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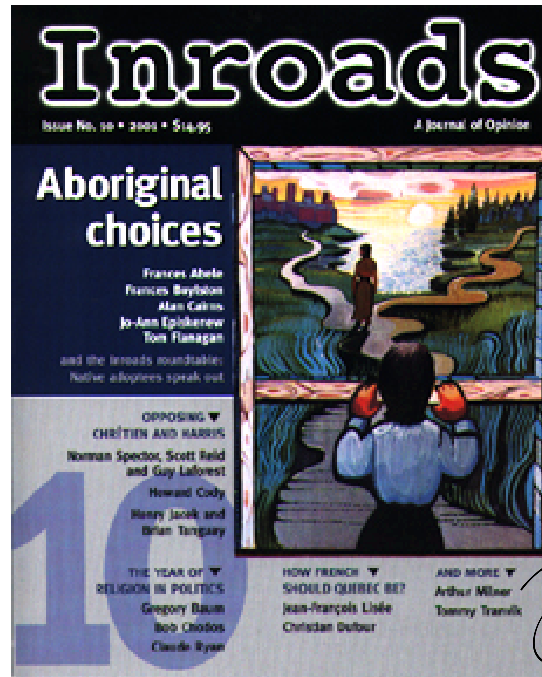

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JOURNAL Inroads 10

Aboriginal policy through literary eyes

Jo-Ann Episkenew

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JO-ANN EPISKENEW EXAMINES A number of literary works by Canadian Aboriginal writers dealing with Indian and Métis people. Together, they reveal the devastating effects of public policy.

Episkenew traces this history from 1973, when Maria Campbell penned *Halfbreed,* her account of growing up in northern Saskatchewan. This work was the first Aboriginal voice to reach both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Canadians, making Campbell "the mother of Canadian Aboriginal Literature."

In the years since, Aboriginal literature has flourished. Because of the enormity of past policy failures, many creative works by Aboriginals have been semi-autobiographical, exploring these failures through personal stories.

Episkenew calls attention to literary contributions as part of a process of wider consultation, warning that too often well-meaning policy makers forget until it's too late to consult with Aboriginal people about the policy they mean to create.

INDIANS NEVER GOT MENTIONED IN ANY OF THE SCHOOLBOOKS EXCEPT FOR being the guides for the brave explorers discovering the country. I could never figure out how you could say you were out discovering something when you needed a guide to help you find it. But Indians were always second to the explorers who were creating the real history of North America.… We were either heathen devils running around killing people or simple savages who desperately needed the help of the missionaries in order to get straightened out and live like real people.… If white people hadn't gotten here when they did we'd have all died. (Wagamese 1994, 12-13)

Many Aboriginal Canadians can relate to Garnet Raven's satirical description of his experiences in the educational system. A status Indian, former foster child, and ex-convict, Garnet is one of the narrators of Richard Wagamese's *Keeper 'N Me*, a novel that describes how Canadian public policies to re-educate Aboriginal people profoundly affected the lives of the Raven family. Although policies specific to education comprise only part of the government of Canada's response to the "Indian problem," the common objective of all policies seems to have been the re-education of Aboriginal people.[1]

That Aboriginal people needed to be re-educated is a perception based on several premises, premises shared by most people of European ancestry since 1867. When the newcomers first arrived in North America, they had little time to worry about re-educating anyone; they were too busy trying to survive, something they would not have been able to do without the help of and education from Aboriginal people. But as this dependence on the Aboriginal population lessened, and as the Aboriginal population was decimated by disease and loss of the land base for their traditional livelihood, the government of the new nation of Canada focused attention on policies to deal with the people whom they believed redundant.

At the time, in the late 1800s, most Canadians of European ancestry believed that the original people of this country were destined to become a "vanishing race." Indian people were to be pitied, to be sure, but were still unpredictable and dangerous. The newcomers considered their European way of life clearly superior; since the Indians' lifestyles were incompatible with modern society, they were, therefore, doomed to extinction. There was nothing in the Indian peoples' ways of life – from their relationship to the land, to their methods of rearing and educating children – that the newcomers considered worth preserving anywhere but in museums. The newcomers developed policies to control Indians and to ease their inevitable passage into oblivion.

