Effects of Colonialism on the Métis in Canadian Northwest:
Catholic Religion and Educational System as the Main Colonial Instruments

Eva Flášarová
I declare that I have worked on this final-year dissertation independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

Eva Flášarová
Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my supervisor, Klára Kolinská, for her useful comments and encouragement, Jana Heczková for her always being willing to help, my parents for their great support during my studies and always being there when needed.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0  Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  The Métis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 The Term Métis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Red River as the Cradle of the Métis People</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Colonialism and the Métis Identity</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Development of the Métis Identity</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Métis vs. Half-breeds</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Louis Riel and the Métis</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Red River and North-West Resistance</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Colonialism: Its Principles and Stages</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Origins of Colonialism in Canada</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Colonialism in the 20th Century Canada</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Catholic Church as a Colonial Instrument</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Catholic Church in New France</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Catholic Church in the Northwest</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Catholic Church in Maria Campbell’s <em>Halfbreed</em></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Education as a Colonial Instrument</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 The Oblate Mission</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Eurocentric Histories and Myths</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Education and the “Native Problem”</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 The Educational System as Reflected in Campbell’s <em>Halfbreed</em> and Culletton’s <em>In Search of April Raintree</em></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Conclusion</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
0 Introduction

Until the mid-twentieth century, the world had been divided into two parts, the colonizers’ one and the colonized’ one. The European civilization had held sway over the less, from its point of view, developed peoples which in the European perspective needed to have been led to civilization. As Howard Adams contends: “The goals of ‘civilizing’ and ‘christianizing’ were pushed as excuses to undermine the power and legal authority of indigenous states” (Tortured People 143). The three biggest European powers, the Great Britain, France and Spain were mutual rivals in their pursuit of taking control over the new lands. The conquest was called “discovery”. Adams stresses the impropriety of the concept when he claims that

‘[d]iscover’ is one of the greatest con-game concepts in the imperial vocabulary. Why was Marco Polo’s visit to China in 1295 not a discovery? ‘Discovery,’ obviously is only a notion of European imperialism, [...] which applied only to vulnerable indigenous countries. Wandering European pirates encroached upon any foreign land they sighted and plundered the homes of indigenous citizens (Tortured People 9).

The objective of the colonizers was to conquer the new lands, subjugate the local indigenous population while exempting them from the basic human rights. The colonizers’ conviction in their own superiority over the non-Christian peoples functioned as a justification for the colonization. Thus, racism played a key role in the colonization process. Frideres points out that “racism is undeniably the underlying ideology of the manifest policies regarding Native-White relations throughout the history of Canada” (Frideres 10).

Although the results of the colonization processes wherever in the world did not differ, everywhere the local population becoming marginalized, powerless and discriminated against by the members of majority societies, the methods used by the
colonizers in order to achieve the objective of subjugation the aboriginal peoples differed from place to place. This is evident when comparing the means by which the colonization of the native peoples in the two distinct parts of the North American continent was achieved. While the conquest of the aboriginal peoples of today’s United States was accomplished with the use of military power, the colonization of Canada happened with the help of Catholic missionaries who, pretending to be helping the native population took power away from them and thus subjugated them.

The colonization of lands which were later to become Canada gave origin to a distinct phenomenon. The mixed-blood people, who emerged from the mixing of the first European colonizers, the French and the British, with aboriginal women, gradually developed into a cohesive unit and began to think of themselves as of a new nation. They started to call themselves the Métis. However, not all mixed-bloods in Canada are considered to belong to the Métis people, as the sense of the identity united the Métis residing in the area of Red River in the Northwest of Canada only. It was the Métis of the Red River who were eventually recognized by the Canadian Constitution in 1982 as a distinct aboriginal people. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the existence of the Métis is a direct consequence of colonialism and, as Adams points out, “Métis had a blood link to Europeans, the mixed-blood population was an outcast from the white conquerors” (*Tortured People* 125). The history of the Métis has been interwoven with their struggles for the federal government’s recognition of their rights, mainly the land rights.

The role of the Métis in colonialism was changing in accordance with the changes of the economic principles promoted by the colonizers. During the French reign the Métis enjoyed relatively good and stable position in the society, functioning as mediators between the European fur traders and aboriginal peoples and making their living by selling furs. While, on the other hand, under the British rule the Métis found themselves at
the bottom of the society. There was no place for the Métis in the newly established capitalist order. The British colonizers did not attempt to integrate the Métis into the majority society. Conversely, the intention of the colonizers was to create a class of low-wage laborers out of the Métis so that they could be exploited by the capitalist regime. Therefore, the colonizers, in their effort to subjugate the Métis population, exposed them to the systematic ideological pressure. Racist myths, biased historical facts and humiliation of the native cultures and traditions served as powerful means by which the colonization of the Métis was accomplished. The Catholic Church and the educational system were the most powerful instruments employed for the implementation of the colonial ideology into the Métis’ consciousness. Regarding the colonial strategy employed by the British government in Canada, Adams observes:

The segregation of Aboriginal peoples from white mainstream society was a deliberate strategy employed by the state. This separation tended to reinforce stereotypical images of indigenous peoples who were cast aside as being dirty, lazy, vulgar, and unsuitable to live amongst so-called civilized and clean white society. These images become internalized and Native peoples developed a shame and inferiority complex about their culture. As a result we function within this colonized framework of culture and this legitimize the stereotyping of our culture and personality (Tortured People 125).

The attitude of the British colonizers towards the Métis was particularly abusive when one takes into consideration the extent into which the Métis had contributed to the formation of today’s Canada. Had it not been for the skillful negotiation of the Métis called Louis Riel with the British government officials, the Dominion of Canada would not have existed in the form as it does in these days and Manitoba would not have been made a province. It was not until the 1960s that the attitude of the federal government to the Métis began to change in a positive way.
The fact that the Métis had not been legally recognized as the aboriginal people until 1982 worsened their oppression. The Métis had organized their revolt against the oppressive colonizers’ regime twice but both the Red River Resistance and the North-West Resistance were suppressed by the British. As a consequence, the Métis, having lost their hopes for a better future in their defeat at Batoche during the North-West Resistance, were losing their sense of identity and were trying to assimilate into the majority society. The Métis were passively enduring the colonizers’ oppression until the 1960s, when “Canada’s indigenous people began their anti-colonial struggle” (Tortured People 160). The Métis began to realize their oppression, “mobilized resistance and tried to throw off the chains of colonialism.” However, as Adams further remarks, “after a decade of struggle for self-determination, we [the Métis] found themselves under ‘new’ control – direct colonial domination transformed into neocolonial rule” (Tortured People 160).

The aim of my thesis is to provide an overview of the historical development of the Métis as a distinct people and their role in colonialism. I deal with the question of the Métis identity and the effects of the colonial oppression on the Métis’ collective consciousness. The analysis of the contribution of both the Catholic Church and the educational system to the subjugation of the Métis define the primary framework of my thesis. The assessment of the impact of the eurocentric ideology on the Métis’ consciousness is given. For demonstrative purposes, the chapters on Catholic Church and the educational system are supplemented with brief analyses of novels written by Métis writers, Maria Campbell and Beatrice Culleton.
1 The Métis

Mixing of races seems to be a direct and natural consequence of Colonialism. In this respect, Canada was not an exceptional case. On the contrary, regarding the mixing of the local inhabitants with the European colonizers, a specific phenomenon occurred in Canada. The mixed-blood people gradually developed into a cohesive unit and begun to perceive themselves as a distinct people, the Metis. However, the fate of the Métis under the colonial rule was bleak. Having not been legally recognized as the aboriginal tribe, the Métis found themselves on the fringe of Canadian society, discriminated against and impecunious. Nevertheless, a considerable progress has been achieved in recent years as far as the attitude of the federal government to the Métis and their grievances is concerned. In 1982, the Métis were incorporated in the New Canadian Constitution as a distinct aboriginal group, which manifests the positive changes in Canadian native politics.

There are the métis people living throughout the whole Canada, however, in the context of the thesis I will focus on the people with whom the term “métis” has been most frequently connected with, the Métis of the Fur Northwest, the area at the forks of Red and Assiniboine rivers, particularly today’s Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta”.

1.1 The Term “métis”

Dickason explains that “[t]he term ‘métis’ is derived from the Latin verb miscere, which means ‘to mix, mingle’” (Aboriginal Peoples of Canada 189). As far as the Canadian history is concerned, the term refers to people who emerged as a consequence of a mixing of two races, those of aboriginal peoples and Europeans. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer

---

1 Generally, the term “métis” is used to denote people of mixed-blood origin in Canada. The term “Métis” is used to refer to the mixed-blood people residing in Red River Area only.
S.H. Brown claim that such partnerships gave “genesis to a composite ‘mestizo’ population and the creation of a bold and startlingly original ethnic and national identit[y]” (The New Peoples 3). The official web site of the Métis National Council of Canada offers the following description of the Métis and its genesis:

Prior to Canada’s crystallization as a nation in west central North America, the Métis people emerged out of the relations of Indian women and European men. While the initial offspring of these Indian and European unions were individuals who possessed mixed ancestry, the gradual establishment of distinct Métis communities, outside of Indian and European cultures and settlements, as well, as, the subsequent intermarriages between Métis women and Métis men, resulted in the genesis of a new Aboriginal people – the Métis (Who are the Métis?) .

Peterson and Brown remark that the term métis, “when used by French speakers, [used to] apply broadly to the offspring [...] of the French and Cree speaking descendants of the Red River métis” (The New Peoples 5). People who emerged from the bonds of English or Scotch men and aboriginal women were usually refered to as half-breeds. It is important to remark, however, that the term half-breed, although having been used in past as a distinguishing term only, has domesticated in the twentieth century society as a racist abuse. Regarding the misusage of the term “half-breed,” Dobbin points out that:

In 1920s prairie society, the new order of the West, the term Half Breed was used almost exclusively as a derogatory term – a term used out of ignorance, bigotry and lack of understanding of the history of the North West. It was reserved especially, though not exclusively, for those who had been rejected by that new order, those who dealt with bigotry by avoiding it, those who ‘kept to themselves’” (Dobbin 51).

Peterson remarks in her essay “Many Roads to Red River” that both the terms halfbreed and métis “began to appear [at the beginning of the nineteenth century] with increasing

---

[2] In the thesis the term half-breed is used in its primary meaning, to deferentiate the anglophone mixed-bloods from the francophone Métis.
frequency in the travel literature, carrying with them the pejorative baggage of social 
inferiority and degeneracy” (Peterson 39). The pejorative meaning of the term “métis” in 
many cases resulted in the Métis’ deliberate concealing their real identity. The term half-
breed can be included into the group of most frequent vulgarisms by which the people of 
mixed ancestry have been labeled in the twentieth century by the members of the majority 
society.

Peterson and Brown argue that until the recognition of the Métis in the Canadian 
Constitution of 1982

persons of mixed Indian and European ancestry who, for whatever reasons, 
[had not been] regarded as either Indian or white [had been] referred to, 
often pejoratively, as ‘halfbreeds’, ‘breeds’, ‘mixed-bloods’, ‘métis’, 
‘michif’ or ‘non-status Indian’. Collectively they [have been] characterized 
by an almost universal landlessness and an oppressive poverty (The New 
Peoples 4).

Thus, the conditions in which the Métis lived were caused by their uncertain political 
status and absence of governmental benefits.

Nevertheless, it poses a difficulty to provide a convincing definition of a person 
eligible to the Métis category because no binding definition of the term has been 
developed in Canada yet. Although there have been numerous attempts to define the 
Métis, none of these has been approved of so far. The main reason for this is a complexity 
of the whole issue. In order to demonstrate it, I propound a concise overview of the 
development of the term Métis.

Donald Purich contends that “the term Métis has been used in three different ways 
in Canada” (9). Until 1982, when the Métis were recognized as an aboriginal group in the 
Canadian constitution, the term Métis had comprised also non-status Indians. According
to the second definition the Métis could be anybody of a mixed ancestry who would identify as Métis. The third and, simultaneously, the most restrictive definition recognizes as Métis only descendents of the historic Métis of the Red River area. According to Purich none of the above mentioned definitions is appropriate and applicable as it either makes the category too vague and, therefore, inaccurate, or, on the contrary, it makes the Métis category excessively exclusionary, which seems rather unjust bearing in mind the métis people outside the Red River. Due to the fact that the category of Métis has not been settled yet, the government is still not certain about how to deal with the Métis.

Considering that already twenty three years have past since the legal incorporation of the Métis among aboriginal people of Canada, and no legal definition of the Métis category has been settled yet, it remains a question how much longer it is going to take before the Métis status becomes clear.

Métis National Council was founded in March 1983 and is considered “the umbrella organization for Métis organizations from Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia” (Sawchuk 79). Its role is to represent mixed-blood people of the above mentioned areas. Peterson and Brown claim that “[f]or the Métis National Council, the ‘Métis’ people form ‘a distinct indigenous nation with a history, culture and homeland on western Canada’” (The New Peoples 6). The draft definition of the Métis as outlined by the Council in the year of 1999 mirrors this concept. It reads as follows:

‘Métis’ means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is accepted by the Métis Nation through the Acceptance Process and:

a/ is a descendant of a Métis person who resided in or used and occupied the historic Métis Nation Homeland on or before 8 December 1869; or

b/ is if Canadian aboriginal ancestry, can demonstrate sufficient connection to the Métis Nation, and is resident in the Métis nation Homeland at the date of enrollment; or
1 The Métis

c/ was adopted as a child, under the laws of any jurisdiction or under nay Métis custom, by a Métis within the meaning of (a) or (b) or a descendant of any such adoptee (Sawchuk 79).

The most recent definition, however, used by Métis National Council, defines the Métis as a person who “self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation” (Who are the Métis?). Baring in mind the development of the definition of the Métis term it is evident that the Métis category becomes gradually more and more “exclusionary” (Sawchuk 81). Thus, a “new set of disaffected Métis” emerges, which may cause “problem to the organization” (Sawchuk 80).

1.2 Red River— the cradle of the distinct “Métis” society

In spite of the fact that the first Métis appeared already in the mid seventeenth century on the eastern coast of Canada, more accurately, around the Great Lakes area in New France, Peterson and Brown stress that “the community that in its genesis and history was most critical to the coalescence of a collective and conspicuous métis political and cultural identity” was that of a Red River area (The New Peoples 10). Two conditions contributed most to this fact. The first of those was the assimilationist politics of New France that promoted the idea of “One Nation”\(^3\). Thus mixed-blood people in the region had to choose between assimilating themselves into the society of the white settlers or join the Indian tribes. Olive P. Dickason emphasizes the fact that “[t]he policy of creating one nation [simply] discouraged the emergence of a separate Métis identity during the French regime” (Aboriginal Peoples of Canada 193). In these circumstances, Dickason says, “the mixed-blood children identified with one side or the other of their heritage” (Aboriginal Peoples of Canada 193). The second, no less important reason was the expansion of the

---

\(^3\) For more detail see the chapter 3 on colonialism
fur trade further west, to the north-western prairies in Canada. Dobbin quotes in his *The One-and-a-Half Men*: “Métis people owed their birth to the fur trade” and their whole existence and life revolved around this activity (qtd. in Dobbin 18). Adams is being more specific when explaining the role the fur trade played in the emergence of the Métis:

As the fur trade grew, so did the need for labour. European trading companies required cheap labour that could be discarded when not needed. Usually, this type of labour was supplied by European workers. However, in the latter 1700s there was a shortage of such labour due to wars in Europe. The Hudson Bay company concluded that a cheap labour pool had to be reproduced within Rupert's Land (*Tortured People* 107).

