, to make certain that the immediate language transmission can continue. In the case of the Michif language, the age gap in the community is severe: there are no children learning the language at present in a natural setting, and the fluent speakers are in their 70s or older. There is urgency to fill the gap in the adults’ generation. Therefore, in the summer of 2017, Nicole Rosen, Verna DeMontigny, Harvey Pelletier and I organized a Mentor-Apprentice program for two teachers and two learners in Brandon for about 100 hours each.¹³ The Mentor-Apprentice Program, first developed in California by Leanne Hinton (Hinton 2002), is a method of language teaching that fits particularly in a situation of language endangerment. It consists of a one-on-one language immersion program, where a “mentor” (a fluent speaker of a language) is paired with one (or more)

12 http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

13 The Brandon Mentor-Apprentice program was financed with Mazzoli’s funds from the Bremen TRAC program, with contributions from Nicole Rosen and the Institute for the Humanities at the University of Manitoba.

“apprentice(s)” (learners). The mentor and the apprentice(s) spend a certain amount of hours (usually 300) per year together, doing everyday activities, and culture-specific practices, and using the language at all times. Immersion is a special method of teaching and learning language as well as culture. It tends to reproduce the environment in which language is passed on from one generation to another in a natural setting, and it is an effective way to create new speakers and improve the fluency of semi-fluent speakers (Hale 2001, 227–236). The Brandon program followed the experience of Camperville (Manitoba), where Metis Elders Grace Zoldy and Rita Flamand hosted several students in Mentor-Apprentice language learning programs between 2004 and 2010. The Camperville programs permitted a group of Michif learners to develop their language knowledge (Souter 2004). Currently, the Canadian Heritage’s Aboriginal Language Initiative has granted funding to the community-based *Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle* of Camperville (MB), to sponsor up to six Mentor-Apprentice programs in Michif and other Indigenous languages.¹⁴

One of the Michif elders who participated in the Brandon program is Verna DeMontigny. Verna was born in Fouillard Corner (*dan li kwaen*) near Binscarth, in 1951. Her father was from Ste. Madeleine, and was a hunter, trapper, and farm labourer. He lived the forced evacuation of the Metis community of Ste. Madeleine and later resettled *dan li kwaen* (cf. Sammons 2013 for a Michif personal narrative that accounts for these facts).¹⁵ Verna DeMontigny reports the story as she heard it from her father: “In the fall of 1939, when my father came home from working in Saskatchewan, he found his house burned to the ground. His dog was shot in front of him. He couldn’t do anything, he was defenseless. They had weapons.”

Ste. Madeleine was evacuated to comply with the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (PFRA), issued in 1935 with the aim of exploiting the economic potential of the prairies, unfit to growing crop. Through the PFRA, the Crown claimed several prairie areas (including the land of the Metis community of Ste. Madeleine) and designated them as community pastures (Zeilig/Zeilig 1987). Most of the families were forced to relocate without compensation.

Verna lived most of her adult life in Brandon, except for a couple of years in Winnipeg. Verna is today a respected Elder, active in her community in language and culture transmission and reclamation, and nonetheless she recalls episodes of discrimination and abuse against her as an Indigenous person. In the following Michif excerpt (glossed, and translated in English), she recalls specific episodes from her past in Brandon:

14 <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2018/11/government-of-canada-announces-support-for-indigenous-languages-in-manitoba.html> and <http://www.dauphinherald.com/news/view/3869>

15 Sammons 2013, 150 notes that there is a scarcity of accessible texts in the Michif language, and even fewer are those texts that address Metis historical issues through personal narratives.

[Site] difisil. Akooz mo ni-kii-mi(yoeeeyi)m-ikaasho-naan.
 [it.was] difficult because NEG 1.PST-like.TA-MID.AI-IND.1PL
[It was] difficult. Because we were not liked.

A Brandon, deuziem fwe kaa-ishpichi-yaan oote, mii zaa'nfan gii-aaya-w-ak ashey.
 in Brandon second time CNJ-move.AI-CNJ.1S here POSS.1PL child.PL 1PST-have.Alt-IND.3-PL already
In Brandon, [...] the second time I moved here, I had my children already.

Ekoshi eekwa en maezo'n gii-naton-en,
 so at.this.point INDEF.F house.F.INAN 1.PST-look.for.TI-IND.1S
So now I was looking for a house,

pii ee-kishkeeyiht-ahkik lii moo'nd aweena niiya-naan,
 and CNJ-know.TI-CNJ.3PL ART people who 1-PL
and when the people knew who we were,

mo gii-(ni)taweeyim-ikaasho-naan ekota chi-wiiki-yahk.
 NEG 1.PST-want.TA-MED.AI-IND.1PL there CNJ-live.AI-CNJ.1PL.INCL
they didn't want us to live there.

Akooz kii-itwe-w kaa-/ 'Lii savaazh minihkw-ee-shki-w-ak, wiini-shi-w-ak'.
 because PST-say.AI-IND.3S CNJ ART Indians drink-THE.AI-too.much.AI-IND.3-PL dirt-be.AI-IND.3-PL
Because they said: 'Indians, they drink too much, they are dirty.'