Unlike the Indians, the Métis were not objects of pity. The newcomers' attitudes towards the Métis were different because of their deep-seated fear of miscegenation. William Keating led an American expedition to the North West, which culminated in a report to the United States government entitled Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnipeek, Lake of the Woods, etc. In it Keating discussed the potential difficulties he anticipated in colonizing the Métis because of their ferocity and their "matchless competence" in living in their environment. His description, written in 1823, reflects attitudes shared by most of European origin at that time:

> *[The Métis'] countenance is full of expression, which partakes of cunning and malice. When angry, it assumes all the force of the Indian features, and denotes perhaps more of the demonic spirit than is generally met with, even in the countenance of the aborigines.* (quoted in Farrell Racette 1999, 6)

The few policies bearing on Métis people reflect this fear and disdain.

If we look back from the present, it is difficult to fathom just how injurious public policies have been to Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, despite the injuries, we have not vanished. As the policies that attempted to address the "Indian and Métis problem" were implemented, the voices of Aboriginal people were silenced. Almost all Aboriginal people with the dubious fortune to attend school between 1885 and 1900 – most of whom were status Indians – found the education designed for them to be inferior and to discourage verbal and literary expression. Its goal was to prepare them for unskilled and domestic work, to teach them to turn their backs on their Aboriginal identity, their people, and their history. When immigrants became available for unskilled and domestic work, "the government scrapped this meagre educational goal for Aboriginal children in favour of ghettoizing them on reserves at the peripheries of the economy" (Ray 1996, 243). Not until the latter half of the 20th century were Aboriginal people able to appropriate the language and the literary styles of their colonizers – to write back to their colonial oppressors and tell their stories.

In this essay, I examine a number of literary works by Canadian Aboriginal writers dealing with Indian and Métis people in the area covered by the numbered treaties.[2] Taken together, they reveal the devastating effects of public policy.

WHEN HAR OLD CARDINAL PUBLISHED *The Unjust Society* in 1969, he became the first Aboriginal person to "write back" and point out the grave flaws in Canada's public policies. Although influential among well-educated non-Aboriginals, Cardinal's book was not accessible to many Aboriginal people because most had only a limited and second-rate education. Not until Métis activist Maria Campbell published her best-selling autobiography *Halfbreed* in 1973 did an Aboriginal voice reach both Aboriginal people and average Canadians. *Halfbreed* is an important text in that it explains in an accessible manner how public policies have harmed Indian and Métis people in this

country. The reception that *Halfbreed* received surprised and motivated aspiring Aboriginal writers; it revealed that mainstream Canadians would listen to their stories. To the writers that followed her, Campbell became the mother of Canadian Aboriginal literature. Although most of them still use autobiographical "life writing" as a foundation, creative Aboriginal writers are also experimenting with other literary genres. Because of the enormity of failed past policies on the lives of Aboriginal people, public policy still remains the focus of much Aboriginal literature.

Campbell begins *Halfbreed* with an account of the 1885 Battle at Batoche and tells how many of the Métis and Indians who had joined together in resistance were either incarcerated or executed. Campbell (1973, 6) reports that the total cost to the federal government to stop the Rebellion was $5,000,000. After realizing the high cost of fighting a united group of Indians and Métis, governments developed policies to exacerbate and perpetuate the divisions between Indians and Métis[3] that had begun to emerge in the mid-1800s. At that time, the Métis population had increased to the point where, as a people, they had become endogamous, no longer marrying into Indian bands to the same extent as in the past. As well, Indians and Métis had become competitors for the declining buffalo stocks (Farrell Racette 1999, 22). The treaty-makers were not interested in race and culture so, when the treaty-making process began, some Métis signed treaties[4] and some Indians took scrip.[5] The Indian Act of 1876, and all the iterations that followed, defined Indians in exclusive terms. Among the excluded groups were those who had received or had been allotted half-breed lands or money scrip, and their descendants.[6]

Not until the latter half of the 20th century were Aboriginal people able to appropriate the language and the literary styles of their colonizers – to write back to their oppressors and tell their stories.