The remoteness of the prairies in the Far Northwest provided the best conditions for a development of the Métis as a unique people. Olive Patricia Dickason comments in her essay “From ‘One Nation’ in the Northeast to ‘New Nation’ in the Northwest: A look at the emergence of the métis” on the uniqueness of the area:

[...] it was in the Far Northwest that a sense if separate identity finally crystallized. It was only there that appropriate conditions were found: isolation, slowness of settlement and the enduring importance of the fur trade. In this context, French-English rivalries encouraged the new spirit, contrary to what their effect had been in the East. The fur trade allowed it to be born” (*The New Peoples* 30).
2 Colonialism and the Métis Identity

2.1 Development of the Métis Identity

The Métis identity has been developing ever since mixed-blood people came to settle in the area of Red River in what is now Manitoba in the eighteenth century. Regarding Red River and its importance in the Métis genesis, Frideres explains that “[b]y the 1820s, many Métis had taken up residence at Red River, and thus it became the economic and social centre of the Métis” (38). The mixed-blood people traditionally divided into two groups, the French Métis and Scotch or English halfbreeds, each of them identifying with a different fur trading company. The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People says that, as a rule, “the French-speaking Métis were associated mostly with the North West Company and its Montreal-based predecessors. The English-speaking ‘half-breeds’ were aligned chiefly with the pre-merger1 Hudson’s Bay Company” (The Report). As Adams points out, “the Métis spoke French, were Catholic and had a French based culture, in contrast to the English halfbreeds who spoke English, were Protestant and had a British based culture” (Tortured People 107). Taking into account a considerable difference of the two cultures based on opposing religious principles, it seems incredible that the members of the two groups eventually merged and begun to refer to themselves as the Métis. Generally, two circumstances influenced this phenomenon. The circumstance that played a major role was the fact that both the mixed-blood groups belonged to the same social class in the Northwest. In other words, both the Métis and halfbreeds filled up the roles of fur traders in Colonialism. Thus, as Adams maintains, “the race/ethnic factor of colonialism subjugated them as the underclass workers and with the same racial stereotypes” (Tortured People 107). Consequently, both groups, feeling that they had the same oppressor to defy, eventually mingled into one group. The fact that “the [M]étis and

1 Mounting economic and political pressures forced the HBC and the NWC to merge in 1821 (Ray 160).
mixed-bloods joined together in the great Red River buffalo hunt” which Irene M. Spry stresses in her essay “The métis and mixed-bloods of Rupert’s Land” reflects the closeness of the two groups (Spry 105). Nevertheless, it was not until the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century that the Métis had begun to conceive of themselves as a distinct people.

Thus, the emergence of a distinct Métis identity was a result of long-lasting historical process during which a further mixing of the members of the two groups occurred. Accordingly, as Sealey and Lussier put it, “the Métis grew in numbers, flourished and began to think of themselves as neither European nor Indian but as a distinct and separate people” (3). The mixing gave genesis to a specific culture and traditions that began to characterize the Métis as a people. Sealey and Lussier point out that “[t]he mixture of Indian and White races caused the Métis to develop a distinct way of life which was a remarkable adaptation of two cultures to the environment of the Northwest” (13). The colonial politics of the fur trade played an indisputable role in the whole process. What is more, Purich stresses the fact that Indian nations were just as important as Europeans in shaping Métis culture. Their traditions and languages are an integral part of Métis culture and their influence is such that the Métis identify themselves as a native people and not as non-natives (Purich 26).

Regarding the position of the Métis in Canadian society, Adams maintains that “[a]lthough we [the Métis] emerged in North America as a distinct racial group of people” (*Tortured People* 93) and they are part European, they have never been accepted by European society as its equal members. The author emphasizes the role of colonialism in shaping the Métis reality when he stresses that “[h]istorically, we [the Métis] were definitely segregated from white society and isolated into our [their] distinct aboriginal community” (*Tortured People* 93). However, this isolation gave rise to a multifarious
Colonialism and the Métis Identity

culture which was a characteristic blend of both the Indian and European traditions. Verne Dusenberry’s description of specific elements of Métis traditional life illustrates this:

For their livelihood they depended primarily upon the buffalo, as their Indian forebears. But unlike their Indian grandparents, the hunt stemmed from the Red River settlements, where they returned each fall with pemmican\(^2\), to be sold or traded to the Hudson’s Bay Company for other food items to be consumed during the winter months. Their transportation was not confined to the horse alone, as was the Indian’s, for their distinguishing characteristic was the half-breed cart, a unique intention of their own, made entirely of wood. [...] The housing of the metis was copied directly from their fathers. [...] the metis had inherited the Indian’s love of the dance. But instead of using the dance as a medium of a religious expression, the metis danced for sheer pleasure. Nor was the music that of the primitive drum; rather it was [provided by] the fiddle [...] The dress of the metis, too, was a blend of both Indian and French. [...] From the influence of their French fathers, the metis devoutly followed the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church (Dusenberry120).

Besides all these elements, the Métis developed a distinct language called michif, a blend of Cree, English and French.

Regarding the Métis’ sense of group identity, Adams states: “By the early 1800s, French Métis and English halfbreeds, as a class-structured society were well on their way to developing a strong sense of independence and self-determination (Tortured People 108). In other words, in the beginning of the nineteenth century the Métis had reached the state of development, at which they ceased to view themselves as descendents of two different groups. According to Dobbin,

By the 1860s the conditions favoring the growth of nationalism were gaining strength at Red River. The Métis and Half Breeds now numbered in the thousands, five times the white population. The working, peasant and middle classes were becoming stronger and more defined. Yet they

\(^2\) A dried meat which could be kept for years.
were still far from fully developed and this slowly emerging national strength now faced new, external threats. [...] The fur trade and the HBC were about to be succeeded by a new economic thrust: agricultural settlement sponsored by industrial capitalism (Dobbin 22).

However, as Sylvia Van Kirk remarks, officially it was only “after 1870[^1] [that] the Anglophone mixed-bloods rapidly ceased to be recognized as a separate indigenous group, and métis has become the label which has tended to subsume all of the mixed-blood people of Western Canada” (Van Kirk 216).

Métis had an opportunity to manifest their newly acquired national consciousness in 1816 when, at the Battle of Seven Oaks, they, led by a young and educated anglophone mixed-blood Cuthbert Grant, defeated troops of the governor of the colony, Robert Semple, who was trying “to assert his authority over the area” (Purich 37). Adams sees the importance of the event in that it made the Hudson Bay Company realize that “it had to begin recognizing half-breeds as a national political unit” (Tortured People 108). Apart from that, the outcome of the event, “sent a convincing message to the imperialists in Ottawa and London that half-breeds were a force willing and able to defend their right to the Northwest Territories (Tortured People 108). On the occasion of the event, “the Métis first flew their flag, a horizontal figure eight on a blue background” (Purich 38).

All considered, the Métis had been on the verge of becoming a new nation as they, as Frideres points out, “developed a separate culture and took on the characteristics of a separate nation. Living in distinct communities, they developed their own local laws and attempted to implement their own form of government” (38). What is more, the Métis traditional way of life had offered multiple elements to the members of the Métis communities which were worth identifying with. However, the arrogance of the British colonial politics, its focus on immigration and subsequent development of industries,

[^1]: This year the Métis and half-breeds, as one group, defended their rights against government in Ottawa. Manitoba was created a province.
made it impossible for the Métis to thrive as a dignified group of people in the Northwest. However, the Métis did not surrender to the acquisitive British colonizers without a fight. Their newly acquired “sense of nationhood” (Sealey, Lussier 33) gave them strength to defend their rights not only as residents of the Northwest, but, mainly, as the people whose only homeland was Canada. As Sealey and Lussier put it:

These Métis people are the true natives of Canada. Indians and Europeans were immigrants – only the millennia separated their penetration into the New World. The meeting of the two races produced a mixture which was not from another land but whose sole roots were in the New World (Sealey, Lussier 9).

### 2.2 Métis vs. Half-breeds

Historically, the French Métis had been much more nationalistic than their anglophone counterparts. It was the French Métis who played an important role in forging the Métis identity. The roots of these differences between the two mixed-blood groups reach back to history, more precisely, to different policies of the two fur trading companies.

While the French North West company had openly encouraged relationships of its employees with aboriginal women from the beginning of fur trade, the policy of Hudson Bay company seemed much more restrictive. However, in the course of time, Hudson Bay company’s officials came to the conclusion that relationships with aboriginal women could bring economic advantages to their company. Jennifer S.H. Brown remarks that despite a relaxed policy of Hudson Bay Company, “destinies [which] awaited the [mixed-blood] progen[ies]” (Brown 199) differed considerably regarding the two environments. Generally speaking, the French fur traders tended to keep closer alliances with their aboriginal wives than English did. Majority of French worked as “freemen” in fur trade. Therefore, as Brown maintains, they tended to “form their own homes and ties with métis and Indian kin and friends, away from the posts where they had worked” (Brown 197).
Accordingly, as Sylvia Van Kirk stresses, their “cultural identity was based on the duality of their heritage” (Van Kirk 216). Conversely, the anglophone mixed-bloods usually had to choose between one of the two environments.

The English speaking mixed-bloods were expected to suppress the native part in them, which was causing a considerable psychological distress to many of them. Successful assimilation into the Protestant world was supposed to be the main aspiration of the majority of half-breeds. The problem, which would later become a steady part of the Métis lives, the perpetual search for identity which has been lost in an oppressive, racist world of a colonizer, had been present in the lives of anglophone mixed-bloods since their genesis. Van Kirk expresses the seriousness of the issue when saying: “British-Indian children were taught to deny and increasingly felt the need to suppress the Indian part of their heritage, but racist attitudes could nevertheless deny them the positions in white society to which they aspired” (Van Kirk 208). In other words, the progeny of Protestant fathers were, on the one hand, being forced into suppressing their Indian part in them, which must have been a tyrannizing experience, while, on the other hand, the Protestant society was deliberately denying them the right for successful integration. What is more, a light color of skin seemed to be a major attribute necessary for a successful assimilation. As Van Kirk remarks, “dark halfbreed[s] [...] would never be acceptable in Canadian society” (Van Kirk 213). Thus, the psychological pressure inflicted on a halfbreed individual was even accelerated by him being worried about the fact that he could not fulfill his father’s expectations.

The francophone Métis used to be much more identity conscious. The French Métis did not share the aspirations of their anglophone counterparts to assimilate into the white society. Conversely, they were proud about the fact that they had succeeded in

---

4 I intentionally use a pronoun “he” when referring to a halfbreed individual in this context as it was mainly males who were expected to succeed in white society. Thus a male halfbreed was exposed to a considerably bigger pressure than his female counterpart.
powerful interconnection of both the native and the european elements in their culture. As Brown puts it:

[i]n this particular group, more or less connected with the North West Company as the context of its most rapid growth and maturation (both demographic and political) lay the genesis of the mid-nineteenth-century métis [...] sense of identity and pride, the ramifications of which are still spreading among modern métis (Brown 198).

Brown also points out that the “nineteenth-century métis political activity and self-consciousness arose in good part from men who were in a tension between two worlds” (Brown 204). Cuthbert Grant Jr. and Louis Riel are justly considered to be the most outstanding Métis personalities of the nineteenth century. The former played an important role in surging national consciousness among the Métis. Sealey and Lussier explain that Grant was “converting more and more Métis to a belief in a New Nation, in which Métis rights could not be trampled upon by the proclamation of the Governor of Assinibioam Liles Macdonell” (39). Louis Riel became, using Sealey’s and Lussier’s wording, “a national symbol of Canada’s eternal problem of racial and religious strife” (88). The biography on Louis Riel called “One Life, One Vision” says that Riel “gave his life for his people” (One Life, One Vision) Although his personality kept officially unrecognized in Canada for long decades following Batoche, recently he has eventually begun to be conceived by Canadian public as “first human rights advocate” (Purich 46). Both Red River and North-West resistances were connected with Louis Riel’s person.

### 2.3 Louis Riel and the Métis

Thomas Flanagan remarks in his introduction to The Diaries of Louis Riel: “[...] Riel’s baffling personality [...] was so full of contradiction and ambivalence. It is virtually impossible to apply any descriptive adjective to him without also simultaneously
affirming the opposite” (17). Purich portrays a development of Canadian public’s attitude to the personality of Louis Riel:

In books, articles and speeches he has been described as everything from “an unrecognized father of Confederation” and Canada’s “first human rights advocate” to an “inveterate masturbator” (by the psychiatrist who testified in his defense). Until the 1960s, Riel was classified by most Canadians as a murderer and traitor. Then, as Canadian guilt over the treatment of its native citizens grew, Riel became a hero. Today, there is a movement to have him pardoned posthumously (Purich 46).

Louis Riel was born in October 22 in the year of 1844 in St. Boniface. He was the first child of Louis Riel Sr. And Julie Lagomodiere. As Purich remarks, “Riel Sr. Was a successful miller. His ethnic origin was primarily French, though his mother was believed to be of mixed French and Chipewyan origin” (47). Both of Riel’s parents were devout Catholics, accordingly “their piety was to be an important factor in the family’s daily life” (One Life, One Vision). Although Louis Riel’s ancestry was only one-eighths native and his family, as Flanagan says, “did not lead the roving life of the prairies but was firmly settled in the French part of the colony” (9), he was “extremely conscious of his [Métis] identity, inherited through his father’s line” (One Life, One Vision). However, a prominent position of his family allowed the young Riel to “indulge in the luxury of school” (Purich 47). Riel was a good student, which drew the attention of bishop Taché who recommended to young Riel that he should begin studies at the theological phaculty in Montreal. For almost ten years was Riel studying at Sulpican College in Montreal “law, humanities and classics” (Purich 47). According to Flanagan, “[i]t was assumed that he would return to the North-West as a missionary, the first Métis priest” (9). However, Riel ceased to find any satisfaction in the studies and therefore decided to leave the college. He was hoping to marry a French Montreal girl called Marie Julie Guernon, however, his fiancé’s father’s prejudice discouraged it. Riel, bitterly disappointed by the prejudice of
people he considered himself to be a part of from seven-eights of his whole self, his pride in his Métis heritage even accelerated. Therefore, he decided to return among the Métis in Red River area. Flanagan quotes George Stanley, Riel’s biographer, who remarks that Riel was leaving Montreal at the age of twenty-four, “educated, clever, imbued with a strong sense of pride in himself and in his own people, and unemployed, [which] was an explosive mixture” (9). He arrived in Red River in 1868. Within a year he became a leader of the Métis in their revolt against the aggressive annexationist politics of the British colonizers. As Flanagan puts it: “Louis Riel did not begin this movement, but his political and oratorical gifts quickly moved him to the forefront” (10). Hudson Bay Company was supposed to transfer its territory to the Canadian Dominion on December 1, 1869. However, the whole process prolonged, which resulted in the North-West being without any effective government for some time. Riel, making use of his legal training acquired in Montreal, established a Provisional Government. Thus, “according to Riel’s argument, the Métis government and Canada were two sovereign nations” (Purich 55). Accordingly, Canadian government had to negotiate with the Métis about the conditions of annexation of Manitoba to the Dominion of Canada. Canada finally accepted all conditions set by the Métis. Manitoba thus became a province, as the Métis required, and Louis Riel became a hero of his people.

However, Riel’s glory was rather short-lived. Protestant part of Canada became enraged after Riel’s persecution of Protestant Orangeman Thomas Scott. As Flanagan observes, “the effect of the Scott affair was to cause such hatred of Riel in English Canada that he was never again able to play a full, legitimate politics of the Dominion” (10). In

---

5 The explosion begun when Hudson Bay Company sold its vast territories to the newly established Dominion of Canada. French Métis, Catholics, wanted to ensure their land rights before Protestant settlers came and laid claims to the Métis land. For more detailed information consult the following subchapter.

6 In view of the political difficulties, the takeover was delayed until July 15, 1870 (Purich 55).

7 Thomas Scott was one of the men who were supposed to be sent to Manitoba in order to assassinate Riel.
the aftermath of the event a large anti-Catholic sentiment was surged in Protestant Canada. As Ray explains,

Outside Manitoba, the country remained deeply divided about how Riel and the Métis should have been treated. French-Catholic Quebec strongly identified with Riel, the Métis, and their cause. Most people in English Protestant Ontario wanted revenge against the Métis and their leader. They had to wait until 1885 (Ray 203).

The racist sentiments in Manitoba forced many Métis families to leave the Area of Red river and reside further west in the prairies. Riel fled into exile in the United States. He was twice elected as a member of Parliament but he never had chance to accept the opportunity. Partly it was due to his being worried about his life, partly due to the animosity of Protestant members of Parliament, who prevented Riel from taking his seat. Riel was forced to stay in exile until 1880. He only returned to Red River in July, 1884 after the Métis had called him back to defend their rights for the second time. This time, however, the colonial power was determined to violently suppress the Métis demands for just treatment. What is more, the Protestant society was hostile to Catholic Métis. Racism was becoming more pronounced in the Northwest and poverty was oppressive. Furthermore, the Catholic clergy, the Métis’ alleged protector, proved to act to the Métis disadvantage. Seeking out Riel in the United States and persuade him to lead his people again seemed to be the Métis only chance.