Ekoshi eekwa gii-kiiyaashk-in.
 so at.this.point 1.PST-lie.AI-IND.1S
And so I lied.

En maezo'n gii-(ni)taweeyiht-en, naandaw chi-wiiki-yaan.
 INDEF.F house.F.INAN 1.PST-want.TI-IND.1S somewhere CNJ-live.AI-CNJ.1S
I wanted a house, somewhere to live.

gii-kweechim-ik-wak: 'Kiiya chii'n Spanish? En faam aa'n Spanish?'
 1.PST-ask.TA-INV-IND.3PL>1 you INT Spanish INDEF.F lady.F.AN in Spanish
They asked me: 'Are you Spanish [Latina]? Are you a Spanish lady?'

'Wii' gii-itw-aa-n. Ekoshi eekota naandaw sae'nk aa'n gii-wiiki-n ekota.
 yes PST-say-THE.AI-IND.1S so at.this.point around five year PST-live.there.AI-IND.1S there
'Yes', I said. And so I lived there for about five years.

Gii-atoshk-aa-aw-aa-w-ak anikik. Pii lii maezo'n gii-peekiht-en.
 1.PST-work-THE.AI-TA-DIR-IND.3-PL those.AN and ART house 1.PST-wash.TI-IND.1S
I worked for them. And I cleaned houses.

Mitoni kwayash gii-peekiht-en.
 really good 1.PST-wash.TI-IND.1S
I cleaned them really well.

Kaa-kweechim-ikaasho-yaahk la farm neetee chi-itoht-ee-yaahk
 CNJ-ask.TA-MED.AI-CNJ.1PL.EXCL DEF.F farm.F.INAN over.there CNJ-go-THE.AI-CNJ.1PL.EXCL
When we were asked to go back to the farm

taande kaa-pee-ohche-yaahk, ekoshi 'Wii' gii-itw-ee-naan, gii-pichi-naan ekota.
 where CNJ-come-from-CNJ.1PL.EXCL so yes PST-say-THE.AI-IND.1PL 1.PST-move.AI-IND.1PL there
where we come from, and we said 'Yes', we moved back there.

Maaka li darie zhornii, anima la maezo'n kaa-kii-li-rent-ii-yaan,
 but DEF.M last day.M.INAN that.INAN DEF.F house.F.INAN CNJ-PST-the-rent-THE.AI-CNJ.1S
But the last day, that house I rented,

ma klee gii-doo-meek-in kiihtwam.
 POSS.F.S key 1.PST-go-give.AI-IND.1S again
I went there again to give back my key.

Ekoshi eekwa gii-shakih-ik-wak anikik lii moo'nd.
 so at.this.point 1.PST-love.TA-INV-IND.3PL>1 those.INAN ART people.PL
And so now, the people liked me.

Ekoshi eekwa ee-peeweey(aaw)-iyaan,
 so at.that.point CNJ-come.out.AI-CNJ.1S
And so now when I came out,

Dit-aa-wak, ki-(ka)-wihtam-aw-ti-naawaaw keekway, dit-aa-wak:
 1.say.TA-DIR-IND.1>3PL 2-FUT-tell.TI-TA-INV-IND.1>2PL something 1.say.TA-DIR-IND.1>3PL
I told them, I will tell you something, I told them:

'Niiya en Michif'.
 I INDEF.F Michif
'I am Metis'.

Pii gii-peeweeyaaw-in akooz tultaa'n kii-itw-ee-w-ak maana lii Michif pa bo'n,
 and 1.PST-come.out.AI-IND.1S because always PST-say-THE.AI-IND.3-PL usually ART Michif NEG good
I came out because of all the time they said Metis people were no good,

osham minihkw-ee-w-ak, tu lii zhur minihkw-ee-w-ak,
 too.much drink-THE.AI-IND.3-PL all ART day drink-THE.AI-IND.3-PL
they drink too much, they drink everyday,

loer zaa'nfaa'n mo pishkeeyim-ee-w-ak, wiini-shi-w-ak.
 POSS.3PL child.PL NEG take.care.TA-DIR-IND.3>4-PL dirt-be.AI-IND.3-PL
they don't take care of their children, they are dirty.

Eekoshi maana kaa-itw-ee-chik.
 so usually CNJ-say.THE.AI-CNJ.3PL
That's what they used to say.

Oota Brandon, gishkishi-n miina en tfwee. Ni-maama gii-itohtah-aa-w
 here Brandon 1.remember.AI-1S even INDEFF time.FINAN POSS.1-mother 1.PST-take.TA-DIR-IND.1>3
Here in Brandon, I remember one time. My mother, I took her

li doktor chi-waapam-aa-t.
 DEF.M doctor CNJ-see.TA-DIR-IND.3>4
to see the doctor.

Ni-maama ayish ana mo kii-kash(kiht)t-aa-w ee-pikiskwe-t aa'n Aangle,
 POSS.1-mother because that.AN NEG PST-be.able-THE.AI CNJ.speak.AI-CNJ.3S in English
Since my mom couldn't speak English,

ekoshi maana gii-kweechim-iko-naan.
 so usually 1.PST-ask.TA-INV-IND.1PL.EXCL
she used to ask us.

