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**Chantal Fiola, *Returning to Ceremony: Spirituality in Manitoba Métis Communities***

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Chantal Fiola, *Returning to Ceremony: Spirituality in Manitoba Métis Communities* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021), 317pp. Paperback. C\$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-8875-5962-4.

In the summer of 2022 I was asked by Chadwick Cowie, a former professor of mine at McGill University, if I would be interested in writing a book review of Chantal Fiola's *Returning to Ceremony* for the *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* (JACANZS). As a Métis scholar whose research often interrogates the intersection of Indigeneity and Christianity, I was enthusiastic to read and review Fiola's work.

On the heels of an internship that involved research with bibles translated into Cree, Ojibway, and Mohawk, I jumped into reading *Returning to Ceremony*. It quickly became evident that a tension which scratches both mine and Fiola's brains has to do with the struggle of untangling Christian thought and action from the project of Indigenous cultural preservation. Despite the stereotype that 'all Métis are Catholic,' Fiola's extensive community research and interviews support her argument that 'Métis people can play an important role in the resurgence of Indigenous ways of life, including spirituality' (p. 7).

Fiola interviewed eighteen Métis individuals with connections to six different Red River Métis communities across the province of Manitoba. These participants ranged greatly in age, class, educational background, and locale. Notably, each participant had very different definitions of their own spiritual practices and relations to Métis ceremonies.

Additionally Fiola constructed a Métis-Anishinaabe research design and methodology to complete her project. Key to this framework are visiting knowledge keepers, identifying one's family and community before speaking, and of returning to the community to share the findings of one's research. Practical elements of this research design include snowball sampling to gather participants, having one's research be place (or nation) specific, in addition to incorporating traditional medicine (like sage and tobacco) into the 'visiting'/interviewing process, and letting oneself be guided by Spirit.

Using this framework to trace written and oral histories of the Métis people Fiola establishes that what are typically regarded as First Nation specific ceremony and spirituality, like the use of sweat lodges, and plant medicine, have always been a part of Métis community and culture. This assertion highlights the efforts of the Canadian state and the Catholic Church to separate Métis from traditional practices, to forgo their own Indigeneity and instead to assimilate into mainstream French-Canadian culture.

For example, Louis Soren, one of Fiola's interlocutors from St. Anne shared that in his community, 'it was survival to identify as French; there was no benefit to identify yourself as Métis...we had to be proper and had to prove that we were not *le sauvage* especially because Roseau River First Nation was down the road" (p. 130). Building on this testimony, and that of other participants, Fiola finds that a good portion of her eighteen participants have family who originally may have identified as 'French' but have now proudly announced their Métis identity.

Many Métis involved in the study actually changed their self-identification based on their participation in ceremonies (Fiola specifies that 'change' in this case largely referred to a reinforcement of identity). Once the Métis identity of the subjects, and their relationship to this identity is established, Fiola focuses on how her subjects participate in ceremony as modern Métis. Some participants also

revealed that their family was not supportive of their own choice to reconnect to ceremonies, and in Lorette, some families even claimed to 'not believe in ceremonies' (p. 218). However, negative reactions have not prevented any of Fiola's subjects from pursuing their own spirituality.

In fact, knowledge of spirituality and ceremony are elements which tend to strengthen the interlocutors' desire to reconnect with their Métis identity. In her conclusion, Fiola addresses the modern, hesitant Métis individual: "to those Métis who worry they are 'not Indigenous enough' to go to ceremonies, I hope you draw confidence and find peace in the knowledge that some of your Métis ancestors participated in this way' (p. 241). Emboldened and hopeful, she continues on, 'when you commit your life to these healing ways – you are reconnecting your family line and strengthening the bond between your ancestors, your living relatives, and your descendants' (p. 241).

While the experiences of 'divisions like those discussed by the Métis people in this study can result in confusion, shame, a lack of confidence in identity and subsequently, an avoidance of ceremonies,' Fiola's book shows a deep desire among modern Métis to reconnect and engage in a resurgence of these ceremonies.

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