However, the situation had changed considerably in the Northwest since Riel left the area in 1870. As the role of fur trade had gradually been decreased to a minimum, the Métis found themselves in a complicated situation. With their major source of livelihood gone, they were desperate. Moreover, the newly come settlers were posing a considerable threat to the traditional Métis way of life. The Métis were determined to defend
themselves against the European oppressor. However, they felt they needed a capable leader whom Riel had proved to be during the first resistance in 1870.

As Ray puts it, “Although Riel was well established in his new home, he had not forgotten his Métis roots” (218). He still felt strong ties to the Métis people in the Northwest and was not indifferent to their fate. Moreover, Riel felt he had a mission to fulfill and helping his people in their fight against the oppressor seemed to be an adequate opportunity to accomplish it. As Ray remarks,

He had always been a deeply religious man, but now he thought of himself as a prophet destined to establish a new religion in the northwest. This belief set him on a collision course with the Catholic clergy, many of whom had supported him earlier at Red River (Ray 218).

Riel seemed to be annoyed by the way the Catholic clergy was treating the Métis, adapting the Catholic preaching to the demands of British colonizer. The clergy, being afraid of Riel and the power he had over the Métis, tried to prevent himself from taking the lead of the Métis, in which they did not prove to be successful. However, the Catholic clergy decided to manifest their disapproval of Riel’s attitude by collaborating with the colonial government and thus betraying the Métis cause.

During the resistance, according to Dobbin, “the Métis national will was weakening. This final struggle for liberation didn’t demonstrate the strength of will possessed by the Métis in the conflict of 1869-70” (25). The Métis strong feeling of identity as it had developed over the decades suddenly appeared under the constant attacks of both the colonizer and the clergy. The Métis knew their future, their independent way of life was seriously threatened under the conditions prevailing in the Northwest in the last decade. The Métis people, however determined they seemed to be to protect their newly acquired sense of identity, did not have means to effectively confront the immense power of colonialism.
The Métis felt humiliated by their defeat at Batoche. As Dobbin puts it: “[the] Métis national unity suffered its final blow in the flight into exile of Gabriel Dumont⁸ and the cynical and illegal execution⁹ of Louis Riel” (25). Adams maintains that

[b]y hanging Riel, Ottawa silenced revolutionary and separatist ideas in the Northwest for many years [...] The message was clear – the Ottawa regime was now in full command. Th[e] highly publicized judicial murder was to serve as a vivid reminder of what happens to patriotic citizens who attempt to establish their own democratic government in a colony (Prison 137).

The myths which become domesticated in the canadian history books in connection with both the resistances and Riel’s personality were supposed to intensify the colonized Métis consciousness. By referring to the events as rebellions the colonizers have purposefully ridiculed the Métis and their fight for human rights. The Catholic Church and educational institutions have served to the colonial system as effective means of both dissemination of distorted historical facts and deepening the Métis colonization. Adams claims that the Métis national liberation wars have always been overshadowed by an excessive emphasis on Riel [...] The colonizer has magnified Riel’s role to obscurity of all other factors [...] The colonizer often contrives false images and myths about indigenous leaders [...] The statues of Riel, the posthumous pardon, and the new title as one of the founding fathers of confederation are all designed to serve our [the Métis’] oppressor’s guilt (Tortured People 119).

Thus, while questioning the prominence of Riel’s personality in the lives of today’s Métis, the Métis activist indicates his opposition to the way the colonizer creates the history to his advantage. Adams does not question Riel’s “superior leadership” in both the

---

⁸ Gabriel Dumont was a no less important leader in the North-West resistance. His illiteracy prevented him from negotiating effectively with the federal government. For this reason he persuaded Riel to participate in the resistance.

⁹ Louis Riel was judged by a jury who was entirely Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. Riel was not allowed to defend himself, he was banned to speak until the end of the trial. Moreover, he was sentenced to death when pleaded guilty for high treason, a crime he could hardly commit when being an American citizen.
resistances, neither does he refute the fact that Riel “made the greatest sacrifice for our [his] people” (Tortured People 119). What he does, though, is demonstrating the fact that the true Métis history has long time been obscured by eurocentric hypotheses the purpose of which was a manipulation with the Métis consciousness.

2.4 Red River and North-West resistance

Two times in the second half of the nineteenth century did the Métis rose up to oppose the oppressive policies of the British colonial government. While the first event, the Red River resistance could be considered a partial victory as far as the Métis’ grievances were concerned, as it resulted in the formation of the province of Manitoba and the implementation of the scrip system, during the North-West resistance the Métis suffered a humiliating defeat, their uprising having been militarily suppressed and their grievances silenced.

During the first uprising the Métis were expressing their concern about a projected transfer of Rupert’s Land under the jurisdiction of a “newly formed Dominion of Canada” (Purich 49). The Métis felt themselves being ignored by the government as far as the project was concerned. They were trying to “ensure their survival as a distinctive francophone and Catholic community”, and therefore they “insisted on guarantees of their autonomy, such as provincial rather than territorial status, bilingual government institutions, confessional schools, and local control of public lands” (Flanagan 3). As Thomas Flanagan claims in his Riel and the Rebellion, 1885 Reconsidered, “these demands were granted in a formal way in the Manitoba Act of 1870” (3) This act promised the Métis an allotment of land in a form of scrip as well as a local government. The government, however, did not fulfill its obligations arising from the Manitoba Act, which had been, in Flanagan’s view, the government’s intention. Purich paraphrases
Thomas Flanagan who says: “its [government’s] goal was only to buy out the Métis quickly and cheaply” (61). Although the government “began the distribution of land scrip”, it “neither consulted nor negotiated with the Métis. Moreover, “the scrip was transferable”, which led to “90 percent of the Métis [being] either defrauded of their birthright by […] groups of land speculators or forced to sell because of poverty and the refusal of banks to loan them money to begin farming” (Dobbin 25). Thus Métis, due to a deliberate failure of the scrip system, were left landless and made to leave Manitoba further west in order to proceed with their traditional way of life. As Purich explains: “Racism and violence against the Métis became everyday occurrences which, coupled with the inability to gain land and the need to move west to find vanishing buffalo, led to a massive westward migration of Métis”. Consequently, Métis “became outcasts in the province which they helped create” (Dobbin 64). The North-West Resistance in many aspects differed from the Red River one. Dobbin conveys the differences between the two uprisings in a following manner:

The Métis struggle of 1869-70 was a struggle for democratic rights and economic freedom and involved a broad alliance of Métis – voyageurs, workers, farmers, Red River hunters, middle-class businessmen and intellectuals. The rebellion of 1885 was […] an economic struggle for land and, secondly, involved a narrow alliance of Métis workers and plains hunters (Dobbin 24).

The North-West Resistance was provoked by an ignorant attitude of the Canadian government to the critical situation in the Northwest. Adams contends that a discontent among all people in the Northwest, both native and white, begun in the early 1880s, mainly centering around economic issues. The cost of machinery was 40 percent higher on the prairies than in the east, local merchants charged a high price for all goods,[…] while farmers received low prices for their products (Prison 78).
Moreover, the settlers were discouraged from “participation in the political and economic concerns of the community. “The people felt themselves to be voiceless victims in a corrupt system” (Prison 78).

Although the final uprising at Batoche has been connected solely with halfbreeds and the Métis, the truth is that it was also “local merchants, farmers, settlers, workers” and natives who participated in the protests leading to the Batoche uprising. What both white settlers of the Northwest and the Métis petitioned the government for was “a greater authority for the Northwest Territories Council” as well as land grants (Prison 83).

Besides this, though, the Métis were strongly motivated by “a strong element of national liberation” and they felt that “fighting a national liberation struggle” was “worth taking up arms” (Dobbin 24). Nevertheless, due to a propaganda launched by the Macdonald’s regime with a view of discrediting the Indian and the Métis movement by portraying them in the only local newspaper as “savages” massacring “innocent settlers” and, simultaneously, due to “certain concessions [made by the government] to the white residents of the Northwest” (Prison 82), “the Métis and Indians were becoming isolated from the white people’s organizations and forces” (83). Thus the Métis again became victims of the federal government’s well-elaborated plan which intended to provoke the Métis into rebellion so that a subsequent “military occupation of the troubled Northwest” would be justified. In other words, disorders in the Northwest functioned as a pretext for government’s occupation of the territory and a subsequent annexation of the Northwest to Canada.

The Métis were defeated by general Middleton’s army at Batoche “in the spring of 1885”. This event characterizes the end of “Métis national unity” (Dobbin 25) and, simultaneously, the beginning of a long lasting colonial oppression and a racial discrimination of a mixed-blood population in Canada.
Those mixed-bloods who “enjoyed relative immunity from Canadian harassment and were allowed to cross the color line which Canadian bigotry had drawn against the rest of the mixed blood population” were “the middle-class English speaking halfbreeds” (Dobbin 23). Sealey and Lussier claim that this group of mixed-bloods who succeeded in “cross[ing] the color line” (Sealey, Lussier 149) became influenced by the colonizer’s ideology to that extent that they begun to turn on their socially unacceptable brothers with contempt, they were the unceasing critics of the “breeds” and Indians. “Useless misfits in society”, “lazy bums”, “disgrace to humanity”, and other, less complimentary terms were used to direct attention at the “breeds” in such a way that no one would consider associating the speaker with them (Sealey, Lussier 139).

Nevertheless, a vast majority of mixed-blood population in the Northwest were those who, for various reasons, did not manage to “cross the color line”. These people, as Sealey and Lussier explain

accepted their fate passively. Discouraged, dispirited and poverty-stricken, they entered the twentieth century […] ill prepared to garner their share of the good things Canada had to offer. For two more generations, they were to suffer persecution, humiliation and the denial of the rights enjoyed by other Canadians (Sealey, Lussier 140).

The effect of the decades of the Métis’ exposure to Catholic preaching manifested itself in the aftermath of Batoche. After the crushing defeat at Batoche the Métis felt themselves to be a “defeated people”, they “became discouraged and dispirited”. Lethargy “began to permeate the Métis people” (Sealey, Lussier 136). Dobbin points out that “it was during the first two decades after 1895 – as almost a million Europeans burst upon the Canadian plains – that the Métis world was decisively subordinated to white society” (34). To emphasize the situation the Métis found themselves in at the end of the nineteenth century, the author quotes Henry Pelletier, the Métis person, who remarks: “It used to be
that you would have a Métis driving his horse and wagon down the road and following along behind was his little dog. Now the white man is driving the wagon and the Métis is like that little dog, running along behind” (qtd. in Dobbin 34).

The last remnants of the Métis national will were lost in the Batoche defeat. After that moment the Métis begun to view themselves as defeated people, marginalized parts of a thriving white society. Due to “increasing racial intolerance that became a feature of the new immigrant society,” (Ray 264) a new phenomenon, hiding the native roots, sprung among the Métis. The fair color of skin seemed to be a necessary prerequisite for the Métis’s successful assimilation into the majority society. What is more, the colonizer was aware of the power his preaching of white ideal had over the Métis. Thus, the main aspiration of the colonizer was to make the Métis begin to hate themselves, their dark skin and their heritage as such. Until the 1960s, the time when the Métis begun to realize their oppression, the colonizer had been more than successful in his programmed manipulation with the Métis consciousness.

Sealey and Lussier comment on the situation of the Métis after their defeat at Batoche:

The first half of the twentieth century did not belong to the Métis. [...] The mental set of the Métis was one of hopelessness, and a feeling that failure would be their lot no matter what efforts were expended. The history of the Métis taught that in conflict with Euro-Canadians they would find no success in negotiations, armed conflict or retreat. In a sense, they were a people who had no future and were cheated of the present because the past was filled with pain, hunger, sorrow and despair. [...] For many of them, the world was a cesspool of unemployment, social ostracism by Whites, spiritual and physical degradation, hunger, long term malnutrition, disease and squalor (Sealey, Lussier 145).

The Métis identity underwent a considerable crisis after Batoche. The Métis people did not only lose their hopes for a better future in that defeat but the majority of them begun
to perceive their native heritage as an obstacle for dignified life. The colonizer, in his attempt to humiliate and subjugate the Métis, developed methods with the help of which he achieved the psychological subjugation of the Métis. The Métis found themselves under the constant pressure of the colonial school system and the Catholic Church. Both of these institutions emphasized the triviality of the native way of life while implanting the notion of white superiority in the Métis. The colonial mechanism led to the Métis’ gradual suppression or denial of their native roots. The feeling of shame replaced the Métis’ pride in their heritage. However, in spite of the fact that poverty struck almost all the Métis irrespective of their place of residence, the strong feeling of identity survived almost exclusively among the Métis living in the wilderness. In comparison to their counterparts residing on the “fringes of White settlements,” (Sealey, Lussier 147) they managed to keep their feeling of identity for a long time. The conditions needed for the preservation of the commodity seemed much more favorable in the communities located away from the influence of the majority society than were they in the cities. Sealey and Lussier explain the phenomenon:

Here [in the Métis communities], also, the housing was substandard, educational opportunities were limited and, since work was available only sporadically, the people lived in harsh poverty. Although poverty-stricken, it was within these communities that the Métis identity remained strong. [...] The social and cultural disintegration found in fringe communities was [...] lacking in predominantly Métis settlements. Cultural assimilation to White ways was slow and thus handled without undue stress. From these stable communities were to come many of the leaders of the Métis in the decades of the 1960’s and 1970’s. (Sealey, Lussier 148)

In towns, the Métis found themselves under a straightforward influence of the colonizer’s system. Racism and prejudice was preventing especially those Métis who were recognizable to the majority society due to the coloring of their skin from a successful
integration. Accordingly, the poverty and dependency on the welfare begun characteristic features of the inhabitants of the “Shanty Towns” (147). As Sealey and Lussier explain:

Low wages forced many into the cheapest houses in the dilapidated areas of the cities. In such depressing conditions, and with no recourse but to accept welfare when unemployed, they were again victims of prejudice and discrimination. The larger society felt uncomfortable with Métis in its midst and often rebuffed them when they sought help, friendship and understanding (Sealey, Lussier 156).

All considered, the Métis’ loss of identity in the towns was a consequence of the fact that conditions they experienced in the towns did not provide any positive elements to identify with. What is more, the pressure of the colonial system forced the Métis into hiding their native heritage. Thus, the pride in being the Metis was diminishing with every other generation of children being born into the uncomplimentary environment symptomatic for the Métis in the towns.

The colonizer’s systematic emphasizing of white ideal resulted in the Métis’ yearning to become respected members of the majority society. The Metis who had a white appearance were trying to “pass as members of a European ethnic minority group” (Prison 168). Adams argues that such Métis “become consumers of material goods that represent prestige symbols. [They] are seeking recognition from the white world and lead a sham existence that leaves them disappointed and more frustrated than they were before” (Prison 169). Such existence often gave origin to serious mental disorders, which Sealey’s and Lussier’s argument proves: “[...] people who are unaware of, or cannot accept, their past, often have serious personality conflicts” (149).
3 Colonialism: Its Principles and Stages

To realize the consequences of colonial oppression in general and its impact on the Métis consciousness in particular, it is necessary to define colonialism as an ideology. Edward W. Said explains that “at some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others.” Consequently, Colonialism “involves untold misery” for subjugated peoples (5). Both the terms “imperialism” and “colonialism” are used when referring to the practice of forcible subjugation of peoples on distant lands by a distinct European empire. Although these terms are frequently being interchanged, Said differentiates between the two and he maintains that “imperialism” means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distinct territory, while “colonialism” is, in his view, almost always a consequence of imperialism. Accordingly, it is the “implanting of settlements on distant territory” (8). Thus the “imperial attitudes”, the most pronounced of which seems to be the “conviction” of the moral and ideological superiority of the conquering world power over the conquered peoples, “underly[ ] colonial conquest” (Said 17). Adams uses the term “eurocentricism” to designate the imperialist ideology. In Adams’ view “eurocentricism” is a view that Europeans have of themselves as being culturally and politically superior to all other peoples in the world. Europeans have long believed they possess a superior civilization, and they have long believed indigenous civilizations to be subhuman and inferior. Imperial Europe viewed aboriginal societies according to its white supremacist ideals, not in terms of Aboriginals’ own socio-economic cultures (Tortured People 26).

According to Adams, the process of colonization consisted of three stages. In his conception, the objective of the first stage rested in the colonizer’s determination to win the natives’ favor and trust. It was at this primary stage that the work of missionaries was
particularly needed. After the first objective was accomplished, the economic and political subjugation followed. The whole colonizing process was completed with “the final stage of colonialism, the cultural takeover”. Thus, the “emphasis was placed on [the] archaic features” of the Métis culture instead of allowing it to develop “along with the nation’s advancing technology and economy” (Prison 33). What is more, the whole colonizing process was based on the racist assumptions conceiving the native population as “inferior due to biological characteristics” (Tortured People 158).

