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## **POWER, PRAXIS AND THE MÉTIS OF KELLY LAKE, CANADA**

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### **Abstract /Résumé**

Although agency and power in Aboriginal communities is often not recognized, this paper develops a conceptual framework within which both the oppression and the agency of a Métis settlement is identified and assessed. It is based on ongoing participatory action research, completed by the first author, who is also Métis. Kelly Lake, British Columbia is currently faced with a number of challenges, such as the lack of a proper sanitary sewage system, little access to natural resources and few health services. Despite these circumstances, the residents of Kelly Lake have undertaken several initiatives to ameliorate the problems and reorient the embedded power relationships.

Bien que l'on ne reconnaisse pas souvent les relations de pouvoir dans les collectivités autochtones, le présent article élabore un cadre conceptuel qui permet de cerner et d'évaluer l'oppression et le pouvoir dans un établissement métis. L'article est fondé sur des recherches continues sur l'action participative menées par le premier auteur, qui est également métis. La collectivité de Kelly Lake (Colombie-Britannique) fait présentement face à un certain nombre de problèmes, tels que l'absence d'un système adéquat de traitement des eaux usées, un accès limité aux ressources naturelles et le faible nombre de services de santé. Malgré de telles conditions, les résidents de Kelly Lake ont mis en oeuvre plusieurs mesures d'amélioration et de réorientation des relations de pouvoir intégrées.

## Introduction

Agency and power in Aboriginal communities, particularly in historical contexts, has often not been recognized. Canada's first peoples have typically been positioned as victims who do little either to resist or redefine the hegemonic relations within which they are embedded (DePasquale, 2003). Yet, as many authors, such as Winona LaDuke (1999) have pointed out, the landscape of Native struggles is replete with examples of their dynamic engagement in the issues that affect their lives. Within Canada, Annette Chrétien (2005) argues that the Métis have long been actively involved in political struggles, but that the nature of those struggles has evolved over time. She asserts that subsequent to the Canadian Constitution of 1982 and the official recognition of the Métis, Métis politics has shifted away from the 'politics of recognition' towards the 'politics of definition.' By this she means that although the Métis are now officially recognized as one of Canada's first peoples (the other two groups being First Nations and the Inuit), the politics has now shifted towards such questions as who *is* Métis, what rights and resources ought to follow from that definition and who gets to decide such questions. As compared to Canada's First Nations and Inuit groups, these are particularly thorny issues since the Métis have less clearly defined access to land rights, the government funding of social programs, language rights and so on.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996) addressed some of the complexities involved in the 'politics of definition.' RCAP recognized the existence of Métis peoples throughout Canada yet made the distinction between the Métis Nation and 'other' Métis peoples. In the context of RCAP, the Métis Nation refers to the historical community tied to Red River, Manitoba and the military conflicts of the nineteenth century involving Louis Riel (Chrétien, 2005). The Métis Nation is linked to the Métis National Council (MNC) and has official recognition by the federal government. Regarding the 'other' Métis, RCAP states:

Several Métis communities came into existence, independently of the Métis Nation, in the eastern part of what we now call Canada, some of them predating the establishment of the Métis Nation. The history of Métis people who are not part of the Métis Nation is not easy to relate. For one thing, their past has not been much studied by historians. If the Métis Nation's story is unfamiliar to most Canadians, the story of the 'other' Métis is almost untold. (RCAP, 1996)

Thus, the 'other' Métis is an ambiguous, amorphous category whose boundaries and characteristics remain to be defined. For those poten-

