Chantal Fiola, *Returning to Ceremony: Spirituality in Manitoba Métis Communities*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021. 336 pages. ISBN 978-0887559624. $27.95 paperback.

The growing number of Métis scholars newly awoke and yearning to reconnect with their ancestral ways is evidenced by Michif (Red River Métis) scholar Chantal Fiola in her second book, *Returning to ceremony: Spirituality in Manitoba Métis communities.* As a Manitoba-based researcher who shares a story of reconnecting with her Métis ancestry through graduate studies in Ontario, Fiola is one of several promising scholars who is researching her way back to Métis traditions and belief systems working alongside Métis community members. Building on the success of her first award-winning book, *Rekindling the sacred fire: Métis ancestry and Anishinaabe spirituality,* Fiola deepens her assertion that Métis people are continuing to take part in ceremonial practices and spiritual traditions of their First Nations ancestors by extending her initial study on individual practices to that of a community level focus. Working with community researchers who hold connections to six historic Métis communities, Fiola reaches into the personal lived experiences of 32 self-identified Métis to explore the topic of spirituality relative to how people self-identify and experience contemporary life in Manitoba. The stories within this collection work to counter some of the common misconceptions around the Métis as a nation of people who are exclusively Roman Catholic by bringing attention to the Indigenous spiritual practices of the Métis. Readers should be wary that although there is a particular focus on Anishinaabe spiritual practices in this volume, the Métis have integrated other Indigenous spiritual traditions and practices.

In choosing to focus on six historical Métis communities who are often overlooked in academic research, Fiola is honouring the call from Métis Studies scholars Leah Dorion and Darren Préfontaine (1999) who advocate for a community version of truth-telling over that of the "great man of history" narrative. In their words, "the Métis experience still remains a 'hidden' history best expressed by the memories of Elders and other community people" (p. 3). Fiola undertakes a thorough and extensive review of print literature alongside oral accounts to ground her study, and it is apparent in her study that historical leader Gabriel Dumont and present-day Métis matriarch Maria Campbell are held up as bastions of knowledge around this specialized area. With many Métis women now stepping into leadership roles across the Métis Homeland, I was hoping to see a fuller discussion of our traditional matriarchal ways within this book. Nonetheless, Fiola delves into other critical aspects of Metisness, such as self-identification, knowledge of family history and scrip, knowledge of Michif language and other cultural traditions, societal and internalized racism. The inclusion of how these aspects of Métis life are experienced make this book a valuable resource for "new" Métis who are trying to understand the many truths that have been hidden from our people either intentionally, by families wishing to keep their children safe, or through a colonial form of schooling that has either erased, demonized, or biased how people understand our involvement in Canadian history.

Significantly, the author steps out of the typical binary trap of either/or to suggest that Métis people are variously positioned on a continuum that includes Indigenous spiritual traditions on one side and Catholicism, or other Christian-based faiths, on the other. This conceptualization of a continuum resonates for me as a fellow Métis scholar as our people are most famously known for their diversity and independent spirits. In my 2020 publication *Digital Storytelling in Indigenous Education: A Decolonizing Journey for a Métis Community* that explored a digital storytelling journey with members of the Fishing Lake Métis Settlement, I came to the conclusion that a "common narrative framework emerged premised on the belief

that a *personal responsibility to collective survival requires the ability to adapt*" despite the diverse range of stories that community members shared and created. This careful phrasing made space for the highly diverse stories that emerged from the Métis settlement as well as an honouring of our collective ways, still intact and evidenced time and again in this remote northern Alberta settlement community. In this sequel to her initial study, Fiola repeatedly takes up the term "syncretism" to describe an ideal situation where both belief systems are brought together in a balanced way. I wondered to what extent this term coincided with a Métis way of knowing, being, and doing with what is often referred to as taking the "best of both worlds" to create something new.

The author's claim that "Métis-specific approaches within academia are nearly brand new" (p. 13) is one that rings true, at least at first glance, given the First Nations-centric approaches that are privileged within Indigenous studies or Indigenous education at the post-secondary level. There are, however, a number of Métis scholars who have ventured into this much-neglected area over the past several years (see, for example, Gaudet, 2019; Gaudet, Dorion, & Corrigal Flaminio, 2020; McDougall, 2006; and, more recently, Shalene Jobin on "kitchen table talks"). There are also several studies emerging from Métis scholars in terms of Métis-specific approaches to storytelling (see, for example, Poitras Pratt, 2020).

It is apparent from the many insights that Fiola shares in this book that she is learning much as she continues to explore this unique topic area and, importantly, she continually strives to be ethical and community-focused in her research approaches. What I found fascinating in this book is how Fiola credits one self-identified Métis professor as the impetus for reconnecting to her Métis ancestry and Indigenous spirituality. She also notes a generational shift in the source of (re)connection to Indigenous pride from the social movements of the 1960s, including the American Indian Movement and Red Power groups, for older generations of Métis to that of higher education as a source of empowerment in contemporary times. This is an important finding. With many institutions of higher learning dedicating time and resources to Indigenizing and decolonizing in response to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) Calls to Action, these firsthand accounts from Métis serve as testaments to the impact of what can be very challenging work inside post-secondary institutions to be more inclusive of Indigenous ways. Indeed, the nod to education's contemporary influence as a positive force could also serve to deflect another commonly held misconception across a multitude of Indigenous communities that higher education serves only to further assimilate Indigenous learners; quite the opposite appears to be true in those institutions that are undertaking this challenging but important work in a "good way." Another telling indicator of the author's growing expertise as a Métis scholar is revealed in how her first study adopted a very broad acceptance of Métis self-identification to that of reliance on the Métis National Council's definition of Métis person in this second study. In these ethically concerning times of "pretendIndians" where a number of people, including prominent scholars, are adopting false Indigenous identities to further their careers and advantage, it is vital that we are asking the question "What community claims you?" For those who are new, or newer, to questions of Métis identity, Fiola's explanations of how colonial policies and societal racism have played a major role in how Métis people see themselves and self-identify to others is illuminating and crucial to the goal of self-determination. As I read through these sections, I wondered if the discussion on the despicable act of "race-shifting" (where someone discovers or fabricates an Indigenous ancestral connection) might be confusing for a reader, or Métis person, who is in the early stages of coming to understand Métis-ness. In what is now a common narrative of how Métis people are finding their way out of shame, guilt, or fear, to reclaim their Métis identity, this important act of reclamation is not to be confused with the exploitive act of "race-

shifting" that the media is showcasing in contemporary times. I applaud Fiola for her candour as she shares with readers her own learning journey around this topic. The advice from Métis matriarch, Maria Campbell, on how the author "shouldn't believe everything she is told" – similarly extends to other Métis people who have been distanced from their identity and stories and how they ought to be wary of what and who they rely on as authentic knowledge resources. Finally, it is to Fiola's credit that she seeks advice from the federally recognized political organization, the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), on how to conduct research in our communities. While there are several complex issues that arise when a political organization assumes authority over research topics and researchers without requisite expertise and training in formal research activities, this is also an area that is deserving of much more attention and funding as Métis communities are unquestionably experts of their own life experiences.

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