3.1 Origins of Colonialism in Canada

The Colonization of Canada begun in the sixteenth century and the French were the first Europeans who arrived in the region of St. Lawrence with the intention of founding permanent settlements there. However, as Frideres asserts, “initially, the French were interested in the New World [only] as a source of wealth capable of financing wartime activities” (16). Besides, as Dickason remarks, by the seventeenth century, the official policy of France was that of “creating of one nation” (Aboriginal Peoples Of Canada 193). In other words, in the initial stage of its colonial presence in what was to become Canada, France promoted the idea of peaceful coexistence of the French settlers with their aboriginal counterparts in which, as Frideres quotes, “they usually succeeded, because their [French’s] agricultural style of life only minimally disrupted Native life” (qtd. in Frideres 16). Dickason explains the French colonial policy in a following way:

[I]n the early seventeenth century, France, as well as Europe generally, still had all-too-vivid memories of the demographic disasters of the Black Death during the fourteenth century. In the seventeenth century, a direct relationship was perceived between a nation-state’s power and the size of its population; France, aspiring to continental pre-eminence in Europe, needed its people at home. Thus, the French were suspicious of sending

---

1 Jacques Cartier entered the mouth of the St. Lawrence in 1534 (Woodcock 13).
out citizens to colonize distant lands, for fear of depopulating the homeland. The alternative would be to send out a small corps of people who would intermarry with indigenous populations, producing, as it were, on-the-spot French nationals overseas (*The New Peoples* 23).

Thus, the emergence of the Métis population in Canada was a direct consequence of French colonial strategy. However, since the eighteenth century, France ceased to promote its policy of “one nation” as the results of the policy turned out to be rather disappointing. As Dickason puts it, the French men were “becoming Savage simply by living with the Savages” (*Aboriginal Peoples Of Canada* 193) instead of the latter becoming “naturalized” French citizens (*Canada’s First Nations* 22) as was the intention of France. Ray comments on changing French colonial policies as follows:

> The French Crown reversed its position at the beginning of the eighteenth century and begun to discourage such unions in the belief that interracial marriages were producing a “bad race” in North America. However, the Native people and Frenchmen in the interior paid little attention to colonial or Church policies. They continued to form unions as they pleased, for many reasons, including, in keeping with native traditions, the cementing of trading and military alliances (Ray 62).

Regarding aboriginal inhabitants residing in a territory that was later to become Canada, British colonial policy seemed, comparing to the French one, much more violent. The objective of British colonizers was to subjugate the native population and open Canada for settlement. Racism seemed to be a driving force of British colonialism. It arose, as Adams asserts, “from economic factors inherent in capitalism” (*Prison* 5). All considered, colonialism in Canada developed in accordance with economic principles prevalent in the territory at a specific time. In the French regime it was mercantilism under which fur trade flourished, while the economy the British colonizers promoted was that of industrialism and capitalism.
Colonialism and subjugation of the Métis in Canada had its pragmatic reasons. Fur trade was the basis of the French mercantilist economy and it quickly expanded to the western parts of today’s Canada². The Métis prospered and soon “became the most potent economic force” in the Northwest (Ray 165). As Ray further claims, “one of their achievements was combining buffalo hunting with farming and other activities” (165). However, what seems to be important to realize regarding the fur trade and its practices is that, during the French regime, it was, from a considerable part, dependent on Indian slavery. What is more, as Adams maintains, it was Catholic church which, “under the guise of holy and humanitarian intentions was the most serious exploiter of Indian labor and flesh” (Tortured People 53). Thus, the economy of fur trade gave origin to racism.

It was mostly the British Hudson Bay Company which took certain measures in order to make the native fur traders submissive and easily exploitable. The most frequent methods used by Europeans to subjugate the natives in the fur trade were those of distributing alcohol and other European consumer goods. Adams comments on a destructive force these products had on the natives:

Unfortunately, the Europeans quickly discovered the power alcohol had over the Indians. Initially used as an inducement to bring Indians to the forts, alcohol soon became a major trade item. But the white traders were anxious to create a solid market for their manufactured goods, and most of the trade in furs involved the exchange of axes, iron cooking kettles, clothing, and of course, firearms.[...] [T]he destructive function of the natives’ use of European goods was that it created a dependence upon white traders. (Prison 21)

Moreover, Ray claims that even before the Hudson Bay Company gained its monopoly over the fur trade in the Northwest in 1821, it had openly discriminated against the Métis in its everyday practices. Not only did the new racist arrangements prevented the Metis

---

² French fur traders had its base in Montreal and became united under North-West Company
from possessing important positions in the company, but the Métis were being
discriminated against also financially. Thus, although the Métis were in an advantageous
position comparing to their native counterparts as many of them were familiar with
European customs which they inherited from their French or British ancestors, it did not
save them from becoming victims of racist abuse aimed at them by both the Protestant
settlers and the British Hudson Bay Company officers.

However, it was only after the British’ foundation of Confederation in 1867 that
the Métis became victims of systematic colonial exploitation. Until that time, the Métis,
as a group, had to be respected as they had formed a majority of the Northwest society.
However, the situation changed after the British became sovereign rulers of Canada. All
of a sudden, as Frideres points out, “Mercantilism as an economic theory had been
discarded, and the importance of the fur trade was dwindling; colonization in the true
sense was now important (18). The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal
Peoples says that

when the dominion of Canada emerged in 1867, its government intended
to make immediate headway on an expansionist agenda that was one of the
primary reasons for Confederation. The government made plain its
intention to take over all the territory of Hudson’s Bay Company
operations within a matter of weeks of the beginning of the first session of
the first parliament (The Report).

Thus, the French Mercantilism suddenly changed to the British industrialism, the basis of
which was capitalism. It quickly became evident that there was no intention on the side of
the British colonizers to ensure a dignified place for the Métis in the new order. This was
demonstrated by the ignorant attitude the federal government showed when dealing with
the Métis during the events leading to the two uprisings. Adams conveys a nature of British colonial policy when he declares that:

British colonizers, using the imperial state, were instrumental in shaping Canada’s demographic development to their political and economic advantage. As a rule, the British assigned a large population of European immigrants to Canada, thereby ensuring imperialist development. The Canadian industrialists and the British imperialists developed the colony through immigrant agriculture. The Canadian government also received a preferential treatment in the form of British capital. During the latter part of the 19th century, Western Canada became an agricultural economic region. To expand the agricultural means of production, land was required for incoming white settlers, who served as markets for British industrial products. The homestead scheme was enacted, and the Indians and Métis, whose livelihoods depended on the soil, were driven from their land. [...] Thus, British and Canadian troops, with the state’s authority, took offensive action, confiscated the Aboriginals’ land, and almost annihilated the Métis nation in the progress (*Tortured People* 30).

The British colonizers made use of two distinct phenomena which considerably facilitated the process of subjugation of the Métis. The role played by Catholic Church in the process of colonization is indisputable, however, it was a sudden disappearance of buffalo herds from the Northwest plains that had a decisive impact on traditional life of the Métis and finally led to their subjugation. Adams suspects the British colonial government in Canada of participation in the slaughter of the buffalo. He justifies his view in a following manner:

The sudden and systematic slaughter of the buffalo certainly helped to serve Ottawa’s plan. Also, the confinement of the Indians and Métis to

---

3 For more information on the two Métis uprisings see the chapter 2 on the Métis identity
4 Since 1830s a number of buffalo herds “roam[ing] the plains” had been diminishing (Woodcock). By 1870 they had totally disappeared.
5 It is well known that the United States, its army, and its government deliberately exterminated the buffalo in order to exterminate the Indians who lived on them (Prison 65). However, Canada has never publicly acknowledged to have had anything in common with the policy of the United States.
reserves ad rural ghettos immediately after the slaughter makes it hard to believe that the fact of millions of dead buffalo on the prairies was coincidental. Too many pieces of the imperial plan fitted together too neatly (*Prison* 65).

The whole culture of the native peoples residing in the great plains of the Northwest was to a considerable extent dependent on the buffalo. Woodcock explains that the buffalo “had provided in abundance everything they needed for their highly specialized way of life. It sustained a whole culture, not just economy, and it is no exaggeration to say that when buffalo herds died off, the traditional life that had been lived on the plains for seven or eight thousand years died with it” (Woodcock 261). Although the disappearance of the buffalo did not have such a devastating effect on the Métis as it had on other Plains Indians, the Métis suffered a great deal as well. In a view of the fact that “the buffalo hunt provided the Métis with an impressive organizational structure and by 1820 was a permanent feature of Red River life,” (Purich 29), the disappearance of the buffalo did not only mean the end of the Métis prosperity, but it also caused a significant damage to the Métis culture.

Nevertheless, the power of british colonialism was fully demonstrated only after the brutal suppression of the Métis during the North-West Resistance. An immense wave of racist hatred that had been surged against the Métis before the resistance only increased in the aftermath of the event. Consequently, with all their hopes lost after their defeat at Batoche, the Métis remained, as Woodcock remarks, “disorganized, marginal community in Canadian society”. Woodcock concludes that “it is only recently that they have re-established a kind of unity and cohesion as a people” (275).
3.2 Colonialism in the twentieth century Canada

A number of mechanisms have proved useful to the colonizer regarding his effort to maintain the Métis in their subjugated positions in the twentieth century. Apart from the role played by Catholic religion and educational system, it has mainly been, using Adams’ terminology, “economic” and “political subjugation” that kept the Métis oppressed (Prison 33). Economic subjugation is achieved by creation of the feeling of dependency among the oppressed on something offered by the majority society. Instead of giving the colonized a possibility to participate in the economy of the majority society, the colonizer creates conditions under which it is impossible for the colonized to obtain a decent job. Due to discriminatory practices, the Métis are given only seasonal or casual jobs, which as Adams remarks, forces them into “a day-to-day occupational existence” (Prison 145). Adams gives a following assessment of the situation:

The majority of jobs given to native people are casual and seasonal, hence they are unable to build any security around such jobs. These employment circumstances force natives into a day-to-day occupational existence. They are unable to plan for a future, or for their children, or think in terms of social mobility within the present employment structure (Prison 145).

Thus, the Métis becomes dependent on the welfare of the state. Dependency on welfare has been, in the twentieth century, a widespread phenomenon in Métis reality, of which Adams gives a following account:

Welfare assistance is one of the most effective ways of controlling the oppressed, who represent a threat to society’s order. However, once people are forced to live on welfare for a while, they develop a dependency that soon encompasses their entire lives. The structure for maintaining Aboriginals under the welfare system extends through numerous state institutions, such as the police, schools and the church. The result is a

---

6 For more information see chapters 4 and 5.
highly sophisticated and efficient mechanism for making the poor fearful, intimidated and, most importantly, subservient (Tortured People 19).

Political subjugation rests in the colonizer’s determination to leave the Métis in “[a state of] ignorance and passivity, [...] politically cautious, suspicious of political ideas” (Dobbin 81). Thus, being politically “illiterate”, the colonized does not pose any threat to the society’s order (Tortured People 78). Adams comments on the role political subjugation plays in colonialism when he stresses that:

“Divide and rule” is a basic method of oppressive action that is as old as imperialism itself. Since the colonizer subordinates and dominates the rank-and-file natives, it is necessary to keep them divided in order to remain in power.[...] Accordingly, oppressors prevent any method and any action by which the oppressed could be awakened to the need for unity. Concepts such as unity, organization, and struggle are immediately labeled as dangerous.[...] It is in the interest of the colonizer to continuously weaken the oppressed, to isolate them, to create and deepen rifts among them. This is done by various means, from repressive methods of police action to forms of cultural imperialism and community action programs. The colonizer manipulates the people by giving them the impression that they are being helped (Prison 178).

Accordingly, colonialism made use of the Métis vulnerability. As they did not possess a land base to get united on, they became politically weak. With the exception of Alberta, where eight Métis colonies were established by federal government in the forties\(^7\) of the twentieth century, the Métis, having not been recognized a federal government responsibility\(^8\), were “forced to squat” on “Crown Lands” (Ray 265). As Ray points out, “[t]hese squatters came to be known as the “Road Allowance People”\(^9\) (265). The Métis settlements have been scattered throughout Canadian Northwest, often “virtually

\(^7\) The foundation of the Métis settlements in Alberta has been the only project sponsored by a federal government regarding the Métis in Canada.

\(^8\) Until the issue of the New Canadian Constitution in 1982, the Métis had not been recognized as an aboriginal people. Accordingly, legally, they had not been a federal government’s responsibly.

\(^9\) Road Allowance: crown land on either side of road lines and roads (Campbell 8).
immobilized by poverty, malnutrition and disease – conditions which made democratic action nearly impossible” (Dobbin 72). However, two times during the twentieth century the Métis managed to gather strength and opposed the oppressive colonial government.

In the thirties it was mainly Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady, the Métis activists, who, as Dobbin remarks, “made a steady and determined contribution to [the] long process of decolonization by encouraging the native people to cast off their colonial, dependent mentality” (197). Brady was repeatedly emphasizing the fact that the oppression of the Métis would not be finished until “the Métis ruthlessly uproot every last vestige of colonialism to which [they have] been subjected” (Dobbin 198). However, the movement in the thirties and forties did not succeeded in bringing any major changes to a social order in Canada. It had not been until the sixties that the Métis question came, at least for a decade, to the foreground of interest of both Canadian majority society and federal government. Adams ascribes the fact that the Métis National Movement arouse in the sixties to a general situation in colonial world at that time. The Métis anti-colonial struggle in Canada was provoked and inspired, as Adams stresses, by “the civil rights struggle that overtook the United States in the 1960s” (Tortured People 160). Adams explains the background of the Métis National Movement in Canada in a following way:

Our battle was part of the political crisis of the world, as expressed by youth and university students. We were influenced by the events south of the border and prodded by increasing racism at home, rose up against Canada’s colonial administration. Racism and semi-apartheid structures were highly visible. Particularly oppressive were the state welfare officials, the police, priests and teachers. Indians, Métis, and Inuit people were sensitive to their powerlessness and lack of control they had over their daily lives (Tortured People 160).

---

10 The greatest achievement of the movement was the issue of the Métis Betterment Act in 1938, on the basis of which eight Métis settlements were established in Alberta.
Nevertheless, Adams concludes remarking that “after a decade of struggle for self-determination, we [the Métis] found ourselves [themselves] under ‘new’ control – direct colonial domination transformed into neocolonial rule” (160), under which the Métis people “continued to be equally repressed, exploited and impoverished” (*Tortured People* 155).
4 Catholic Church as a Colonial Instrument

Rivalries between the French and the British have been a steady part of the Canadian history. Thus, changes of rulers brought about changes of the officially supported religion as well. Accordingly, Catholicism, which had been brought by French explorers and had been gradually implanted onto native societies with varying degrees of success, was at various times confronted with an influence of newly established Protestantism. However, the most critical times awaited the Catholic Church after the British had defeated the French in the year of 1763 on the Plains of Abraham and, accordingly, became the sovereign rulers of what was to become Canada. Since the first explorers and later settlers to Canada were French and, consequently, the first mixed-blood people were Métis, the Catholic Church had become over the centuries a steady authority for Métis throughout Canada. However, there had always been a hidden purpose for the activities of the Catholic missionaries in the colonies. Besides accompanying and serving the first settlers, the missionaries soon began to fulfill the roles of civilizers, of propagators of the Christian dogma, a situation which was convenient for the imperialist purposes.

Concerning the preoccupation of European colonizers with the civilization of the natives, James S. Frideres cites in his *Native Peoples in Canada* the observation made by the British Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in 1830:

> It appears to me that the course which has hitherto been taken in dealing with these people [Indians], has had reference to the advantages which might be derived from their friendship in times of war, rather than to any settled purpose of gradually reclaiming them from a state of barbarism, and of introducing amongst them the industrious and peaceful habits of civilized life (qtd. in Frideres 10).
Howard Adams argues in his *Prison of Grass*¹ that “conversion to Christianity was a powerful force in the destruction of native culture and religion, and the imperialists fully understood how useful missionaries could be in subjugating colonized peoples” (28). Therefore, the Church quickly became an inseparable partner of the colonization process. Gloria Cranmer Webster expresses her opinion about the role the missionaries fulfilled during the colonization period in a following way: “the settlers came for our lands and our resources. They were quickly followed by the missionaries and government agents who came for our souls and minds” (Webster 29). John Webster Grant maintains that after a long time of concealing the truthful information concerning the role missionaries played in a process of colonization in Canada, they have finally become to be conceived “as unwitting destroyers of a culture they seldom took the trouble to understand” (1).