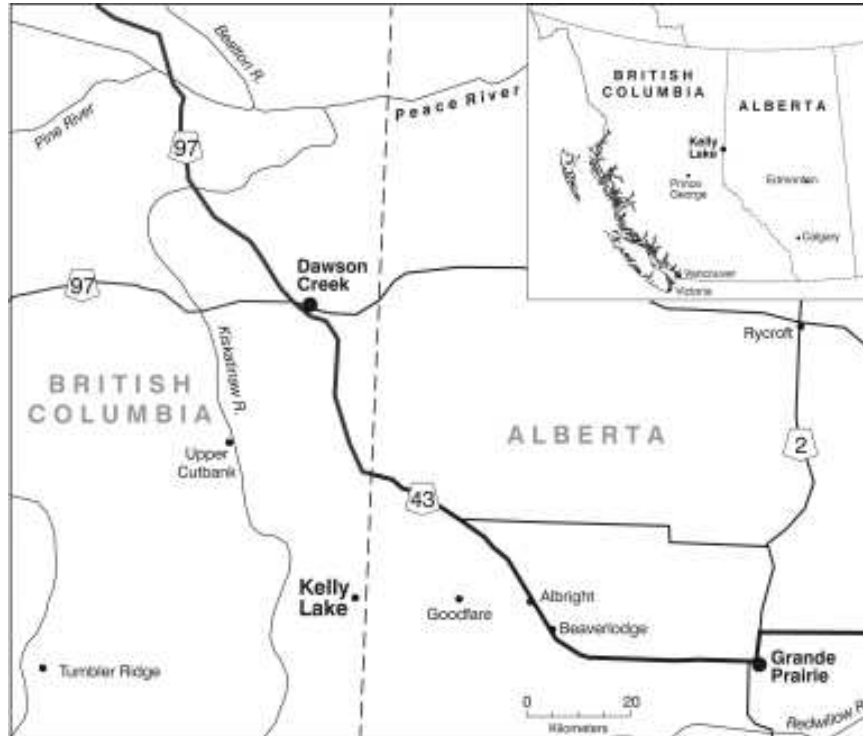
tially encompassed by this category, this is problematic since the 'other' Métis often do not receive the recognition and support that is offered to the Métis Nation or other Aboriginal groups.

Foremost amongst recent struggles addressing some of these definitional issues is the 1993-2003 legal battle known as the Powley case in which an Ontario Supreme Court judge granted a Métis community in Sault Ste. Marie the right to hunt moose. This case recognized the presence of a Métis community east of Manitoba as well as their traditional hunting rights as an Aboriginal people (Chrétien, 2005). Other struggles include the recognition of a Métis presence in Newfoundland (Pomeroy, 2004), and broader negotiations, debates and philosophical differences among several Métis organisations including the Métis National Council, the Canadian Métis Council, the Métis Nation of Ontario, the Métis Nation of British Columbia, etc.

At the local scale, an example of these shifting power relationships and recent steps towards redefinition are captured by the small Métis settlement of Kelly Lake in British Columbia. Through activities associated with addressing a host of social and environmental issues, this community is altering the hegemonic power relations within which they are embedded. Kelly Lake (population 150), located 60 miles west of Grand Prairie, Alberta, just inside the British Columbia boundary (see Figure 1), was established by a group of Métis with ties to Red River, who were pushed to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains by the rushing influx of European immigrants. For several generations Kelly Lake's relative isolation afforded it some protection from further encroachment and the region had (and to a great extent, still has) abundant sources of country food to sustain a traditional subsistence economy. The Kelly Lake area is also endowed with resources of recent interest to capitalist economies, namely timber, coal, gas and wind power.

As a Métis settlement, Kelly Lake exhibits both similarities and differences to other Aboriginal communities in Canada. On the one hand, unlike First Nations' territories, the Kelly Lake settlement is not an 'Indian reservation,' and so has not suffered the negative consequences nor enjoyed the protection that this designation provides. On the other hand, as a Métis community associated with a distinct settlement location, the situation in Kelly Lake shares several similarities with other Aboriginal communities. For instance, the village has struggled with high unemployment, lack of services, environmental contamination and resource extraction from their traditional territories. And, like many other Aboriginal communities, Kelly Lake has recently begun to take small steps to challenge the status quo and deal with these ongoing problems, for instance, by facilitating a hearing aid campaign in the commu-

Figure 1



Kelly Lake, British Columbia, Canada

nity and undertaking negotiations for energy resources in the form of wind energy.

This paper assesses the historic development of Kelly Lake, the problems it faces, and examples of active agency in dealing with those problems. We argue that they are contributing to the redefinition of the place and identity of the Métis within Canadian society, among constitutionally recognized Aboriginal groups, and within the Métis themselves. To structure this assessment a three-dimensional framework of power relations, first articulated by Steven Lukes in the 1970s (Lukes, 1974) is utilised. He argues that there are three dimensions of power; those demonstrated by direct interaction between actors in pluralistic decision-making, by the effects of non-decision-making, and those related to dominant ideologies that obscure the real values and interests of actors. We argue that utilising this multi-dimensional concept allows for a more nuanced understanding of the predominant multiple and interactive power relations that can affect small communities such as Kelly

Lake, as well as the practices through which those relationships are negotiated, reinforced and/or altered. In other words, the model provides a framework through which we can assess both the oppression and the active agency of the Kelly Lake community.