Maria Campbell describes how public policy divided the Aboriginal community and, indeed, entire families. Maria tells us that even though her paternal great-grandmother, Cheechum, was the niece of the Métis leader Gabriel Dumont, Cheechum's mother's family were Indians who had been out in the bush when the treaties were signed and, therefore, were without Indian status. Maria's Grandpa Campbell, son of Cheechum and a Scot employed by the Hudson's Bay Company, married a Métis woman from the Vandal family who fought at Batoche, and they and their children were Métis. However, "when the treaty-makers came, [Grannie Campbell's sister Qua Chich, and her husband, Big John] were counted in and became treaty Indians of Sandy Lake Reserve instead of *Halfbreeds*" (Campbell 1973, 20), as did Maria's maternal grandfather, Pierre Dubuque, a Frenchman from Dubuque, Iowa.

After marrying Maria's father, Danny Campbell, Maria's mother lost her Indian status and was forced to move off the reserve and live with the Métis. Since Bill C-31 amended the Indian Act in 1985, Campbell and her siblings have been eligible to apply for Indian status. Many of the other Métis families named in this book – Vandals, Arcands, Isbisters, and others – have since become members of the Ahtahkakoop, Muskeg Lake, Big River, and Mistawasis First Nations.

LA BEAU SHA SHOO: "Dah Jesus he poured me a big glass full an boy he was a nice glass too! He was all gold wit diamonds and green an red stones. So me I have a drink wit him. Ole Arcand say 'Who am I to say no to dah Jesus Chrise.'" Painting by Sherry Farrell Racette, from *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, translated by Maria Campbell.

Anishinabe playwright Drew Hayden Taylor describes the maze of policies defining Aboriginal identity that Aboriginal people are forced to negotiate daily:

> *First of all, let's start with the basics. Status, non-Status, Métis. So far painless. I guess next would come the already mentioned Indian, followed by Native, Aboriginal, Amerindian, Indigenous and First Nations.... From there we can go to on-Reserve, off-Reserve, urban, treaty. Got a headache yet? How about the enfranchised Indians, the Bill C-31 or re-instated people, the traditional Indians, the assimilated Indians? I'm not finished yet. There are the wannabes (the White variety), and of course the ever popular full bloods. My personal favourites are what I call the Descartes Indians, 'I think Indian, therefore I am Indian.'...Right now there are two dozen separate names for our people. Where does it all stop? I wanna know who keeps changing all the rules? Even I get confused sometimes.* (Taylor 1996, 54-55)

Most Aboriginal people would agree. Anishinabe poet and scholar Kateri Akiwenzie Damm (1993, 11) summarizes: "'[w]ho we are' has been constructed and defined by Others to the extent that at times we too no longer know who we are. The resulting confusion, uncertainty, low self-esteem and/or need to assert control over identity are just some of the damaging effects of colonization." Rather than culture, history, or biology defining "who we are," Aboriginal identity was and still is determined by non-Aboriginal policy makers and can change by the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen.

Public policies that have redefined who we are and what we do have damaged

Aboriginal people's self-image and self-esteem. For generations, the Métis men in Maria Campbell's community had been successful in their traditional roles as providers and protectors. Not only did they earn a living as hunters and trappers, their work was important to the development of the new nation of Canada. However, when forced to turn to farming – to acquire ownership of their own lands under the rules governing homestead acquisitions – they failed miserably. And, after the government granted their land to white immigrants, their collective self-esteem was irreparably damaged.