A number of cases can be mentioned in which Catholic clergy have proved their service to the colonial success. It is not only Howard Adams who blames the Catholic missionaries for having initiated negative racial stereotypes in Canadian society, for betraying the Métis during such important event as was the North West Rebellion in 1885 or for having served as the “powerful influence in spreading European culture and ideas of white supremacy” (*Prison* 29). The paradox is, though, that in spite of the injustices done by the Catholic clergy to the Métis throughout the decades, the majority of the Métis stayed loyal to Catholicism. However, recently, the attitude of the Métis to the religion seems to have been changing according to what Adams claims in his *Tortured people*: “although [the] churches held considerable power over Native communities for many years, their influence has been seriously weakened in recent time” (43).

The concluding section of this chapter is devoted to the analysis of the role Catholic clergy mostly played in Métis communities in the past. The problem of the

¹ Any further reference to this book will be abbreviated as “Prison.”
attitude of the Métis towards the authority of Church is outlined as well. As far as the role of Catholic clergy in the Métis communities is concerned, Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* serves as a valuable source to draw on.

### 4.1 Catholic Church in New France

The first Catholic missionaries to Canada appeared in the sixteenth century on the eastern coast of the North American continent, more precisely in New France. However, “the honour of being recognized the first missionary to the Indians fell to Jessé Fléché, a secular priest of the diocese of Langres, who was recruited for Acadia in 1610” (Grant 3). The primary role of the first missionaries was to “civilize” the natives, alleged heathens. According to Adams the first missionaries were not “aware of the specific function they served in the imperialist scheme”, which, as he argues, was not important. On the contrary, Adams points out that the missionaries “were much more valuable in the service if they were naively dedicated to Christianizing the ‘heathens’ and remained ignorant of the political function” (*Prison* 29).

In Dickason’s words, the aim of the first missionaries was to “protect and cherish th[at] helpless race” (*Canada’s First Nations* 225) and “to save Indian souls” (Grant 31). Nonetheless, the main reason why the French authorities wanted to strengthen the relations with native peoples was that they wanted to ensure the continuity of the fur trade. Ray explains that “winning the trading loyalties of Native people was essential to the success of French imperial policy [as] the Crown had tied the fur trade to its colonial expansion plans” (60). What is more, “once the French had to face rival European claimants for territory in the Atlantic and eastern Great Lakes regions, the retention of Native groups as military allies became increasingly important.” Thus “the Crown turned to Catholic missionaries to Christianize Native people, while simultaneously introducing
them to French ways, in an attempt to make them loyal allies” (61). However, as soon as all the threats were warded and no other “potential attackers” acknowledged, the Métis and other aboriginal peoples of Canada were no longer needed for the “support in battle” (Frideres 19). Accordingly, the assimilationist policy was launched with Roman Catholic missionaries as its major promoters.

All of a sudden, the Métis in the area of New France were being forced by the Church into reclaiming their identities and merging either with the native or the white population. There was no other way for the Métis residing in the area than to assimilate, unless they wanted to suffer the prosecution of the federal government. Until 1988 there had officially been no Métis people in the area of New France, which testifies the power of the Roman Catholic Church in the process of colonization and subjugation of the Métis. At the same time, the active collaboration of the Roman Catholic Church on the assimilationist project in New France demonstrates its role as the collaborator of white government.

Thus, the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in New France might have seemed rewarding for the natives at the beginning, however, it turned out to serve the colonizer’s purpose instead. The way the Catholic Church treated Métis in New France demonstrates its position in the colonization process. However, at that time the Church had not been the official collaborator of imperialism yet. As Howard Adams puts it in his *Tortured People*: “It was not until the mid 1800s that [services of church] were recruited by Anglo-Canadian imperialists for systematic colonization” (42).
4 Catholic Church as a Colonial Instrument

4.2 Catholic Church in the Northwest

After the Great Britain became the sovereign ruler over the Canadian territory in 1763, Protestantism became the officially promoted religion there. In a view of the fact that the British authorities were initially “opposed to the establishment of a regular Catholic hierarchy” in the Northwest, the only diocese present in the region after 1760 was the Diocese of Quebec (Huel 11). In spite of the fact that there had been a large number of the Métis and French Catholics living in the Red River Colony, there had been no permanent Catholic priest to serve them until Lord Selkirk, a Catholic himself, invited a Catholic Bishop to “establish a permanent mission in his colony” at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Huel 11). Nevertheless, it was not until the arrival of the Oblate mission in 1845 that the Roman Catholic Church began to play its prominent role of an executor of colonialism.

The Oblate mission arrived in the Red River area in 1845 to “assist Bishop Norbert Provencher and begin their initiation to missionary work among the Saulteaux and Métis of southern Manitoba” (Huel xiii). Adams maintains that Catholic missionaries “came to the Canadian Northwest in the nineteenth century as the vanguard of industrialism” (30). Accordingly, their primary role was to prepare the Métis for a new order and a way of life which was expected to reach the Northwest soon. It did not take long before Catholic missionaries became popular among the Métis and French settlers, which Huel ascribes to their being “first and foremost a French-speaking order and, as such, [they] were an elite in the French Catholic community be it in Quebec or in western Canada” (xi). Thus, in spite of the fact that the Northwest territory was full of Protestant settlers openly expressing their antipathies to their Catholic Métis neighbors,

---

2 In 1763 the British defeated the French on the Plains of Abraham and thus became the sovereign rulers of the land which were later to become Canada.
3 Lord Selkirk was the first British who came to the Red River area with the intention of establishing a permanent settlement there.
the Roman Catholic Church “expanded far beyond the limits established by the early secular missionaries and Oblates” (Huel 13). Before long, the Catholic missionaries managed to build strong positions among the Métis who became their loyal audience.

Appearing in the Northwest, the territory run by the British Hudson Bay Company, the Oblates had to win their positions in the area where Protestantism was the generally promoted religion. However, as Irene M. Spry remarks, in spite of the fact that “hostility between Catholic and Protestant divines was a byword in Rupert’s land” (Spry 97), the Oblates managed to vindicate their positions in the territory. This can be partly ascribed to the active cooperation of the first missionaries with the Hudson Bay Company’s officers who quickly realized how beneficial the mutual cooperation could be.

On the one hand, the Catholic preaching of a “moral necessity of honoring their [Métis] contractual obligations” was advantageous for the company’s trading relations with the Métis in the fur trade. The Oblates, on the other hand, could use the company’s transportation facilities (Huel 35). Huel more precisely comments on the nature of the relationship between the Oblates and the Hudson Bay Company:

> While company policy and the antipathy of a few of its officers at times created hardship for the Oblates and their mission […] the Bay’s officers were quick to note that Oblate missions attempted to be self-sufficient […] and that the Oblates offered more support to the company than did Protestant missionaries (Huel 35).

Moreover, Adams claims that it was the Hudson Bay Company which invited Catholic priests to the Northwest territories. The officers of the company were relying on the missionaries that they would manage to “maintain economic and political control within Ruperts Land” (*Tortured People* 42). The prominent Métis activist further adds that “the Hudson Bay Company and the British Colonial office brought in both Anglican and Roman Catholic churches to the Northwest Territories during the period of serious
working class agitation against Hudsons Bay Company” (Tortured People 42). Accordingly, the role of the Catholic priests was to bring to the Métis, the most pronounced agitators against the Hudson Bay’s exploitative policies in the fur trade, the “ideological colonization” (42). In other words, Catholic preaching was supposed to be influencing the Métis to the point at which they became more submissive and timid. The Métis thus were supposed to become victims of the colonial machinery which made use of Catholic religion in order to suppress fur traders who were asking for fair prices for their goods. However, at that time the Métis did not give their clergy the opportunity to manipulate them. On the contrary, the Métis eventually succeeded in making the Hudson Bay Company relinquish its monopolistic politics in the fur trade. Eventually, as Dobbin observes, “the Métis declared free trade” (21).

Taking everything into consideration, the missionaries who came to the Northwest with the intention of serving the poor, did not hesitate to initiate a close relationship with the exploitator of the Métis, the Hudson Bay Company. Nonetheless, most Métis, contrary to their Cree counterparts who seemed to be suspicious about the “inquisitive priests,” (Prison 30) yielded to the religious pressure of the Oblates and, in their guilelessness, began to regard their Catholic priests as “superior and invincible” (Prison 27).

However, in the first place it was the well-elaborated tactics of the Catholic mission which earned the missionaries their popularity among the Métis. The tactics was based on two prerequisites. The first one was the foundation of a mobile mission, a “mission ambulante” (Huel 13), which was a unique departure from the traditional parish or casual contact with itinerant tribes”. Thus “the clergy were able to maintain contact with the Métis hunters in their wintering camps” (qtd. in Huel 13). Placing a “great value in the preservation of indigenous languages” was the second principle of the Oblate mission which functioned as a “bulwark against Protestantization” (Huel xix) as
Protestant priests were mostly reluctant to learn indigenous languages. Concerning the importance of the above-mentioned factors for the mission Huel observes:

To be successful and effective as a missionary in the North West, [...] one needed more than the desire to serve in that region. If he were to be understood by those whom he was evangelizing, the missionary had to communicate in the language of his audience and be familiar with their customs and traditions. In addition, the process of evangelization could not be conducted in an artificial milieu nor could the missionary be isolated or set apart from his flock [...] the Oblates would have to preach and instruct in the vernacular and live in the midst of their charges and adapt their activities to the lifestyle of the Métis” (Huel 29).

All considered, the Oblates were, at the initial stage of their activities among the Métis communities, genuinely determined to christianizing the Métis, which they proved by their willingness to make sacrifices in order to accomplish their objectives. In Adams’ view Catholic missionaries truly believed they “served God” when trying to civilize the Métis by evangelizing them. He further maintains that “the missionaries believed that God had commanded the clergy to save the souls of the heathen savages” (Prison 29).

Moreover, their conviction in a correctness of their conduct was based on their “feeling of social, economic and cultural superiority” over the Métis (Huel xxv). Accordingly, the priests were allegedly serving God when trying every possible means to paralyze the Métis independent thinking.

Huel observes that the Oblates’ primary objectives were those of incalculating “among them [Métis] a behaviour and lifestyle that reflected Christian values.” In other words, “instil in children [Métis] the fear of God and the necessity of avoiding temptations and sin” (Huel 6). The clergy managed to rouse in their Métis audience the feeling that opposing the authorities was a mortal sin. By doing this they ensured the Métis’ obedience. Thus, the fear of God belonged to the most effective instruments used
for colonization purposes. Not only did the clergy’s emphasis on the possible God’s malice successfully inspired awe in the Métis and thus resulted in their gradual loss of the ability to rationally judge their situation and oppression, but it also justified the oppression inflicted on them both by the priests and by the colonial society. Consequently, the Métis, being afraid of hell, were patiently enduring their fate which was, according to the clergy, predestined to them. The irony is, that the clergy practiced these exploitative methods while pretending to fulfill the roles of the Métis confidents. Accordingly, the clergy accomplished that the Métis began to fear God, while, simultaneously, they still worshipped their priests for their kindness and willingness to make them immune to any possible temptations. By pretending to sympathize with the Métis and their grievances, the Oblates succeeded in winning the favor of their Métis audience. Therefore, as soon as the missionaries accomplished their objective of becoming part of the Métis communities, the second phase of the colonization process, in which Catholic priests played a major role, could have been initiated. The Oblates made use of the privileged position and power they had over the Métis for colonization’s purposes. Howard Adams argues that it was the Métis’ great devotion to their religion and priests” that made them easily manipulatable and thus susceptible to the effects of colonization (*Prison* 31).

Thus, the power of Catholicism in the process of colonization of the Métis rested in its ability to pretend to be serving the Métis while, in fact, by preaching obedience and humility it was deliberately taking power away from them and colonizing them. Frideres explains how Catholic ideology has been exploited to colonize the Métis:

> Roman Catholicism holds that poverty is not a social evil, but is God’s will. Instead of struggling against God’s will, Catholics are encouraged to humbly accept their fates to ensure a place in heaven (Frideres 174).
Accordingly, the Métis were encouraged by their priests to passively endure their poverty caused by the oppressive colonial system instead of mobilizing themselves and trying to resist the oppressive system. All considered, Adam’s judgment that “the part played by the priests in the colonization of the native people was as destructive as that played by the soldier and the fur-trader” (*Prison* 28) seems adequate.

The attitude of the Oblates to their Métis flock was changing in accordance with the changes of the conditions in the society of the Northwest. While at the beginning the Oblates’ activities benefited the Métis, the missionaries were petitioning government for schools, hospitals, and other facilities which had been scarce in the Métis settlements, their determination to serve the Métis was gradually diminishing with more and more Protestant settlers coming to the Northwest. As Dobbin remarks, “Métis were no longer an acceptable flock for a Catholic Church trying to maintain its prestige in the new, Protestant, order” (43). Catholic priests were still parts of the Métis settlements, however they inconspicuously begun to fulfill their unwritten role of the collaborators of government and its colonial politics. In this sense, the Catholic priests were in an advantageous position as by then they had managed to build strong enough positions in the Métis communities, which enabled them to manipulate easily with the Métis consciousness. Their alleged role of the Métis’ confidants allowed them to play with Métis’ psyche and thus manipulate them into accepting their inferior positions in Canadian society and, how Adams explains, “be eternally grateful to the Lord for giving us [them] so much in life” (*Prison* 27). Verne Dusenberry comments on the privileged position Catholic priests enjoyed in Métis communities:

> From the influence of their French fathers, the métis devoutly followed the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. So devoted to their Church were they that as a matter of general practice they seldom embarked upon a hunt without having a priest accompany them. When they stayed away from the
settlements over a long period of time, they observed Sunday with recitations of the rosary and with prayers (Dussenberry 122).

Although the author comments in her essay on the situation of the mixed-blood people in Montana, her observation is fully applicable to the Métis of the Red River area. One of the reasons why the Métis were being relatively easily converted to Catholicism may have been that they felt safe with the Oblates who spoke French as they did and thus inspired confidence in the Métis. The intention of the first missionaries was to appeal to the Métis’ consciousness until the latter began to regard them as the essential parts of their Métis communities. Once the priests accomplished that objective and the Métis were in a state of dependence on their clergy, the priests had the best conditions for practicing colonization principles on their Métis audience. However, the way the priests manipulated with the Métis seemed so inconspicuous that the Métis perceived priests’ practices as manifestations of loyalty and alliance rather then of exploitation. In the analysis of Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* a number of examples concerning the exploitative practices of the Catholic clergy are outlined.

There are numerous examples to be drawn on in support of the assertion that the Oblates repeatedly acted to Métis’ disadvantage during their work in the Northwest. First, as Huel asserts, “[t]he Oblates generally disliked free traders because their presence was disruptive” and, in their opinion, “threatened long standing relationships” (35). Dobbin comments on the nature of the above mentioned relationships in a following manner:

The greatest threat to the HBC dominance of Rupert’s Land came from free traders. Their competition for profits led the HBC to seize their goods, arrest and often jail them. In the mid to late forties the company brought troops from Britain to emphasize its authority. In 1849 the free trade struggle came to a head. […] the Métis declared free trade (Dobbin 21).

In other words, free trade was a straight attack on the monopoly system in the fur trade that had been indirectly declared by the Hudson Bay Company. Accordingly, Catholic
Church as a secret collaborator of the Company, could not allow that to happen. Thus those ones whose interests the Oblates tenaciously promoted were clearly not the Métis’, their alleged wards, but, contrary, those of the exploitators of the Métis.

Secondly, the existence of the mounted police in the Northwest territories was, in its beginnings, also a merit of the Oblates who, as Adams argues, “constantly urged the federal government to establish a police force for the maintenance of imperial justice in the Northwest” (*Prison* 31). Adams, in the same text, further comments on the role of the Mounted Police played in the lives of the Métis: “The Mounties were not ambassadors of goodwill […]; they were the colonizer’s occupational forces and hence the oppressors of Indians and Métis” (86). While their intended responsibility was that of “patrolling” the Métis communities, they “proved instead to be a source of oppression and agitation, much disliked by the native people” (85). Consequently, the role of Catholic priests in this case was again that of the Métis’ oppressors.