We maintain that the Métis of Kelly Lake are simultaneously imbricated within a set of evolving multi-dimensional power relationships and practices, involving the various levels of government, private industry and Aboriginal groups. Even as these power relationships constrain their capacity to achieve their goals, Kelly Lake residents are actively involved in contesting and redefining them, in some cases, by circumventing the touted fiduciary relationship between the federal government and the Métis people. The paper begins by outlining the theoretical framework and methodology. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the Kelly Lake case study and a brief conclusion.

### **Lukes and Theories of Power**

Simplistic or uni-dimensional conceptions of the power relationships and practices facing Aboriginal communities do not acknowledge the multiple pathways through which power is mediated and exercised. For instance, pluralistic approaches to understanding political policy and decision-making assume that key stakeholders will influence these processes through mechanisms of debate and competition wherein power is discernable through observable behaviour and outcomes. However, Schlosberg (2002) stresses that the pluralistic model only supports and acknowledges limited stakeholder participation, since the system favours previously established actors and groups, rather than emerging interests, such as Aboriginal groups or other marginalised peoples (Lukes 1974, 2005). further contends that pluralism does not question the distribution of social power and resources among stakeholders nor does it address the influence asserted by hegemonic ideologies. He also is concerned with the strict focus on active decision-making; non-decisions, neglect and the suppression of conflict may also have important ramifications (see also Scholsberg, 2002 and Crenson, 1971). Hence, Lukes (2005:27) is at pains to point out that "...the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent conflict from arising in the first place." He maintains that an in-depth understanding of the power relations at work in modern societies must accommodate dimensions of power beyond those envisioned by the pluralistic model. As outlined below, theoretically, he asserts that there are three levels of power relationships (Lukes 2005:29). Digeser (1992) further observes that methodologically, each understanding of power is associated with a different empirical question.

- One-dimensional: Focus is on behaviour and decision-making, observable (overt) conflict. Policy preferences and interests are revealed by political participation (Lukes, 2005). Key empirical question: “Who if anyone, is exercising power?” (Digeser, 1992:980)
- Two-dimensional: Focus is on decision-making and non-decision making<sup>1</sup> and observable (overt or covert) conflict. Policy preferences or grievances reveal participant interests (Lukes, 2005). Key empirical question: “What issues have been mobilized off the agenda and by whom?” (Digeser, 1992:980)
- Three-dimensional: Focus in on decision-making and control over the political agenda (not necessarily through decisions), observable (overt or covert) and latent conflict. The real interests of participants may be obscured by dominant discourses (Lukes, 2005). Key empirical question: “Whose objective interests are being harmed?” (Digeser, 1992:980)

Hence, the three dimensional power model stresses that, beyond pluralistic conceptions, power can also be ideological and systemic (Jacob, 1990); power is “able to influence the thoughts and desires of its victims without their being aware of its effects” (Hindess, 1996). It is noted that this type of power is less directed at individuals and more concerned with ‘socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour’ (Lukes, 1974:22).

Lukes’ conceptualisation of power is appealing because it takes ideas about power beyond the realm of pluralism and behaviourism and can incorporate a critique of societal structures and the relationship between these structures and agency (Scott, 2001). Echoing Lukes, Schlosberg (2002) contends that broader conceptions of power relations provide an opportunity to understand critiques of modern society and progress advanced by those traditionally marginalised by the political system – grassroots organisations embedded in local spaces, as well as the poor, Blacks, women, Aboriginal peoples and so on. This questioning of industrial and government agendas and perspectives moves the analysis into the three dimensional realm.

Yet, in the three decades subsequent to the publication of Lukes’ original text and in the 2005, second edition of the book, ample criticism has also been levied at the model. Morriss (1987), for instance, is critical of the way in which the model assumes that people use power solely to control others – the idea that the objective of person “A” is only about having *power over* another, “B”. After all, “A” might value power because it enables the achievement of wants and needs; in this case the *power to* attain goals is the objective, not the direct control of “B”. For

instance, the people of Kelly Lake, through their daily practices and struggles, are attempting to alter hegemonic relations, not primarily to achieve power, but to obtain clean water, better health care, etc. The paper also outlines another possible outcome of the negotiation of power relationships; that is the possibility that “B” might become involved as an equal partner with “A”. This suggests that social relationships do not have to result in winners and losers; instead win-win (positive-sum) outcomes are possible.