'Pee-wiicheew-i. Sapraa'n li doktor doo-waapam-a-k', kii-itw-ee-w maana.
 come-help.TA-IMP.2S need DEF.M doctor.M.AN go-see.TA-DIR-CNJ.1>3 PST-say-THE.AI-IND.3S usually
'Come with me. I have to go see the doctor,' she used to say.

Ekoshi gii-itohtah-aa-w niiya. Eekwa mo'n tor itohtah-a-k.
 so 1.PST-take.so.TA-DIR-IND.1>3 I at.that.point POSS.1.M turn take.so.TA-DIR-CNJ.1>3
So I took her. It was my turn to take her. [...]

Eekwa li doktor ana ee-pee-h-aa-yaahk chi-pee-waapam-aa-t ni-maama,
 so DEF.M doctor.M.AN that.AN CNJ-wait.TA-DIR-1PL.EXCL>3 CNJ-come-see.TA-CNJ.3>4 POSS.1-mother
So we were waiting for the doctor to see my mom,

piikishkw-ee-w ana aa'n Michif.
 talk-THE.AI-IND.3S that.AN in Michif
she was talking in Michif.

Eekoshi peeyak ana oota chiipatapi-w ae'n gaa, ni-natoht-aw-iko-naan.
 so one that.AN there sit.AI-IND.3S INDEF.M guy 1-listen.TI-TA-INV-IND.3>1PL
So one guy was sitting there, listening to us.

Piyish piikishkw-ee-w: 'Keekway anima piikishkw-aa-t-ameek?' Kii-itw-ee-w.
 finally talk-THE.AI-IND.3S what that.INAN talk-THE.AI-TI-CNJ.2PL PST-say-THE.AI-IND.3S
Finally he spoke: 'What is that language you are speaking?' He said.

'Kelsot laa'ng anima?
 what.type language.FINAN that.INAN
'What sort of language?'

Ekoshi gii-it-aa-w: 'Michif anima!
 so 1.PST-say.TA-DIR-IND.1>3 Michif that.INAN
So I told him: 'That's Michif!'

'Ohh', itw-ee-w. 'Eekwa miina la laa'ng di chie'n, d-it-ik.
ohh say-THE.AI-IND.3S so also DEF.F.S language of dog 1-say.TA-IND.INV.3>1
'Ohh', he said. 'That's the dog language', he told me.

Ekoshi nwachiko gii-kishiwaah-ik,
so almost 1.PST-angry.TA-IND.INV.3>1
So he kind of made me angry,

pii gii-wihtam-aw-aa-w: 'Noot laa'ng anima, d-it-aa-w.
and 1.PST-tell.TI-TA-DIR-IND.1>3 POSS.1PL language.F.S that.INAN 1-say.TA-DIR-IND.1>3
and I told him: 'That's our language', I told him.

'Mo ae'n chie'n anima. Noot laa'ng see kom lii zot.
NEG INDEF.M dog that.INAN POSS.1PL language.F.S it.is as ART others
'That's not a dog language. Our language is just like the others.

Kahkiyaw ki-miy-ikaasho-naan en laa'ng chi-piikishkw-ee-yahk.
all 2-give.TA-MID.AI-IND.1PL.INCL INDEF.F language.F.INAN CNJ-speak-THE.AI-CNJ.1PL.INCL
We were all given a language to speak.

Niiya-naan lii Michif ooma noot laa'ng-inaan.'
I-PL ART Michif this POSS.1 language-PL.EXCL
For us the Metis, this is our language.'

Ekoshi kii-it-aa-w anima.
so PST-say.TA-DIR-IND.1>3 that.INAN
That's what I told him.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I provided an account of four communities where Metis people are present and where the Michif language is spoken, or has recently disappeared. I described patterns of language loss which are similar in the four communities and yet highlighted how each community displays a different history. The Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota developed an identity influenced by its being tied to a Chippewa reservation in the national territory of the United States of America, and the anchor of the neighbouring Metis communities in Canada has not been enough to maintain the rather strong socio-political stand of Michif in early decades of the reservation. In Manitoba, the community of Boggy Creek and San Clara maintained a fierce Metis identity despite the language loss, and its citizens' resistance is exemplified in this paper through the analysis of a court case where a Metis resident reclaims his Metis Constitution-based harvesting rights against the constricting Euro-Canadian legal framework. In Saskatchewan, the Muskowekwan First Nation has a remembrance of its Metis component that was once intertwined with the Cree and Ojibwe nations, before being wiped away in the violent impact with the residential school system. The Metis community in Brandon, southern Manitoba, alongside other communities in the Canadian prairies, is bringing forward examples of

language reclamation and resistance, financing language immersion programs for adult Michif learners (Mentor-Apprentice programs), and therefore is a strong example of an innovative Indigenous resurgence focusing of the language. These stories are not meant to define the communities they refer to, and much more could be said about each community. These stories, taken together, provide a picture on issues of loss and resistance in Metis communities in North America.

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