However, the most important and, simultaneously, for the future of the Métis as a people, decisive moments, at which the Métis were betrayed by their clergy, were those of the two uprisings organized by the Métis in protection of their rights. The first insurrection is now being referred to as the “Red River Resistance” and occurred in 1869. The second and also the last uprising the Métis undertook happened in 1884 and is now referred to as the “North-West Resistance.” Although neither of the two uprisings managed without certain interference of the Catholic clergy, the role played by the Catholic priests during the events that finally ended in the North-West Resistance seems much more relevant as far as the consequences of the clergy’s intervention for the future of the Métis are concerned. It was then that the Catholic priests proved their roles of “serve[rs] of colonialism” (Adams 31) when actively cooperating with the colonizer on suppression of Métis grievances and thwarting their efforts.
During both the resistances the Catholic priests functioned as government’s envoys entrusted with convincing Louis Riel, the Métis leader, of the advantage of accepting financial reward offered by the government and leaving Canada instead of accepting the seat in the House of Commons. As Howard Adams puts it: “In the troubles of 1869 it was Bishop Taché, in 1884 it was Father André” (Prison 34). However, while during the Red River Resistance clergy at least “urged the government to deal fairly with the Métis” (Purich 83), during the North-West Resistance, as Howard Adams maintains: the Catholic priests who had been part of the Métis communities for many years did not hesitate to undermine the efforts of the Métis people. Because of the privileged position they enjoyed in the community, they had access to important information which they readily furnished to General Middleton (Prison 31).

The fact is that Catholic priests had taken an active part in all the events preceding the second Métis uprising and their subsequent defeat at Batoche. Adams vividly describes the role played by the Oblates in the events preceding the final Métis defeat at Batoche as follows: missionaries, on the one hand, “did everything to disrupt the movement” and openly “advocated non-violence” (Prison 92), while, on the other hand, were supplying Macdonald’s government with detailed descriptions of the development of the situation in the Northwest. Considering the fact that the government’s intention was to provoke the Métis into taking up arms, the information supplied by priests was of an immense value to Macdonald. Most of all it allowed him for a precise timing of his invasion of the Northwest. In this respect, the priests revealed themselves as Métis’ traitors.

Besides the active cooperation of the Catholic clergy, Macdonald’s government could also rely on a loyal collaboration of the mixed-blood person called Nolin. Despite being “intimately involved in the Métis struggle,” Nolin, as Adams stresses “had a very special function within the halfbreed community of Batoche: the treacherous activities of
Catholic Church as a Colonial Instrument

a provocateur.” Accordingly, “his main function was to get the Métis to take up arms against the government” (Prison 93). All considered, the efforts of the Métis to ensure justice for them as a people were thwarted not only by the Catholic priests who had misused the fact that the Métis “were sufficiently devout and faithful to them” to suspect their collaboration with government, but also by the person from their own ranks (Prison 92).

Taking everything into consideration, the Métis were extremely vulnerable and susceptible to colonization and manipulation. Since Batoche, the priests have been systematically working on reinforcement of the colonized consciousness in their Métis audience by making them believe that “sacrifice was our [their] role” and “inferior” position in society was the natural thing for them. Being exposed to such racist preaching the Métis “internalized the myths of inferiority and become placid and subservient” (Prison 39). Thereby, the immense power of the Catholic preaching was again misused for the purposes of colonization and subjugation of the Métis, keeping them weak and powerless.

However, the North-West Resistance was not the last event at which the Catholic priests revealed themselves as traitors of the Métis. The clergy proved their treacherous intentions again on the occasion of foundation of the first Métis settlement in Alberta. Purich claims that “the idea of forming settlements for the Métis was conceived in the last quarter of the 19th century as an alternative to the disastrous scrip system” (130). Father Lacombe, being “genuinely concerned about their [Métis’] social and economic circumstances” (Purich 131) petitioned government in Ottawa for a settlement, where Métis could practice farming. He envisioned this settlement to function as a “Catholic island in a Protestant sea” (Dobbin 43). Eventually, “[i]n late 1895 the federal government granted the Oblates a twenty-one-year lease of four townships of land (144 square miles)
in what is now northeastern Alberta” (Purich 131). The settlement was called Saint Paul de Métris. Nonetheless, however promising the project seemed at the beginning, it turned out to be a failure. Dobbin comments on the situation in the settlement as follows:

Substantial financial aid from the Dominion government was not forthcoming and the strain on Church coffers became unacceptable. Furthermore, the new society which was engulfing the plains was even less prepared to accept the Métis as equals than the white population of 1885 had been.[…] For financial and religious reasons, the colony would have to be disbanded (Dobbin 43).

Nevertheless, the financial problems were not the real reason why the clergy started to consider disbandment of the settlement. More than being concerned about well-being of their wards the priests seemed to be afraid of their threatened positions in the Northwest after more and more Protestant settlers had come to live in the region. Thus, the real impetus for the act seemed rather to be the clergy’s intention to ensure their positions in the region by generously offering the settlement to the white settlers. In other words, in pursue of their own benefit, the clergy did not hesitate to exploit the most loyal and, simultaneously, the most vulnerable wards they had in the Northwest, the Métis.

What is more, the decision to disband the settlement was made without knowledge of those who the decision effected the most, the Métis. Catholic priests who were in the charge of the settlement again deceived their Métis wards when offering the settlement to white settlers. The worst thing about the incident was, as Dobbin points out, that “[t]he Métis discovered that the clergy had proposed to the Dominion government that the colony be disbanded” only after first settlers arrived and settled on what was supposed to be the Métis’ land (43). The author also emphasizes the fact that the disbandment of the colony was not indispensable. Had it not been for the intervention of Catholic priests who claimed that “the Métis had failed to adapt to agricultural life” although there had not been a single “destitute” (43) family on the settlement, the Métis
would have managed to survive. The alleged failure of the Métis as farmers functioned as a pretext for letting the settlers in the area, which Dobbin’s comment only justifies:

The Church was not content to simply abandon the unwanted colony; it wished to replace the Métis with French settlers from Quebec. To accomplish this, the Church systematically attempted to defraud the Métis of their land\(^4\). The white squatters had taken over the land in what appeared to be a well-organized plan (Dobbin 43).

Despite the interventions of the Mounted Police, the European squatters “supported by the clergy […] remained on the land until it was officially opened for homesteading barely a year later” (Dobbin 44). It follows from what has been mentioned above that the Métis again did not find protection with the clergy to which they had proved loyal for decades.

Despite the subsequent restoration of the land “to the Métis by Order in Council,” (Dobbin 44) the affair discouraged many of the Métis residing in the settlement. What is more, “the psychological and spiritual attacks on the Métis, led by the clergy, had a devastating effect on Métis morale. Many [Métis] gave up the fight and sold their lands” (Dobbin 44). After a degrading experience in Manitoba in 1870\(^5\) when the “racial abuse drove the Métis from Red River” (Dobbin 44), the situation the Métis had to face in Saint Paul de Métis was another example of racial persecution aimed at the Métis in the Canadian society of that time.

Considering all that has been mentioned about Catholic Church and its role in the lives of the Métis, it seems remarkable how quickly the missionaries managed to gain the Métis’ trust. However, what seems even more noteworthy is the extent into which the Métis let themselves be managed by the priests. Although having been multiple times deceived by the priests and their activities, the majority of the Métis stayed loyal to their

---

\(^4\) A secret syndicate was formed whose object was to defraud the Métis of their land. „With the assistance of the influential local priest, Father Therien, many of the more gullible, illiterate Métis were induced to sell their lands. It was only after the intervention of educated Métis into the matter that „the illegal syndicate was exposed and its members fled the area (Dobbin 44).

\(^5\) 1869-70 is the time of the Red River Resistance.
priests and Catholic preaching. Making use of the Catholic dogma, especially its
preaching of servility, obedience and the need for sacrifice, priests succeeded in
indoctrinating the colonized consciousness into the Métis, by which they considerably
served the process of colonization. Adams remarks that “the church was one of the most
powerful and effective instruments in destroying native strength, and indoctrination
leading to supplicant behavior was done largely by the clergy” (Prison 39). Accordingly,
the colonization process to a considerable extent relied on the work of the Catholic
clergy. Once the Métis had adopted a colonized consciousness, they became powerless
and thus harmless for an established order in society.

Adams argues that racism in Canada reaches as back to the past as the beginnings
of the fur trade, which means that it has become deeply “entrenched” in the Canadian
society over the hundreds of years and thus it seems rather difficult for the Métis to
acknowledge it and fight it. Besides Adams, there was one more Métis activist who was
warning the Métis against the excessive influence of the Catholic clergy over their lives. It
was Jim Brady, Adam’s predecessor. Brady was extremely perceptive to “Church’s
exploitation of native people on the mission farms, where the priests lived well of the
labor of Indian and Métis” (Dobbin 36). For this reason he condemned Catholic preaching
and, subsequently, called Catholic religion to be “a crutch, and death oblivion” (Dobbin
36). However, he was only one of a few Métis who were perceptive to the extensive
exploitation inflicted on them by priests. It was not until the middle of the Second World
War that the influence of the Catholic Church on the colonies was gradually being
eliminated. However, despite considerable elimination of the influence of the Catholic
Church over the Métis communities, majority of the Métis have stayed loyal to Catholic
faith, which Purich’s observation demonstrates: “In 1987 the Métis sought to persuade the
Pope to come to Batoche, emphasizing how much their lives were intertwined with the
4 Catholic Church as a Colonial Instrument

Church” (12). In order to prove the important position Catholic clergy have had in the Métis communities, Purich quotes following ideas:

[...] The church was the central component of Metis society ... The parish in Batoche was the central meeting place, where political and social activity took place. In the end [the church at Batoche] was the last stronghold when the troops closed in and where the Metis surrendered (Purich 12).

### 4.3 Catholic Church in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*

Ken Derry remarks in his essay “Religion and Violence in Canadian Literature” that “Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* has been called ‘the most important and seminal book authored by a Native person from Canada’” (Derry 207). The importance of the book lies in the frankness and straightforwardness with which the author, the Métis herself, and, simultaneously, the autobiographical character of the novel, communicates her frustrations with the injustices based on racism in the Canadian society. Campbell devotes a considerable space in her book to her commentaries on the role of the Catholic Church in the lives of her people. The author especially expresses her anger with the way Catholic priests exploited the Métis, their loyal wards. Campbell’s testimony thus confirms the thesis that Catholicism has had a destructive effect on the Métis’ consciousness and the Catholic priests were integral parts of the oppressive colonial system.

The importance of the Catholic religion in the lives of the Métis is demonstrated already at the very beginning of the novel as Campbell remarks that “[i]n general the Halfbreeds were good Catholics and the Masses were always well attended regardless of weather or circumstances” (31). The Métis’ discipline is based on their conviction that “missing Mass was [is] a mortal sin” (31). Moreover, Campbell reveals another characteristic feature regarding the Métis’ uncritical attitude to the religion. She says:
“Our people talked against the government, their white neighbours and each other, but never against the church or the priest regardless of how bad they were” (32). Campbell’s observation mirrors the general situation in the Métis communities up to the sixties of the twentieth century. The Métis are conditioned to believe that the Church is a sacred thing and they have to be loyal to it unless they want to “roast in hell” (31). They believe it is their duty to take care of their church. No matter how poor they are the Metis always find money for the Church, of which the priests take a great advantage.

Maria’s mother is an embodiment of a devout Métis Catholic. She is reconciled with her inferior position in the society. Her reasoning is the result of years of systematic religious influence. The Catholic priests have thus made her believe that her “halfbreedness” predestines her and her family to subordinate position at the bottom of the society. Accordingly, she humbly endures all the hardships inflicted on her by the local priest as she is convinced about the fact that the priest “was picked by God” and thus it is the Métis people’s duty to serve him (29). Her piousness prevents her from viewing the world realistically and, consequently, keeps her colonized. However, the fact that Maria’s mother “never missed church [while she lived] and many times the last of our [her family’s] money went to the collection rather than to buy food” do not even ensure her a dignified Catholic funeral. The priest’s arrogance and callousness reveals when he refuses to “hold services” for Maria’s mother who has suddenly died as her father “had not called a priest in to administer the Last Sacrament before she died” (78). The priest’s leaves a strong feeling of injustice and contempt for the Catholic Church in Maria, which follows her through all her life. The priest’s arrogant behavior effects Maria’s attitude to the Catholic religion to that extent that she refuses to get married in the Catholic church. Instead, Maria has her wedding in the school building, which makes her relatives upset.
However, she feels that our her people forget “the slaps they g[et] from the Church too
easily,” and thus they prolong their colonization.

Campbell admits that she has despised the priest since the very first moment of
her childhood. Campbell, as a little girl, is highly perceptive to the way the priest is
misusing his privileged position in the Métis settlement. The following situation
illustrates the way local priests exploited their penurious Métis wards:

> When I was still quite young, a priest came to hold masses in the various
> homes. How I despised that man! He was about forty-five, very fat and
greedy. He always arrived when it was mealtime and we all had to wait
> and let him eat first. He ate and ate and I would watch him with hatred. He
> must have known, because when he finished eating all the chice food, he
> would smile at me, rub his belly and tell Mom she was a great cook. After
> he left we had to eat the scraps (Campbell 29).

The above mentioned situation is far from being an isolated example of the priest’s
exploitative behavior. When Maria’s father hides the meat from the Mounted Police in the
church basement and the priest finds it, he forces “Daddy to give him some whenever he
want[s] it” afterwards (59).

All considered, the presence of the Catholic priest in the settlement is not a
rewarding experience to the local Métis. Conversely, the priest is a part of the colonial
machinery oppressing the Métis. Campbell’s experience demonstrates the priest’s
indifference to the well-being of his Métis wards.

Maria’s critical attitude to the Catholicism is also in a consequence of the
influence her great grandmother Cheechum has had over her. Cheechum’s strong
personality prevents her from yielding to the pressure of the Catholicism. Besides, her
opposition to the Christianity is partly caused by an experience from her youth when she
was married to Christian of whom she speaks as follows: “if there was such a thing as hell
then she had lived there; nothing after death could be worse” (11). However, Cheechum’s
ability to dispassionately judge the negative aspect of the Catholic presence in the Métis communities is the exceptional phenomenon in the settlement. There are not many other Métis sharing Cheechum’s opinion when she maintains that “[Catholic God] took more money from us [the Métis] than the Hudson’s Bay store” (32). In the most difficult times it is not Catholicism which gives comfort to Maria. She inclines to Cheechum’s philosophy, which Campbell explains:

[…] I never found peace in a church or in prayer. Perhaps Cheechum had a lot to do with that. Her philosophy was much more practical, soothing and exciting, and in her way I found comfort. She told me not to worry about the Devil, or where God lived, or what would happen after death. She said that regardless of how hard I might pray or how many hours I spent on my knees, I had no choice in what would happen to me or when I would die. She said it was a pure waste of time that could be used more constructively. […] Her explanation made much more sense than anything Christianity had ever taught me (Campbell 82).

Not only does Catholicism fail to provide Maria with satisfactory answers to the practical questions regarding the everyday life, but Maria is confused by the discrepancies between what the priest preaches and what he does in reality. While, on the one hand, the priest preaches brotherhood of all mankind, he, on the other hand, openly practices apartheid policies in his church, allowing the Métis to stand in the back rows only. In Derry’s words, the priest “draw clear lines [in the community] that are not to be crossed” (Derry 207). Moreover, while teaching the Métis children that stealing is a crime, the priest himself is caught many times “taking things from the Indian’s Sundance Pole”, which, as Campbell points out, “belong[s] to Great spirit” (29). The most contradictory and hypocritical thing characterizing Christianity as such is the indulgence of Christians in the charity. The charity belongs to the most oppressive practices of the Catholic Church. It is used to reinforce the colonized consciousness in the Métis. As Derry puts it, “Christians
donate their cast-off goods to Maria’s community at Christmas, but then taint the Métis for wearing their old clothes” (Derry 207). Campbell remarks that “by the time I [she] reached the age of ten I [she] had the same attitude as Cheechum about Christians, and even today I think of Christians and old clothes together” (28).