Other criticisms of Lukes’ model include that it assumes it is possible empirically to detect and evaluate non-decisions, hidden agendas, latent conflict and ‘real’ interests (Lukes, 2005, Hoy, 1981). This concern can be addressed by searching out instances where marginalised people react to oppression, upheaval and to perceived opportunities (Hoy, 1981). It is argued that perspectives from those outside the mainstream often shed light on taken-for-granted patterns and practices and reveal dominant power relations. The model also tends to focus on binary power relations (e.g. the power of “A” over “B”), rather than those that are multi-player and intertwined. We also note that it tends to assume that power relations are static, rather than fluid and malleable over time and space. In the case study we thus provide a more nuanced understanding of power and social practices and demonstrate the way in which the Métis of Kelly Lake are actively engaged in multiple relationships, some of which are being altered to provide benefits to all the players involved.

We contend that the community of Kelly Lake is simultaneously involved with the three dimensions of power through their multiple relationships with the federal and provincial governments, other Aboriginal organisations (both Métis and First Nations) and various private industries such as resource extraction companies and private health care providers. It is also clear that simultaneously, these other players are involved in their own complex sets of relationships that sometimes impinge on the power positioning and possibilities for residents of Kelly Lake. For instance, in the case of industry-government-Aboriginal relations, resource extraction companies (including timber, gas and coal) have typically negotiated directly with government authorities and nearby First Nations communities, while ignoring any protests or claims from Kelly Lake residents. Thus, while the other players have benefited from the extraction activity, the residents of Kelly Lake have been excluded from any of the pursuant benefits.

## **Methodology**

This theoretical orientation towards highlighting theories of power is directly related to the methodological approach adopted which is con-



cerned with 'activist scholarship' and 'participation research.' Audrey Kobayashi (2001:66) defines activist scholarship concerned with social justice issues as research combining a 'critical perspective on the world' with the personalization of the research undertaking. The former is "an attempt to understand the systemic ways in which human relations result in oppression, and especially in racialized oppression." The latter implies that activist research involves emotional experiences, commitment to personal stands on political issues, personal confrontation of oppressive conditions and personal commitment 'to make a difference.' She outlines that this approach to research contradicts some traditional approaches, particularly the call for researcher neutrality and objectivity. Moreover, since professional experts, including researchers, tend to align themselves, not always consciously, with elite interests (Fischer, 2005), knowledge production is not a neutral process and the connection between knowledge and power is clear (Foucault, 1980).

In recognition of these issues 'participatory research,' as Fischer calls it, seeks to develop research practices grounded in social justice and democracy, in which citizens and their local knowledges are brought directly into the research process. At the heart of this type of methodological orientation is the fundamental conviction "that people can help choose how they live their lives" (Fischer, 2005:175). One strand of participatory research is called participatory action research (PAR). According to Carroll (2004:276) "in PAR, research is only one of three elements, with inclusive participation and action to create change being of equal import. PAR is in effect a form of radical pedagogy." More specifically, Fischer (2005) outlines that this form of research involves 1) collaborative learning between the researcher and the subjects; 2) it involves a phenomenological perspective that values experiential knowledge and takes place in the subjects' 'natural' setting in order to understand the sociocultural context of the situation; and 3) it seeks to interpret the problems faced by subjects as related to social domination and oppression. As such, participatory action research is differentiated by its ideological commitment to empowerment.

The research conducted for this project was conducted within this approach of activist scholarship and participatory action research. The first author is Métis and a university student. This project both fulfilled the requirements for a directed reading course (with the second author) and allowed him to further the social justice work in the Aboriginal communities with which he is involved. The research was conducted over an eight month period, between September 2004 and April 2005, through an initial four day visit to the community of Kelly Lake, subsequent follow-up visits during which formal and informal discussions were held

with a wide range of community members. Further, extensive telephone and email conversations were held with Kelly Lake community members, and interaction, dialogue and conversations occurred with government authorities, private industry and other Aboriginal groups to both understand Kelly Lake's problems and help facilitate some amelioration of the situation. Finally, the project also collected archival material, books, articles and access to information data. This multi-method approach to data collection allowed for data verification and a holistic understanding of the range and depth of social and environmental issues facing the community. Further, through this participative approach, opportunities to participate actively in the community were identified.

