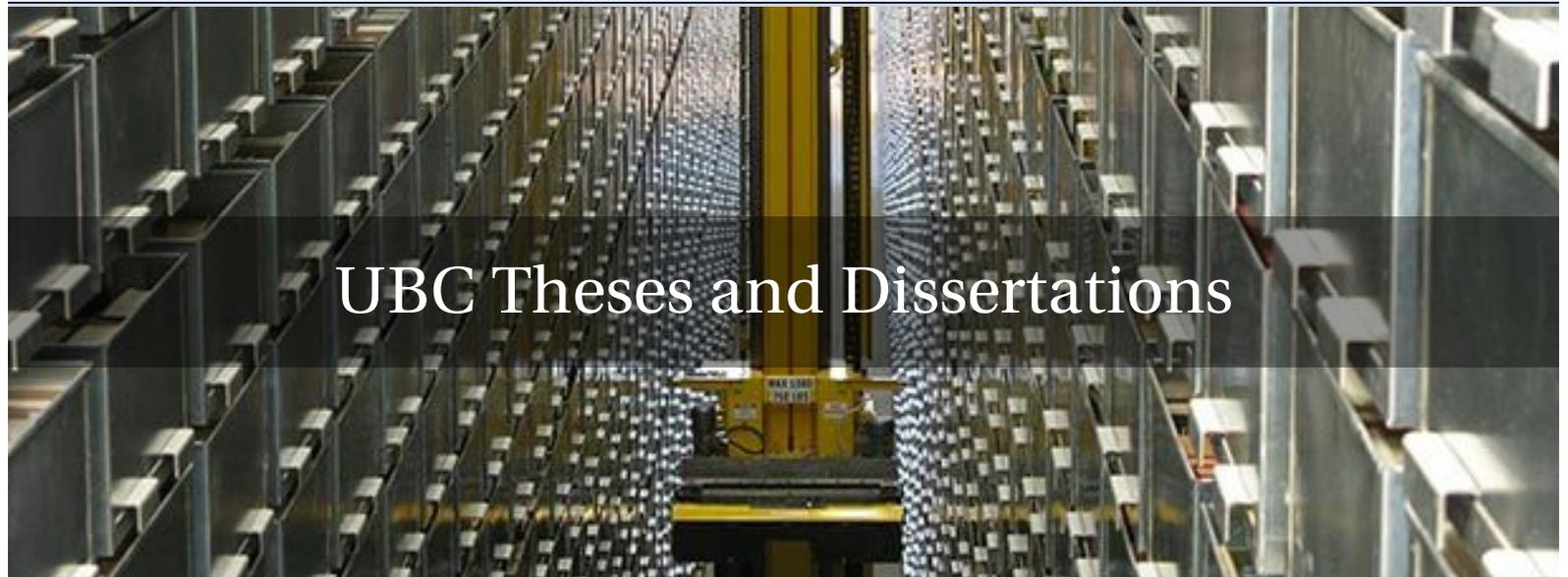


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Lavallee, Guy Albert Sylvestre

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Title The Metis people of St. Laurent, Manitoba : an introductory ethnology

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Description

This thesis examines the lives of a people, the Metis or the Michifs as they call themselves at St.Laurent, Manitoba. The Metis people were generally referred to as the off-springs of the Native Indian women and of the Europeans during the fur trade era. One hundred and thirty years ago, they enjoyed at Red River a successful economic way of life that was highly integrated to the land and to the environment. The Metis, at the time, were a proud race and called themselves the 'New Nation'. In 1870, after seeing Manitoba become a province within Confederation, their leader Louis Riel, was expelled from his homeland and the Metis gradually became, over the years, a socially and economically marginalized people. The purpose of this thesis is to document the process by which a particular Metis community at St.Laurent, Manitoba, is moving or has moved from being a self-contained community to a condition in which some aspects of their lives appear more generally 'Canadian' than specifically Metis. Due to the processes of modernization and secularization, many Metis find themselves today at a cultural crossroad. They face the choice of remaining Metis or becoming 'Canadian'. Data reveals that there are some social, cultural and economic implications in making such a decision. I will argue the point that it is possible to retain a strong and definitive sense of being Metis while at the same time becoming a Canadian and, presumably, less Metis than formerly was the case. Some findings of this research relate to the constituents of Metisness, both core and surface values. We will follow the process of change these cultural values have undergone within the life-span of the informants. Data shows that some Metis, under economic

pressure, made their decision rather quickly as they joined the mainstream of society. Others continue to struggle to retain some aspects of Metisness as they see former cultural ways absorbed by the modern current. In many instances, Metis people are becoming 'Canadian' at the expense of being Metis, that many Metis have assimilated and have become 'Canadian'. As a result, Metis today are not what they were in the past. However, in the process, we encounter many Metis today, who are rediscovering their family origins, their historical traditions and cultural heritage. These people are, in their own ways, socially, culturally and politically reconstructing new expressions of Metisness in today's technological world.

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