Considering Campbell’s testimony, there were not many positive aspects about the presence of the Catholic clergy in the Métis communities. Conversely, as Derry concludes, “it would be very difficult to argue that Christianity has not been responsible for a great deal of Native suffering” (Derry 212).
5 Education as a Colonial Instrument

Educational system proved to be the most effective medium through which ideologies of colonialism could be propagated. In other words, the educational system rendered colonialism a great service by promoting colonial racist ideologies in schools, which resulted in the subjugation of the Métis. Frideres points out that “[e]ducation has traditionally been viewed by churches as the best way to acculture Native people” (173). As Huel observes, Catholic missionaries, although having not been the initiators of the idea of establishing schools in Métis communities, “quickly became the dominant participants in that venture” (Huel 99).

Adams contends that ideology is “the primary means by which the state maintains control over its citizens” (Tortured People 37). Consequently, the colonial ideology was used for an effective subjugation of the Métis. In its essence, the ideological system is, as Adams points out, comparable to “religion in that it is not subjected to scientific, or objective analysis and is put forward to be accepted on faith” (Tortured People 38). Adams concludes that, from this perspective, the educational system is regarded “[a] powerful indoctrination tool” as “the curricula teaches children the importance of submitting to the establishment” (Tortured People 40).

When taking into account that schools are the only institutions besides that of a family, which are capable of molding one’s personality, its contribution to the colonialism becomes evident. The Métis, being exposed to the constant ideological pressure at schools eventually adopts the colonizer’s ideology as their “own sense of belief and rightness” (Tortured People 38). The Métis thus becomes colonized as the racist notions promoted by the colonizer become part of their “common sense” (Tortured People 38). Ideology is therefore considered to be the most powerful colonial tool as it manages to manipulate with “one’s consciousness” and, accordingly, with one’s “entire belief system” (Tortured
Frideres quotes Kardiner and Ovesey who argue that “people to whom negative traits are continually assigned will eventually believe it to be true” (qtd in Frideres 186).

The immense power of the educational system, as far as dissemination of colonial ideology is concerned, rests in its ability to influence whole generations by exposing them to colonial ideologies. Under given circumstances, it is hardly possible for the Métis to prevent themselves from being effected by the ideologies as they encounter them everywhere. Adams claims that “exaggerations, distortions and myths form the backbone of the establishment’s belief system” (Tortured People 95).

Thus, the ideology the Métis are exposed to at schools is based on racist interpretations of the Métis history, a vast number of myths which were developed by the first missionaries and reinforced by eurocentric historians in order to “prove Western Europe as the supreme power” (Tortured People 27). As LaRoque contends, “twentieth century western standards are [were] used to assess sixteenth-century Indian life” (50). Thus the Indian and the Métis have been portrayed as underdeveloped peoples who need to be ruled.

Besides the myths based on distorted historical facts, the society of the colonizer has developed stereotyped images of the Indians and the Métis, labeling them as “backward” and “lazy” people (Tortured People 29). As the majority society have given hardly any opportunities for the Métis to disprove the racist images, the latter have often surrendered to the ideology. As Adams argues, “this imperial practice weakens our [the Métis’] intellectual and social capability to challenge the oppression and colonization resulting from such distortion about history and culture” (Tortured People 99). All considered, the power of ideology is comparable to the military power as the objective of
both is to intimidate and subjugate the masses which could otherwise prove to be
dangerous to the society’s order.

However, the systematic colonization of the Métis through education was possible
due to the fact that the Métis as well as other native people in Canada were until recently
denied their right to control education in their communities despite “parental involvement
and local control of schools are standard practice in Canada” (Highlights 82). It follows
from this that educational system was intended to function as a legal disseminator of
colonialism. Colonial system in Canada used the educational system to suppress native
languages, culture and spirituality and thus make the Métis oppressed. In other words, the
colonial system was working on destroying the Métis from within.

5.1 The Oblate Mission

Regarding the role of the Oblate missionaries in dissemination of the education among the
Métis Huel quotes C. Champagne who asserts that, “[t]o the Oblates, the school became a
key instrument with which to lead neophytes towards a more meaningful understanding of
religion as well as the determination to make one’s behavior conform to these precepts”
(qtd. in Huel 99). However, as parents of the Métis children were unable to pay fees for
schooling, the Oblates, to accomplish their objective, had to “assume all costs associated
with the education” (Huel 102). Michael Holloman maintains that the missionaries acted
on the strength of their convictions that “prescribed […] educational programs” would
“elevate” the Métis “cultural standards to more ‘civilized’ levels” (Holloman 47).
Accordingly, the objective of the educational projects suggested by the Oblates was as
follows:

- instruct the young in the fundamentals of Christianity and simultaneously
- provide them with a practical education to prepare them to live and
function within a sedentary, civilized society, that is, one that reflected the
traditions and values of western European civilization (Huel 99).

Nevertheless, to accomplish the set objective of “civilizing” the natives the Oblates were
gradually resorting to more and more oppressive techniques. They begun to advocate that
the education would be an effective method only on the premises that the child ceased to
“live with his/her family” (Huel 107). Thus an idea of residential schools was generated.
In a view of the fact that the residential schools were granted by federal government
which was legally responsible for “Native education” (Frideres 173), the Métis¹, while not
being considered the government’s responsibility, were, in a majority of cases, spared the
experience. Regarding the residential schools and their methods, Catholic missionaries
begun to pursue the idea of implementation of the Christianity on the natives at all costs,
which Huel’s revelation demonstrates:

Grandin² found a tangible expression of the educational experience he
envisioned for Indian children while visiting a reformatory prison for young
offenders in Citeaux, France, in 1878. His observations led him to
conclude that the sentence of the prisoners was rendered ‘almost pleasant’
and that it made better Christians of them (Huel 120).

These schools operated in Canada until as recently as the year of 1988, “when the last
one closed its doors” (Ray 240). Officially, the intention of the residential schools as
proclaimed by Catholic missionaries was to raise Native children in such a way that, after
graduating from the school they “would be useful, industrious, progressive individuals,
ready and able to earn their living and raise Christian families” (Huel 120). However,
contrary to the official proclamations, children were exposed to systematic colonization
inflicted on them by priests seeking “to divorce the pupils from their cultural ancestry”.

¹ The Métis were not considered government’s responsibility as they were not covered in the treaties
negotiated between the federal government and the First Nations. Thus they were considered “non status”
together with Non-status Indians and as such they legally relied on the same institutions as other Canadians
regarding the education.
² Vital Grandin was Bishop Tache’s coadjutor, who established himself in St. Albert in 1869.
which “had the effect of undermining the children’s self-confidence” (Ray 240). Jean Barman claims that the residential schools “educated them [the aboriginal children] for inequality” (Barman 271). The children were not only “made to feel ashamed for their heritage” (Ray 240), but they were exposed to an immense psychological pressure when being strictly punished for speaking native languages and forbidden to keep in contact with their families. To discourage the children from escaping the schools, the pupils were told that their parents were dead.

Ray maintains that a great deal of native children’s suffering was caused particularly by the “culture shock” they experienced at residential schools. He puts it in a following way:

Because most Aboriginal societies did not use corporal punishment, the rigid discipline of the schools was horrifying. Making matters worse, the students faced an English-only rule the day they entered the institutions, which was inhumane because many of them spoke little, if any, English or French (Ray 239).

Besides, native children had excess only to a limited level of education, which was also a part of the colonial government’s contradictory plan which was, on the one hand, openly declaring assimilations policy while, on the other hand, made an effective integration into majority society hardly possible for the natives. Ray emphasizes the fact that:

schoolteachers never [truly] envisaged that Native students would find a place in Canadian society as equals to whites. Before the wave of immigration at the turn of the century, Native youngsters were trained to be domestic and unskilled labour. As immigrants became available for these jobs, the government scrapped this meager educational goal for aboriginal children in favour of ghettozing them on reserves at the peripheries of the economy (Ray 243).
Accordingly, the real purpose of these schools was not to equip natives with knowledge that would enable their active participation in Canadian society but, rather to destroy the native personality and make him submissive and thus harmless to colonial racist system.

The government’s exploitative policy of forced assimilation reached its climax after a special amendment to the Indian Act had been approved\(^3\) giving “the superintendent-general the authority to use truant officers and fines to track down and compel all Aboriginal children between seven and fifteen years of age to attend Indian schools” (Huel 243). As Adams argues that “there was nothing sacred in this historical process of colonization” (Prison 37).

All considered, the Catholic Church was not only the initiator of the idea of residential schooling, but it was also, together with the federal government, the most enthusiastic promoter of its dehumanizing methods used there in order to subjugate and colonize the native people. By attacking the natives’ spirit through religion and stereotyping the priests managed to destroy the native person’s psyche and colonize them. Adams stresses that “by suppressing the native children, [the] authorities condition them to be quiet, unresponsive, and detached” (Prison 172). The result of such psychological pressure was, as Adams states, that children, “without realizing or having a choice in the matter, internalize[d] the establishment’s systems of beliefs and values” (Tortured People 41). Doing so they confirmed their colonized position.

Although, in comparison to their native counterparts, only a minority of mixed-blood population has been, due to the reasons outlined earlier in the chapter, effected by the oppressive policies of the residential schooling, the Catholic priests managed to govern the lives of their Métis wards no less effectively. Dobbin stresses that Catholic Church “enjoyed almost a century of unrestricted domination of the Métis through control

---

\(^3\) In 1920 Indian Affairs decided to force parents to send their children to school, and it persuaded Parliament to amend the Indian Act accordingly (Huel 243)
of the schools” (Dobbin 64). Thus, the Métis were effected in the same extent as other Native people by “ideological colonialism” which was inflicted on them by teachers at settlement schools which were, as all educational institutions, within the purview of local parishes.

The forced removal of Native children from their homes and their successive forced acculturation in residential schools is the only colonial practice that has been recognized by the United Nations as “discriminatory and damaging” (Doctrines of Dispossession). Although Canadian government “[has] apologized to the country’s 1.5 million Native people for decades of mistreatment that included attempts to stamp out their culture and assimilate Indians and mixed race people” (Doctrines of Dispossession), and, as Borrie contends, offered “a $250 million fund to redress the problems caused by the residential school policy”, it was not, in Borrie’s view, a “strong enough” apology for the Métis who felt that the statement “did not refer to the wrongs done to their communities in enough detail” (Canada Apologizes). Nevertheless, Borrie concludes that the action can be, at least, conceived as a “major step forward” in the native – government relationship.

5.2 Eurocentric Histories and Myths

The subjugation of the Métis through education proved to be successful due to a consistent promotion of the colonial ideologies in school curricula. Myths, together with openly racist interpretations of native histories, created the basis of the colonial ideology. Adams remarks that “until the 1970s Indians and Métis had been excluded from the mainstream of intellectual thought” (Tortured People 93). As a consequence, the only interpretations of the Canadian history the Métis had access to at schools were those made by eurocentric academics who based their conclusions on racist myths and stereotypes.
Thus, as Adams claims, “the mythical interpretations of Native history have been chiseled into the minds of the oppressed masses” (Tortured People 93), which, consequently, led to the Métis’ condemnation of their heritage and their subsequent colonization. Adams explains the meaning of eurocentric history in the following manner:

Eurocentric history is a political interpretation of the world based on Christianity, exploitation, profit, and Western Europe’s blind faith in its superiority. Eurocentric history embraces the myths of Indian inferiority (a myth that encourages Aboriginals’ complicity in their own oppression) (Tortured People 26).

Biased historical interpretations have turned out to be an infallible instrument for successful subjugation of the Métis. Catholic missionaries belonged to the first eager promoters of eurocentric ideology when they depicted the natives as ones who “existed halfway between humanity and animality, […] directed by instinct and ignorant of God and morality” (Tortured People 26). However, it was the twentieth century historians who reinforced the racist myths when using them as pillars for the interpretation of colonial history. LaRoque argues that “the myth of both the nobility and the savagery of the Native is not dead. It has been transported into modern times” (32).

The eurocentric academic accounts of history have been presented by teachers at schools as objective and factual interpretations. LaRoque ironically remarks that the eurocentric historians

certainly had an ingenious way of separating the wheat from the chaff; when the Indians attacked the whites it was a ‘massacre’, but when the whites invaded the Indians it was simply a ‘fight’. When the Indians tried to save what was left of their life-styles, they were savages; when the soldiers indiscriminately wiped out village after Indian village, they were civilized (La Roque 53).
Adams’ offers a few more examples regarding the distorted information Canadian children have been exposed to at schools:

In Canada, classroom students are taught that ‘when Indians attacked a white village and won, the result was a massacre. If whites attacked an Indian village and won, it was described as victory’ (qtd. in Tortured People 95).

Accordingly, the Métis, not having access to any other interpretations, internalize the ideology of the colonizer and begin to associate the negative behavior with Canadian natives as does the colonizer. Thus the Métis “become socialized by the dominant ideology of Western liberalism” which powerfully propagates a superiority of Euro-Canadian society and inferiority of the Aboriginals (Tortured People 93). LaRoque admits that eurocentric interpretations of the historical events to which she was exposed at school made her believe that “the white man was born with wings. Angelic ones at that!” (65).

From this perspective, the eurocentric interpretations of history function as the most effective exploitators of the Métis as the latter, under inexorable pressure of the racist eurocentric theories, lose their ability to critically judge a situation in a society. Adams admits that he himself had been colonized into believing that the Métis belonged to “subordinate” half of Canadian society because of their “race, class, intelligence, history and culture” (Tortured People 93). His reasoning was based, as that of other Métis’, on universal myths which dominated colonial Canadian society. These myths have portrayed the Métis as being “lazy […] primitive, sadistic rebels” and last, but not least, “savages without intelligence or beauty” (Prison 41). Adams puts an emphasis on the fact that the immense power of the myths lies in their ability to “become an organic part of thought processes of the people in the imperial nation and serve as their
realities” (Prison 13). Therefore, the primary objective of myths is to effect the Métis consciousness and make them feel ashamed for their heritage.

Adams points out that a special function of eurocentricism is to “emasculate aboriginals” (Tortured People 25), to make them submissive, incapable human beings without the ability to think for themselves. In other words, colonialism has exploited the educational system in order to disseminate the eurocentric ideology among the Métis so that the latter become subservient and begin to “look up, pathetically with reverent awe to the ‘glorious’ Anglo-European colonizer” (Tortured People 25). In the initial stages of colonial presence in Canada eurocentricism, with its stereotyped depictions of natives as “backward and lazy” (Tortured People 29), was supposed to reduce Aboriginal workers to the lowest-level jobs. Nevertheless, since the twentieth century the eurocentricism has functioned, according to Adams’ point of view, as the ideological basis for maintaining white supremacy and justifying the continued oppression of Aboriginals through the promotion of the mainstream economy and culture. The current work of Euro-Canadian academics and journalists serves the Establishment by upholding the eurocentric tradition with racist and distorted interpretations of history (Tortured People 30). Thus, being exposed to racist, degrading interpretations of historically important events, such as that of Batoche⁴, where “imperial masters brutally suppressed our [Métis’] right to independence, and then duped us [them] into believing that the Métis warriors were primitive rebels and sadistic savages”, the Métis begin to disassociate with their Métis roots. Consequently, they accept their subjugated position in society as well as “the cruelties of oppression as a necessary part of their colonized consciousness” (Prison 41). Adams admits that “as colonized peoples, we [the Métis] internalize much of the state

⁴ The Métis were defeated by federal troops at Batoche in the year of 1885. This defeat marks the end of Métis nation as well as beginning of racial prosecution of the Métis under colonial rule in Canada. For the Métis and Indians, the 1885 resistance was a revolution against Anglo-Canadian imperialism.
ideology and its ethnic, class and race dynamics which perpetuate our [their] subjugation and repression” (*Tortured People* 41). The oppressive system of the colonizer forces the Métis to renounce their Métis heritage and strive for acceptance in the majority society. LaRoque’s contribution seems illustrative of the way the propaganda, disseminated by school teachers, arouses the feeling of hatred towards one’s heritage in the Métis children:

> The point is, I had been perfectly content to sleep on the floor, eat rabbit stew and read and play cards by kerosene lamp until my perceptions were swayed at school. Neither had I suffered spiritual want. I had been spellbound by my mother’s ability to narrate Cree legends and enriched by my father’s dreams, until the teacher outlawed Cree and made fun of dreams [...] From then on I existed in poverty, not with reference to our log cabin [...], but because I was persuaded by my teacher’s propaganda and the pictures. The teacher’s authoritarianism [...] effectively weakened our respect for our parents (LaRoque 68).