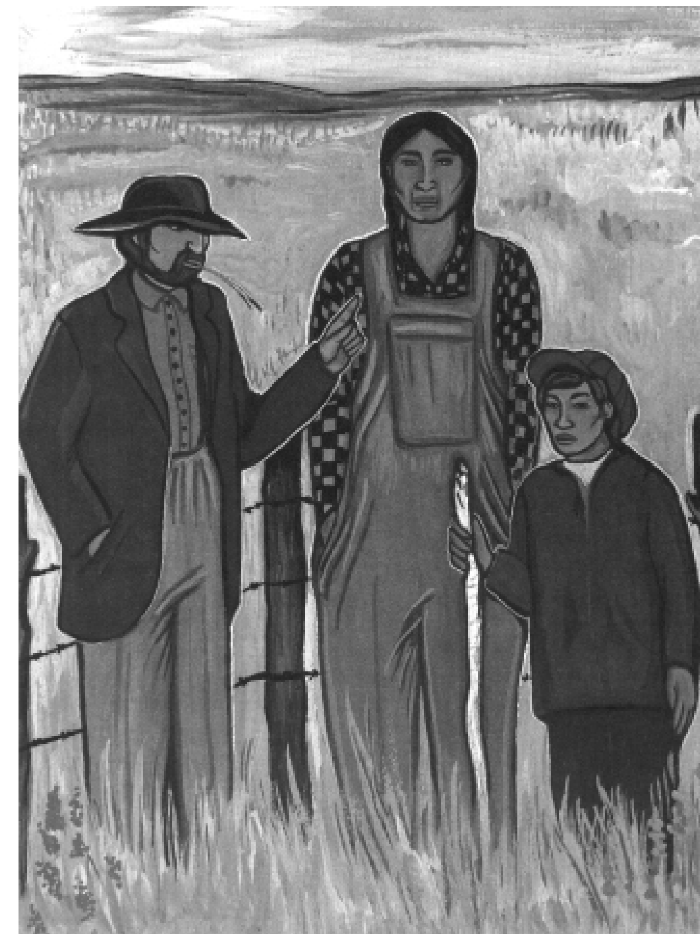
Aboriginal identity, defining "who we are," was and still is determined by non-Aboriginal policy makers and can change by the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen.

Furthermore, the policies that forced the Métis into this landless state created a class system that set them apart from their Indian relatives. Campbell explains how the Métis of her community perceived themselves in relation to the Indians:

> *We all went to the Indians' Sundances and special gatherings, but somehow we never fitted in. We were always the poor relatives, the awp-pee-tow-koosons.*[7] *They laughed and scorned us. They had land and security, we had nothing.… However, their old people "Mushooms" (grandfathers) and "Kokums" (grandmothers) were good. They were prejudiced, but because we were kin they came to visit and our people treated them with respect.* (Campbell 1973, 25)

It is important to note that the Elders acknowledge their kinship with the Métis because relationships between relatives are sacred in Cree culture.[8] Grannie Campbell's status-Indian sister, Qua Chich, never forgets her Métis relatives and brings her horses every year to help them ready their gardens for planting. Grannie Dubuque's brother, chief of Sandy Lake Reserve, dotes on Maria and treats her as if she were his own daughter. Still, at this point in history, at least one generation of status Indians would have attended residential schools where they would have been inundated by racist attitudes that made them ashamed of their identity. No doubt, these students would have felt some sense of relief upon returning home and learning that the white settlers considered their relatives, the Métis, as being even less worthy than the Indian students had been taught to feel.[9]

At the same time as the Métis became squatters on their own land, the Indians living on reserves were feeling the constraints of the many policies that controlled every aspect of their lives. In *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, a collection of stories from the oral tradition written in Métis dialect, Maria Campbell relates the story of her father's uncle "Big John" of Sandy Lake Reserve and his battle with government policy seemingly designed to thwart his attempts to prevent his family from starving. The story is set sometime before 1918, the year Big John died, and is narrated by Big John's nephew, who is Métis and who highlights the differences in public policies targeted at Indian and Métis. In his history, Ray (1996, 203) points out that under the Indian Act, "all 'legal' Indians were wards of the federal government and were to be treated as minors without the full privileges of citizenship." The objective of the policies was to re-educate the Indians so that they would learn to be "civilized" farmers. To that end, the government hires a farm instructor and allots a small herd of cattle to Big John's reserve. Unfortunately for the Indians, the cattle, like the land reserved for them, is the property of the Crown.



BIG JOHN: **"Dat Farm Instructor you tink he own dat damn reservation he act so smart. He tell my uncle Big John hees never gonna be a farmer if he keeps on killing hees cows."** Painting by Sherry Farrell Racette, from *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, translated by Maria Campbell.

When Big John asks for the farm instructor's permission to slaughter a cow to feed his family, the farm instructor, himself Métis, denies his request and explains policy: "No Big John. I can [i.e. cannot] give you pimmishion to kill dah / King's cows. / Dah King he give you dem cows so you can learn to be / civilize like us" (Campbell 1995, 75). The narrator points out that the farm instructor, in reality, does not know "a dam ting about farming" (74).