In the following section we outline the research results, drawing attention throughout to ways in which the three dimensions of power infused the system. Also indicated are the ways in which the community challenged these relationships through small but important resistances and initiatives.

### **The Historical and Socio-Economic Context of Kelly Lake**

The Canadian Constitutional Act of 1982, section 35, defines Aboriginals in Canada as being Indians, Inuit and Métis. Prior to being included in the Constitution, the Métis in Canada chose to align themselves with non-status Indians through the Native Council of Canada since both groups faced similar challenges in obtaining recognition and resources from the federal government (Dunn, 2001, Chrétien, 2005). After being included in the Constitution, the Métis National Council (MNC) was formed claiming to be the voice of the Métis Nation.

As Gerry Andrews (1985), schoolmaster at Kelly Lake from 1923-1925, offered in *The Métis Outpost*, the community has historic ties to the Red River Settlement in Manitoba during the golden age of the Métis under the leadership of Louis Riel, circa 1885. Given this context, one could assume that the people of Kelly Lake would, automatically, be included as part of the Métis nation. However, particularly prior to 2004, the community of Kelly Lake maintained their autonomy from the Métis National Council. Interestingly, since that time this situation has changed greatly. In 2006, the provincial government in British Columbia signed the Métis Nation Relationship Accord with the Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC). In February 2007 MNBC signed a Métis Nation Territorial Affiliation Agreement with the Kelly Lake Métis Settlement Society (KLMSS) (Henry 2007). These agreements are significant as they demonstrate that the residents of KLMSS have been successful in re-positioning themselves politically. A dialogue which had been previously unavailable is now possible. These very recent changes also demon-

strate the fluidity of boundary definitions regarding who has official membership in the Métis Nation. This is clearly a social power issue; it is about the definition of whom and what is 'Métis.'

The community of Kelly Lake did not suffer some of the dire events that were inflicted on First Nations in Canada. Children were not removed and forced to go to residential schools. Instead, schoolmasters were brought into the community where they lived and became actively involved with community members; learning Cree as well as teaching English and other educational skills to the youth. Andrews (1985) wrote that on his arrival at Kelly Lake in 1923, the children could only speak Cree yet became one of the most well-spoken English youth in British Columbia. According to Andrews (1985), Kelly Lake was not a Reserve, but rather a Métis settlement, the people enjoyed many of the same rights as other Canadians including the right to vote; a right not extended to on-Reserve Indians.

In *The Kelly Lake Métis Settlement*, Dorthea Calverly (Nd) writes about events in 1945 when the people of Kelly Lake tried to exert their legal claim to the land. In an example of one dimensional power (involving overt decision-making) and of the traditional capitalist relationship between governments and industry, the response from the government of British Columbia was to make the land at Kelly Lake a 'Reserve.' This was not a Reserve in the traditional Indian sense, but rather a 'timber Reserve' with lumber companies controlling the wood and all uses. According to Calverly, at that time, the timber company holding title to the land had no intention of cutting the trees. The people had to obtain permission to cut logs to expand their houses for their ever-growing families and were denied work on their traditional lands. Calverly states that this contributed to the dependence on welfare in the community. Today, the capitalist-driven relationships continue to be visible when visiting Kelly Lake; industry trucks constantly speed through the community loaded with coal and lumber. These are not just trucks; this is money and resources leaving the traditional territory.

Unfortunately, the presence of the lumber, coal and oil industries has not resulted in job opportunities for members of Kelly Lake. By leveraging their position in the Canadian Constitution as status Indians (e.g. a third dimension power structure), nearby First Nations are able to demand employment, but the Métis of Kelly Lake rarely benefit. This forces many residents to leave in search of employment and has tended to de-populate the community.

Encana Oil is one of the most recent examples of capitalist exploitation of the Kelly Lake area; they recently invested \$369 million for the right to drill and to acquire land in the Kelly Lake area (Parfitt, 2004). The

Métis of Kelly Lake are fighting Encana Oil and the government of British Columbia in court. In an article titled *Battling the Ghosts and Death*, author Derek Reiber (2004) quotes Campbell-Letendre as follows,

They've drilled quite a bit around our area. We're never consulted. Nothing. I don't know how much harder I can stress that there's a problem. We're not here to stop progress. We're just here to say we want to be able to manage it. I want to be able to eat a moose in 10 years. And I want my grandson to be able to eat one in 40 years.