LaRoque’s experience makes it obvious how powerful institutions the schools have been regarding the dissemination of colonialism among the Métis. The teachers’ systematic humiliation of the Métis history and culture and implementation of the colonizer’s ideology in the Métis children arouse a feeling of self-hatred in the latter. The Métis pupils begin to feel that becoming a part of the majority society is the only way how to escape the feeling of shame for their native heritage.

Nevertheless, only a fraction of the Métis manages to integrate into the majority society due to the prejudice and racism of the latter. Even if they manage to do so, they, according to Adams, achieve only “a pseudo-integration” as the “basis of discrimination is racism” (*Prison* 169). Thus the eurocentric ideology to which the Métis are exposed to in schools exploits them to the point at which they are forced to “den[y] their Métis background and forever remain silent about it” (*Prison* 203). However, simultaneously,

---

5 Emma LaRoque, a Métis from northeastern Alberta, was born in 1950. She began her life in the Cree-Métis culture of that era. She defeated a society’s prejudice of that time and graduated in 1973 from Goshen College, Indiana with a B.A. in English/Communications.
the system refuses to accept the Metis as equal members of the majority society, which causes the M"etis considerable frustrations. They feel they do not belong to either part of the society. Thus, the educational system is responsible for the identity crises many a M"etis experience in their lives.

The racist interpretations of the M"etis history and culture seem far from being the only degrading aspects of colonial educational system. A purposeful glorification of the colonizer’s deeds has formed the integral part of school curricula. By memorizing patriotic songs and poems, children at schools are being manipulated into thinking that “Canada is the best and most beautiful of all countries” (Tortured People 40). Adams points out that this is taught in spite of the fact that “Native people’s quality of life is as low as the poor Third World People” (Tortured People 40). Thus, the M"etis children are forced to press into their minds notions that very little correspond to the reality they live in. Nevertheless, these notions become so deeply entrenched in the M"etis’ mind that he or she takes them for granted. Adams points out that the passages he was supposed to memorize were “more of a prayer than a discussion” (Tortured People 25). Thus the tactics of colonizing the M"etis with the help of physically non-violent means has proved to be the most destructive and oppressive for the former. To demonstrate the texts the M"etis children have been exposed to at schools, Adams uses the example of Rudyard Kipling’s racist poem:

Blessed by the English and all they profess.
Cursed by the savages that prance in nakedness.
Blessed by the English and everything they own.
Cursed by the Infidels that bow the wood and stone
(qtd. in Tortured People 25).
5.3 Education and the “Native Problem”6

Since the times of colonialism in Canada, the educational system has been used for the systematic colonization of the Indian and the Métis. As Adams points out, “[t]he school systematically and meticulously conditions natives to a state of inferiorization and colonization” (Prison 152). The objective of the educational system has been to separate the Indians and the Métis and create a group out of them incapable of successful integration into the majority society. To accomplish the set objective, the majority society has developed a number of myths, stereotyping the Métis as mentally retarded people capable of menial works only. What is more, the prejudiced attitude of the teachers “coerce students into feeling ashamed and unworthy” (Prison 152). LaRoque describes her school experience in the following way:

Teachers seemed so cold and distant. They frightened me. Retrospectively, I think it was their attitude of resignation towards me that I could not understand. They were resigned to the belief that I, as a Métis child, was destined to fail.[...] I could not know then that I was already marked as a Social Problem (LaRoque 43).

Under given circumstances, it seems almost impossible for the Métis child to refute the established stereotypes, which leads to frustrations and depressions.

In recent years, the attitude of both the Canadian federal government and public has undergone a considerable change regarding the problem of the native education. The government ministers have been dealing with the problem of a high “drop-out rate” among the native students (Frideres 185) as well as the fact that “nearly 40 percent of Indians have less than a Grade 9 education, which is twice the national rate” (Frideres

---

6 By “native problem” I refer to the general situation characterizing the natives in Canada. Due to oppressive conditions created by the colonialism both the Metis and Status Indians suffer from high rates of alcoholism and drug addiction. The suicide rate is high above the national average.
The educational system and its effect on the natives in Canada has been the subject of many conferences since the 1960s. At that time the Native movement sprang in Canada and the Métis found strength, after the decades of passive endurance of the colonial oppression, to publicly condemn the colonial educational system. Regarding the pernicious effect the colonial schooling had on the native children, Adams quotes a distinct native speaker who delivered his speech on the first National Conference on Indian and Northern education held at Saskatoon in 1967. The speaker, a native himself, condemns the colonizer’s schooling system:

The schooling system of a colonizer was built to colonize and inferiorize us. It has done a very good job, and continues to do so. It rapes our children of their humanity. It destroys their psychological being so critically that they are unable to fit into either the Native or white world! (Tortured People 62).

For long decades it was has been the natives’ alleged lack of intellectual potential which has been viewed by the Canadian public as being the reason for the natives’ high “dropout rate” (Frideres 185). The prejudiced Canadian society “assumed that the Indian [and the Métis are] a ‘problem’” (LaRoque 40). Until the sixties the natives had not been given a chance to publicly express their viewpoints concerning the educational system and its harmful effect on the Indian and the Métis. Recently, however, the natives have begun to disconfirm the well-rooted notion that it is the natives who are to be blamed for their failures in schools. As Adams maintains,

the present formal education program is irrelevant and meaningless to native people. The white middle-class values inherent in classroom instruction mean very little to native students. The curriculum is so strange that students have difficulty relating it to their frame of reference and making it part of their knowledge. Métis and Indian children drop out of school because the program is as alien to them as ballet (Prison 153).
However, although the Indians and the Métis have succeeded in drawing the public’s attention to the problematic question of inadequacy and harmfulness of the present Canadian educational system regarding the natives, there is much more to be done before the system as a whole can become credible for the Indians and the Metis. Adams contends that before “school and economy develop together”, no positive change will take place (153). Most of all, the attitude of the public must change, the job market has to be opened for the Métis and the school curricula have to be adapted to the natives’ needs. Last but not least, the biased eurocentricism has to be deleted from the school curricula and both the Indian and the Métis must be given the access to the dignified and objective interpretations of their histories. Adams concludes that the “[c]ultural genocide and childhood inferiorization must be stopped if the native nation is to survive” (Prison 156).

5.4 The Educational System as Reflected in Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree*

Both Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* seem to be valuable sources to draw on when attempting to judge the role the educational system has played in dissemination of colonial ideologies. All that has been mentioned in the previous chapters about the educational system and its function in colonialism is demonstrated in the Culleton’s and Campbell’s novels. Campbell’s perspective is particularly valuable as she describes her personal experience with schools and the teachers. However, the fact that Culleton’s novel is a fiction does not diminish the relevance of her novel. Conversely, Culleton, the Métis herself, has in many respects drawn on her own experience when capturing the essence of the colonial educational system and its effects on the Métis’ consciousness. The teachers’ symptomatic prejudicial attitude to the Indian and the Métis’ history and culture is openly demonstrated in both the
novels. The harmful effect of the educational system thus seems obvious. The objective of this chapter is not to analyse the negative aspects of the colonial school system as enough has been said about this problem above. This chapter, being based on the testimonies of the two Métis writers, is supposed to function as a realistic account of the educational system and its mechanisms used to subjugate the Métis. The oppressive character of the colonial educational system based on humiliation of the native societies and distortions of the historical facts is visible in both the novels.

Stereotypes created the basis of school curricula during the colonial era. Maria’s experiences with teachers in the local school are almost all negative ones. Maria feels humiliated when her teacher uses the native people as an example of those who are “poor in spirit” for an explanation of the meaning of the certain extract from Bible (Campbell 61). When opposing the teacher’s racist explanation Maria is punished. As Campbell says: “I had to kneel in the corner holding up the Bible for the rest of the afternoon” (61). Another teacher “would often ridicule us [Maria and her siblings] for mistakes” (87).

Adams claims that “insecurity and fear [...] form[ed] the basis of schooling” in colonialism (Prison 158). Causing the native child to be fearful of the school serves as an effective colonial mechanism as the child, having been made afraid, may be, in Adams’ words, “more easily controlled in his behavior.” He or she thus becomes easily manipulatable. Thus, the fear of “being considered stupid [...] is the part of the school’s network of fears” (Prison 158) functioning to colonize the natives. Maria’s little sister Peggie’s experience seems to be a characteristic example of the mechanism in practice. Peggie “grew so afraid of school that she would cry and wet her bed at night” (88) after being a frequent victim of the teacher’s racist offencies. Maria depicts the teacher’s arrogance and cruelty:

Peggie was in the first grade, a very small six year old, timid and shy. Because we used a mixture of Cree and English at home, her
pronunciation was poor. The teacher would shake her and say to the class, “Look at her! She is so stupid she can’t even say ‘this’, instead of ‘dis’”. She would make Peggie stand up at the front of the room for an hour, without moving (Campbell 88).

The residential school is another highly negative experience of Maria’s childhood. It is Maria’s grannie Dubuque’s idea to make arrangements for her granddaughter to attend this kind of school believing that it is the best thing she can do for her and her future. The grannie’s attitude proves the power of the colonialism. The colonial ideology successfully brainwashed both Maria’s grannie and her mother into believing that the oppressive methods used at the residential schools could prepare the Métis child for the future. Maria, however, describes the part of her life spent at the residential school as the most frustrating one. Campbell depicts the school curricula and the oppressive methods used at the residential school in a following manner:

We prayed endlessly, but I cannot recall ever doing much reading or school-work [...] I do recall most vividly a punishment I once received. We weren’t allowed to speak Cree, only French and English, and for disobeying this, I was pushed into a small closet with no windows or light, and locked in for what seemed like hours. I was almost paralyzed with fright when they came to let me out (Campbell 47).

Maria’s experience proves the fact that the primary objective of the residential schools was to arise a subjugated feeling in the native children instead of preparing them for a successful integration in the majority society. The frustrating methods such as denying the child to speak his own language were used to achieve the set goal of colonization of the Indian and the Métis.

As far as attempts of the school system to colonize the natives through the ideological propaganda of the gloriousness of the colonizer’s society is concerned, Campbell’s school experience seems rather eloquent:
Our first teacher was a sad-looking little English-woman in her late forties. She had never taught Half-breeds before and we soon realized that she didn’t like us. [...] She loved to sing and her favourite song was “O Canada”. I can still see her whenever I hear that song, waving her arms up and down, completely off key and getting all red in the face from the effort (Campbell 52).

Culleton provides even a more detailed insight into the colonial way of schooling. In her interpretation, the function of the educational system as a disseminator of colonialism seems obvious. The school curricula are based on the racist interpretations of the history and the teachers’ prejudiced treatment of both the Indians and the Métis is evident. The author demonstrates the efficiency of the educational system in spreading the ideological colonialism when putting in opposition the attitude of two sisters, the main protagonists of the novel, April and Cheryl. The former seems to be a typical product of the colonial system, viewing the problems of the native people in the society “[t]hrough white man’s eyes,” (115) while the latter, feeling the injustice around her, stubbornly defends her people and accuses the teacher’s racist way of interpreting the history.

April cannot understand her sister’s enthusiasm for the Métis history. She claims she knows all about her people’s history, however, her knowledge reflects the eurocentric interpretations to which she has been exposed at school. She seems stubbornly impervious to accept any other interpretations as she recognizes the facts she has learned at school as the objective ones. The harmfullness of the propaganda which has, until recently, created the basis of the school curricula in Canada, is obvious from April’s contemplation:

I knew all about Riel. He was a rebel who had been hanged for treason. Worse, he had been a crazy half-breed. I had learned about his folly in history. Also, I had read about the Indians and the various methods of tortures they had put the missionaries through. No wonder they were known as savages. So, anything to do with Indians, I despised (Culleton 44).
Cheryl, in comparison to April, refuses to yield to the pressure of the teachers’ propaganda. She, emphasizing the point that “history should be an unbiased representation of the facts,” (84) frequently gets into trouble when opposing the racist historical interpretations offered by her teacher. When Cheryl refuses to learn the “bunch of lies” her teacher propounds to the class as factual historical facts, she is accused of “disruptive attitude” (58) and gets punished. The teacher’s eurocentricism reveals when she claims that nobody is authorized to query the credibility of the history books written by “learned men” (58). Cheryl condemns the textbook, according to which the history at her school is taught, for being a “load of crap” (84). To relive her frustrations she begins to write essays portraying “the Métis side of things” (85). Even though April does not share her sister’s enthusiasm about the Métis culture, she admires her courage “to stand up in front of her class and give the speech” (75).
6 Conclusion

The emergence and development of the Métis, a distinct mixed-blood people, create a unique part of the Canadian history. Colonialism deliberately reduced the Métis to the lowest positions in the society. Although having originated from the mixing of the first European settlers, mainly those of the French descent, with the aboriginal women, the Métis have never been accepted as the equal members of the majority society in Canada. Adams quotes Fanon who maintains that a world created by a colonizer is “a world divided into compartments, a motionless Manicheistic world. The Native is being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division” (Tortured People 122). Thus, the Métis’ role in the colonial society was strictly given. However, while the economic principles promoted by the French colonizers allowed the Métis to thrive and develop into a unique ethnic group, conscious of their group identity, the expansionist policy of the British colonialism condemned the Métis to the marginal positions in the society and, consequently, paralyzed their pride in their culture. As the buffalo was becoming scarce, the Métis’ source of livelihood was gone, too. There was no interest on the side of the British colonizers to accommodate the Métis to the newly established order. The racial prejudices of the Protestant settlers represented an unsurpassable obstacle for the Métis’ successful integration in the majority society.

Having not recognized the Métis as a distinct aboriginal people until 1982, the colonizers had deliberately condemned the Métis to the poverty either on the fringes of the towns or their settlements. What is more, the British colonizers did not attempt to deal fairly with the Métis as far as their land claims were concerned either. The military suppression of the Métis, struggling for their rights at Batoche in 1885, proved the fact that the British colonizers’ primary objective was to subjugate the Métis at all costs and make them powerless and thus easily manipulatable. In this respect, both the Catholic
Church and the educational system served as powerful instruments of the colonialism. The power of the Catholic Church regarding the dissemination of colonialism rested in its omnipresence. Not only did the Catholic Church rule over the educational institutions but the priests could make use of their prestigious positions in the Métis communities.

The Métis, having inherited the positive attitude to the Catholic Church from their French forefathers became easy victims of the ideological pressure imposed on them by the Catholic priests, whose preaching of obedience and humility strengthened the colonized consciousness in the Métis. Through the Catholic clergy, the Métis were conditioned to believe that their living in poverty was a signal that they were being tested by God. They believed that the obedient endurance of the God’s testing would ensure them the place in heaven. The Métis’ trust in their Catholic priests was such that they failed to recognize the fact that they were being exploited by their priests, and, what is more, betrayed by them at the most decisive historical moments as was that of the North-West Resistance. The power of the Catholic Church over the lives of the Métis was reduced after the Native Movement broke out in the 1960s and the Métis began to realize their oppression.

The educational system played no less an important role in the dissemination of the colonial oppression among the Métis. Adams considers the educational system to be a “powerful indoctrination tool [as] the curricula teaches children the importance of submitting to the establishment” (Tortured People 40). It was already the first missionaries who regarded the schools to be the most effective institutions through which the acculturation of the natives could have been accomplished. At schools the Métis were exposed to systematic ideological pressure. Myths, eurocentric interpretations of historical facts, humiliation of the Métis culture and promotion of the white ideal where only a few instruments out of many others used by the colonizers to benumb the Métis and,
accordingly, tame them. The Métis, being exposed to uncomplimentary interpretations of their culture tended to suppress their native part in them and strived to succeed in the society of their oppressors. Nevertheless, as Adams observes, these Métis did not only “lead a sham existence” but they, “regardless of their display of wealth, [...] [were] still rejected by white society because the basis of discrimination is racism” (*Prison* 169). The fact that the Métis were, until recently, denied their right to control education in their communities proves the schools’ functioning as the colonial instruments.

Since the time of the Native Movement of the 1960s and the 1970s, the Métis have been working on regaining their group consciousness again. The Métis activists have rose up to point out to the oppression the Métis suffered under colonialism. The decolonization process has been, however, slowed down by the Métis’ finding themselves under the neocolonial rule. In Adams’ words, “[t]he direct political control of the colonies was replaced by a more complex mechanism of indirect domination” (*Tortured People* 155).
Works Cited


<http://www.othermetis.net/Papers/trent/trent4.html>.


Highlights from The Report Of The Royal Commission On Aboriginal Peoples: People To People, Nation To Nation. Canada: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1996.