Nevertheless, the farm instructor's position is a powerful one, second only to that of the Indian Agent, whose authority is absolute. The narrator, Big John's nephew, alludes to the story of Almighty Voice, a Cree from One Arrow Reserve near Batoche who was jailed for slaughtering a cow and escaped only to be hunted down and killed by the RCMP and a group of militia armed with a Gattling gun.[10] Both the narrator and Big John know what happened to Almighty Voice and, therefore, understand that their situation is not one to be taken lightly. If Big John listens to the instructor, his family could starve; if he ignores his orders, he would certainly be incarcerated and his life could be forfeit.

Big John's nephew compares the policies that affect treaty Indians and Métis, but cannot decide whose life is better.

My Uncle he tell me I was lucky I wasen a Treaty…
I don know if I agree wit him or not.
Cause I shore don tink being a Halfbreed was very
good eeder.
Us Halfbreeds we don even got land.
An we shore as hell got no Kings cows to kill.
Me you know
I never want to be a Treaty.
I see how bad dey was treated.
I see my Uncle . . .
Treated worse den a dog an it hurt me inside.
At leas us Breeds
Nobody hees hired to treat us like dat.
An we was our own bosses.
(Campbell 1995, 82-3)

The narrator is aware of the soul-destroying consequences of public policies that treat men as if they are children, thereby stripping them of their dignity. In the end, the narrator shoots enough ducks to feed Big John's family and fend off starvation for another day. Ironically, because he is Métis, the narrator also runs the risk of incarceration because he has no right to hunt outside hunting season, but the Métis are accustomed to living on the edge of the law.

Although they had no Indian Agent or farm instructor to control them, the Métis men of Campbell's father's generation existed in an impossible situation that caused them endless shame. Campbell shows how these men, with the twisted logic of the oppressed, blame themselves for circumstances clearly out of their control. Many think that their Indian relatives have a better life and believe that, had their parents and grandparents been present when the treaties were signed – as were Big John, Qua Chich, Grandpa Dubuque – their lives might have been better. Had their families chosen treaty rather than scrip, they might have had land, food, and education.

But neither provincial nor federal governments took responsibility for Métis education until after the 1944 release of the Piercy Report, which documented the deplorable educational conditions of Métis people. When the province of Saskatchewan assumed responsibility for Métis education in 1947, it was far too late for the men of Danny Campbell's generation. With no education, the only employment for which they qualified was farm labour, which put them at the mercy of the white settlers who, unlike the Indians, did not consider the Métis their kin.

The roles of providers and protectors among Métis men became vulnerable. Although they were skilled hunters, they did not have Indian status so the law did not allow them to hunt as needed for survival. If they hunted outside hunting season, they ran the risk of prosecution leading to incarceration. With such limited choices, Danny Campbell and his brothers ignore the law and do what they have to do to survive: "they trapped, hunted, and sold game and homemade whiskey to the white farmers in the nearby settlements" (Campbell 1995, 12). If they obey the law, they doom their families to a life of relief workers, fear, and starvation; if they break the law, they doom their families to a life of police, fear, and shame. It is no wonder that, in their despair, these men turn to alcohol for temporary relief.[11]

The policy makers realized that to re-educate the Indian people they must start with the children. To that end, they identified a need to remove children from what they considered undesirable influences that indoctrinated them into the Indian lifestyle. They identified those undesirable influences as Indian families.

Until this point, Aboriginal women's traditional role as primary care givers to young children had not come under attack. This changed with the introduction of residential schools: women's self-esteem was shattered in the same way as men's had been when robbed of their traditional functions in society. Ray (1996, 235) contends that "the most draconian assimilation scheme the government imposed on Native people involved the use of schools. Assimilation through white education programs was a cornerstone of British colonial policy, largely as a result of the lobbying of church groups." The alliance of the government and the church resulted in the development of policies that had the power of both the law and the Christian God supporting them, and not infrequently, police were called in to enforce these policies.