Currently, due to the excessive drilling and clear cutting, there are local fears that the wells are being drained and the availability of drinking water is now being questioned (Letendre, personal communication). Campbell-Letendre realizes that progress and technology cannot be stopped, however, he maintains it can be controlled in a manner that does not affect the environment in a detrimental manner. Along this alternative development trajectory, Campbell-Letendre has had initial discussions with wind power companies since Kelly Lake is located on prime real estate for such a venture. To date, Campbell-Letendre has been successful in acquiring four meteorological towers for testing the wind capabilities of the area. In a rare agreement with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), INAC assisted in acquiring the towers as well as supplying \$50,000 in start up funds (Campbell-Letendre, personal communication). Moreover, in contrast to the way in which they have traditionally been ignored by the resource extraction companies, currently the community has also been invited to undertake consultations with other energy resource companies interested in working in the Kelly Lake area.

Their questioning of status quo attitudes towards progress and the quest for more sustainable energy development initiatives (third dimensional power issues) along with the simultaneous demand for consultation (a first dimensional power concern) are emblematic of the complex power relationships within which Kelly Lake is embedded. Note also that these relationships move beyond the typical theorisation of the Aboriginal-government fiduciary relationship, in which it is assumed that the government will negotiate and protect Aboriginal interests. Instead, the Métis of Kelly Lake are challenging both the government and resource extraction companies while simultaneously engaging in potentially positive sum negotiations with other capitalist firms. Through these processes and practices, the Métis of Kelly Lake are attempting to gain the '*power to*' manage some of their local resources and striving to alter the power dynamic currently being faced by the community. As Foucault (1980) would suggest, power here is productive rather than repressive; it

is being sought to improve the daily lives and conditions of Kelly Lake residents.

### **Within Kelly Lake: Infrastructure Issues**

Other examples of the power relationships existent within the community are revealed through the community struggles to obtain adequate infrastructure, including telephones and sewage treatment. Until approximately 1998, the community had one telephone; a payphone that only accepted calling cards or allowed them to make collect calls. In a mini-documentary for CBC Television in 1993, Karen Tankard approached BCTel to enquire about the lack of phone service to the community (Tankard, 1993). BCTel claimed that they were willing to invest \$270,000 towards running phone lines to Kelly Lake and that the people would be required to pay \$27,000. This would have been impossible for the people of Kelly Lake and they remained without phones. Only when a private communications company, Telus, offered to set up the service did they receive phones. The service was installed from Alberta and the community has an Alberta area code, despite being located in British Columbia. However, unlike the second example provided below, the decision to provide the service in Kelly Lake was far less related to the needs of the community than to provide the corporations working in the vicinity with adequate telecommunications. In contrast to the resource extraction industry, in this case practices and decisions made in the interest of private sector players have led to a positive result within Kelly Lake; this despite the marginalised position of the community.

In another example of infrastructure problems, in the late 1970s and early 1980s housing was constructed in Kelly Lake. According to Campbell-Letendre (personal communication), the goal was to have suitable houses constructed to replace the cabins of old. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) acted as the government agent for this initiative. Campbell-Letendre maintains that in order for the housing to be constructed, CMHC required that landowners sign off on five-acre parcels of land. Once the construction was completed, CMHC then sold the land back to the landowners at a cost of \$1,000 per acre. In some cases, CMHC held the mortgage on the property or used it as a rental property. The \$1,000 per acre did not include the mortgage for the actual house. As outlined below, formal ownership to property eventually proved problematic in solving sewage treatment problems.

Part of the housing construction process required CMHC to arrange for, and approve, the construction of a sewage system. A lagoon system was arranged whereby waste would drain into the lagoons and the natural elements would break down the waste. Campbell-Letendre contends

that the Métis had no input into development or installation of the lagoons. The lagoons ultimately proved to be faulty resulting in overflowing sewage and raw sewage backing up into the basements of the homes that had been constructed by CMHC. In her CBC documentary, Tankard presented graphic footage of houses that had to be evacuated due to sewage backup and the proximity of children to the overflowing lagoons. With wide spread sewage overflow, Campbell-Letendre fears that the wild game has become contaminated; that the poorly constructed lagoons put both the health of the community and the health of the trapper/hunter economy at risk (personal communication).