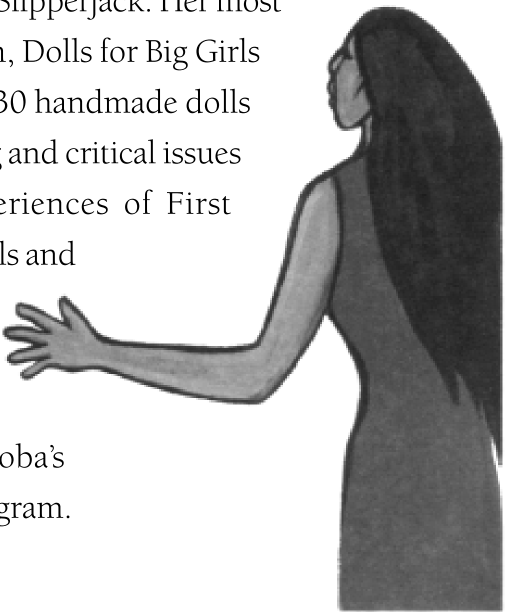
In his 1994 memoir "We Missed the Bus," George Peequaquot of the Yellow Quill Saulteaux Nation tells how, every fall in the late 1940s, the farm instructor notified all parents of school age children of the date when they were required to bring the children to his office to take the Residence truck to school. Because starvation was still a fact of life at that time, many parents reluctantly sent their children to residential schools. They had been assured there would be plenty of food and the children would not starve over the winter. Because most adults on the reserve could not read and did not understand calendars, they ran the risk of being absent on the designated date for picking up the children.

This happened to Peequaquot's family and is the subject of his memoir. When his father misunderstood the date, the children missed their ride to school. A few days later, the priest and the RCMP came to their camp. The priest took the children to school, and the RCMP took Peequaquot's father to jail. Peequaquot (1994, 101) says that "[his father] never understood why he was sent to jail." It comes as no surprise that many Aboriginal people look at both the educational and legal systems with fear and mistrust. Keeper, one of the narrators of Anishinabe writer Richard Wagamese's novel *Keeper 'N Me*, describes the effects of residential school:

The policies that forced the Métis into a landless state created a class system that set them apart from their Indian relatives.

> *…we lost a generation here. In the beginning it was the missionary schools. Residential schools they called them.… They took us and cut off our hair, dressed us in baggy clothes so we all looked the same, told us our way of livin' and prayin' was wrong and evil. Got beat up for speakin' Indyun. If we did that we'd all burn in hell they told us.… Lots never ever came back and them that did were real different. Got the Indyun all scraped off their insides. Like bein' Indyun was a fungus or somethin'. They scraped it all off and never put nothin' there to replace it but a bunch of fear and hurt. Seen lotsa kids walkin' around like old people after a while. Them schools were the beginnin' of how we started losing our way as a people.*
> (Wagamese 1994, 36-37)

PAINTINGS IN INROADS 10 *ABORIGINAL CHOICES* SECTION are by Sherry Farrell Racette, a Regina-based artist, scholar and educator of First Nations and Irish descent. Racette focuses on Métis cultural history and the oral tradition in her diverse practice. Her paintings have illustrated the work of such notable authors as Maria Campbell, Freda Ahenakew and Ruby Slipperjack. Her most recent solo exhibition, Dolls for Big Girls (2000), consisted of 30 handmade dolls exploring storytelling and critical issues relating to the experiences of First Nations and Métis girls and women. Racette is currently a doctoral candidate in the University of Manitoba's Interdisciplinary Program.



Generations of Aboriginal people grew up institutionalized and, therefore, had no parental models. As a consequence, many former students found that, when they became parents themselves, they had little to no knowledge of traditional parenting skills, nor had they learned western alternatives. The policy makers achieved their goal – the children received a western, Christian education and were not indoctrinated into the Indian way of life. The result, however, was cataclysmic and its effects are still being felt in all parts of Canadian society.

The administrators of the residential schools admitted Métis children only when the schools had vacancies; when there were sufficient numbers of Indian children to fill all the positions, the Métis children were forced to leave school.[12] In some ways, this was a blessing even though it resulted in many Métis people remaining illiterate. However, the Métis did not escape the next great movement in public policy, sardonically referred to in Aboriginal communities as the "Sixties Scoop," even though it began in the 1950s and did not end until the late 1970s. By the end of the 1950s reserves and Métis communities were fraught with social problems, the inevitable result of public policies of disempowerment and despair.

As the result of new public policy designed to deal with the social problems of old policy, the number of Aboriginal children in foster care increased exponentially. Children were often placed in foster care because their parents were poor or because the social workers did not understand Indian peoples' ways of living. As Keeper says, the policy makers decided that "our way was wrong and our kids weren't getting what they needed, so they took 'em away and put 'em in homes that weren't Indyun. Some got shipped off long ways. Never made it back yet. Disappeared. Got raised up all white but still carryin' brown skin. Hmmpfh. See us we know you can't make a beaver from a bear" (Wagamese 1994, 37). Apparently, the policy makers did not.

In her novel *In Search of April Raintree* (1983), Métis writer Beatrice Culleton Mosionier appropriates the colonizer culture's most popular literary form to recount not only her own personal experiences as a foster child, but also those of other victims of the same policy who are unable to tell their stories. Culleton Mosionier tells the

The Métis did not escape the next great movement in public policy, sardonically referred to in Aboriginal communities as the "Sixties Scoop."

story of the fictional Raintree family, how they are destroyed by policy that determined Aboriginal children would be better off growing up in white foster homes.

The first assault to the family occurs when they become displaced from their home community of Norway House and forced to move to Winnipeg after the father, Henry Raintree, contracts tuberculosis. The family is further fractured when the Children's Aid Society removes the two daughters, April and Cheryl, from their inner city home and places them in separate foster homes. When this trauma occurs, April is five years old and Cheryl is three. Having lacked the opportunity to develop a sound sense of their identity, the girls at this point in their young lives are naïve and listen to the voices of authority that try to influence them. They learn from their social worker, Mrs. Semple, that their

Aboriginal identity is a deficiency after she warns them that they are subject to what she, the expert, calls "the 'native girl' syndrome":

> *It starts out with the fighting, the running away, the lies. Next come the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. There are the sullen, uncooperative silences, the feeling sorry for yourselves. And when you go on your own, you get pregnant right away, or you can't find or keeps jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there, you get into shoplifting and prostitution, and in and out of jails. You'll live with men who abuse you. And it goes on. You'll end up like your parents, living off society.* (Culleton Mosionier 1983, 62)

April's teachers, principal, and foster parents – more voices of authority – bombard her with similar negative attitudes, and April comes to loathe her Métis identity. She vows that "when [she] got free from being a foster child, then [she] would live just like a real white person" (47).

Garnet Raven, narrator of *Keeper 'N Me*, is placed in foster care when he is three years old but is more fortunate that April in that he is ultimately reunited with his family. After being separated from his family for 25 years, living in foster homes, jail, and on the street, Garnet hears his mother share the feelings she experienced during the long separation: "When I d'in' know where you were no more, I wanted to sing a song for you wherever you were. Maybe protect you out there, keep you safe. Maybe even bring you home to me sometime. Wanted it to be a special song, wanted it to be your song forever. But I couldn't find no words" (Wagamese 1994, 58). Her song is simple but powerful and is comprised of two words: "bih'kee-yan" – come home. This touches Garnet's heart, and when he visualizes his mother singing to him, he begins to heal: "I thought about an old Ojibway woman beside a small fire on a lonely winter's night staring out across the land and the universe towards someone, somewhere in a place far away, singing soft and low, over and over and over…bih'kee-yan, bih'kee-yan, bih'kee-yan" (59).

Garnet is more fortunate than April Raintree, who has no opportunity to reconcile with her parents. Because the narrators of *In Search of April Raintree* are separated from their parents at a young age, readers gain only a limited understanding of the effects on Henry and Alice Raintree of having their children placed in foster care. With April as primary narrator and Cheryl as secondary narrator through her letters, essays, and journals, we learn more about the effects of foster care on the children. Not until close to the end of the novel do we learn the extent of damage their parents suffered. Their mother, Alice Raintree, had fallen into a state of despair after her daughter Anna died and the Children's Aid Society took April and Cheryl away. Attending the arranged visits with her daughters at the Children's Aid offices had been too hard for her, and she found it impossible to continue with them. Overwhelmed by guilt and feelings of failure, Alice Raintree took her own life. April and Cheryl's father becomes a hopeless alcoholic and "gutter creature."

Aboriginal people's writings describe the pain, suffering, and destruction that follow in the wake of policy decisions designed to solve "the Indian and Métis problem" in this country. Early policies were grounded in an arrogant attitude that believed that the white man's way was the superior one. As Keeper says, they were "[a]lways thinkin' they know what's best for people" (Wagamese 1994, 37). The policy makers and the people who enforce policy set about to compel Aboriginal people to bow to the white man's ways. Of course, they did not believe that Aboriginal people could learn to become contributing members of modern society. Policies were designed to take care of Aboriginal people, treating them as children until they disappeared from the face of the earth.

The attitudes of many policy makers have changed. Today's policy makers are cognizant of the destruction brought about by past policies and are working to correct them. With their liberal enlightened attitudes they believe they know better than their predecessors. However, policy makers have entered into a vicious cycle of creating policies that inflict harm and then creating newer policies that attempt to repair the harm of earlier policies. They believe their hearts are in the right place, that they have learned from the mistakes of the past.

At what point, though, do Aboriginal people come into the discussions about the policies that affect their lives? Often policy makers forget until it's too late to consult with the Aboriginal people for whom they are writing policy.

I wonder if policy makers are still "thinkin' they know what's best for people." ■

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Notes

1. Under the Constitution Act (1982), Aboriginal people of Canada are defined as including Indians, as defined under the Indian Act (1876) and its subsequent revisions, Métis, and Inuit. Although

governments have affected these groups in similar ways, different policies have been designed for each group.

2. Treaties 1 to 9 were signed between 1871 and 1929 and covered the land from northern Ontario to northeastern British Columbia. These treaties set out the terms and conditions for sharing the land.

3. This practice continues to the present day. In 1976, I was the Secretary-Treasurer of the West-Central Native Women in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Our constitution stated that our Board of Directors was to comprise 50 per cent status Indians and 50 per cent Métis and/or non-Status Indians. At one meeting an official from the Department of Social Services, our primary funding agent, advised us to divide into two groups, one for status and one for Métis and non-Status. He suggested that if we remained united, we would lose our funding. Eventually the group did divide, and now neither exists.

4. Many families on Cowessess and Gordon's First Nations were originally Métis and can trace their roots to Red River. Many surnames that belong to First Nations people in Saskatchewan belong to Métis people in Manitoba.

5. Beatrice Lavallee, an Elder from the Piapot First Nation, tells me that her grandmother, Mrs. Whitestar, was present at the signing of Treaty 4 in 1874. Her grandmother told her that the government officials frightened many Indian people by telling them that they would lose their freedom and be confined on small pieces of land if they signed onto the treaty. They suggested that, if they took scrip, they would be able to live free as they were accustomed. Many took that advice and chose scrip rather than treaty.

6. For elaboration, see Frideres (1998,25).

7. Campbell translates this word as meaning "half people" (25). Solomon Ratt, Head of the Department of Indian Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, does not agree. Using Standard Roman Orthography, the word is spelled "apihtaw-kosisan": "apihtaw" meaning "half" and "kosisan" being derived from "nikosis" meaning "my brother." According to Ratt, the Cree word for Métis, then, would literally translate into "half-brother."

8. In the Cree kinship system, extended family relationships are important. All of Maria's mother's sisters, had she had any, would also be considered Maria's mothers; all of Grannie Dubuque's sisters would be Maria's grandmothers, and all of her brothers would be Maria's grandfathers. Relatives are wealth.

9. From my article in a forthcoming collection, Thom Episkenew (forthcoming).

10. Daniel David Moses (unpublished) tells this story in a work of historical drama.

11. For more on this subject, see my article in a forthcoming collection, Thom Episkenew (forthcoming).

12. Although born on the Cowessess Indian Reserve, my former mother-in-law, Mathilda Lavallie Bunnie, was by law a Non-status Indian, her father having applied for and been granted enfranchisement. In the early 1920s, she attended Marievel Indian Residential School until grade two when all Métis and Non-status students were required to discontinue, which put an end to her aspirations of receiving an education.

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