As revealed by internal documents, CMHC eventually acknowledged the problems with the lagoons and agreed to undertake the needed repairs. Arrangements were made to assess sewage lines from the houses to the lagoons and to examine the lagoons themselves. However, only houses with which CMHC still had some kind of financial interest were examined. Anyone who had paid off their mortgage was not entitled to testing by CMHC (Pelly, 1993).

Contractors were hired to assess lagoon damage and make recommendations regarding repairs. The inadequacy of the CMHC's sewage management approach is exposed in a letter obtained through Access to Information. Dated July 29, 1993, the letter, from contractor L & M Engineering to CMHC states, 'many of the lagoons are less than 60 metres from the house and closer than 15 metres to the property line, both in contravention of the Peace River Health Unit "Sewage Lagoon Guidelines."' The letter further states, "lagoon systems for individual houses have proven to work well in many areas of northern B.C. The systems which have failed typically (sic) have been small, deep lagoons such as most of those in Kelly Lake." The letter also states, in reference to the Kelly Lake lagoons, "it is our experience that these systems seldom work." L & M Engineering went on to recommend 'above ground' lagoons as opposed to the 'in ground' lagoons that had initially been installed (Lawrence, 1993).

There were further complications and concerns brought about by CMHC's handling of the initial lagoon installations. Environmental consultants HBT Agra Limited were brought in due to water concerns with the lagoon. They expanded on the above analysis. In a letter dated July 27, 1993, HBT Agra states, "It is understood that a number of properties use domestic wells as their water supply. An assessment of the ground water quality and the completion details of the wells was not part of the present study, however, it is recommended that an assessment of the potential for cross contamination between the septic disposal facilities and the water wells be carried out." CMHC did not make the connection

between raw sewage leaking into the land and wells used for drinking water (Pelly, 1993).

L & M Engineering's proposal for the 'above ground' lagoons was presented both to CMHC and the BC Ministry of Health. A letter from then Chief Environmental Health Officer Ann Thomas (1993) to CMHC stated, "As the report suggests, it appears the only option for onsite sewage disposal is 'above ground' lagoons to replace the present below grade lagoons. However, both myself and Mr. Miller (Public Health Engineer) concur that this is an unacceptable option." A letter from Geoff Butchart, Program Manager with CHMC to Jim Morris, Operations Manager, expresses some surprise that this option was turned down since "the proposed corrections were in keeping with their own current guidelines and were prepared by a professional engineer" (Butchart, 1993). Eventually, a sewage system was agreed upon, however, the Métis of Kelly Lake again did not have a say in its design or management. It also does not appear that the problems with the old sewage system have been resolved. On a recent visit to Kelly Lake, Campbell-Letendre pointed out pockets of raw sewage still visible on the surface and the stench of raw sewage was acute. From a theoretical perspective, both of these two infrastructure situations—sewage treatment and telephone service—are examples of the powerlessness of the community to meet even some of their most basic needs; these are examples of both the first and second dimensional power relations facing the community since both direct decision-making and non-decision-making was involved.

### **Power Shift**

History has shown that the Métis of Kelly Lake cannot rely on government to deliver the services and protection that most Canadians enjoy. As Canadians, the Métis of Kelly Lake are landowners and taxpayers, yet they are denied the benefits that mainstream taxpayers enjoy. Whether through active decision-making (e.g. the granting of resource extraction permits), non-decisions (e.g. failure to provide adequate housing and health care), or by recourse to status quo structures (place of the Métis in the Canadian Constitution), Kelly Lake residents have been marginalised. In recent times, however, the Métis of Kelly Lake have been striking out on their own in an effort to improve the various situations in the community. In so doing they are challenging hegemonic patterns and attempting to redefine the social power relations within which they are embedded.

Beyond the alternative energy agreements outlined above, another example of these efforts is a campaign in Kelly Lake that was undertaken to meet a need for hearing care services in the community. The

campaign was structured to allow for participation in the campaign by a wide variety of government and industry actors. The intent was to give parties, such as the Peace River School Board, the opportunity to assist. All relevant parties were initially invited to participate in the campaign.

Through contacts in his network, the first author, David Bentley, approached Campbell-Letendre about bringing a hearing aid initiative to Kelly Lake. Bentley sits on the board of CanHear, a charitable organization that does hearing aid campaigns in third world countries such as Mexico and Haiti. The goal of the campaign was to test the hearing abilities of the people and provide free hearing aids and ongoing care, to those who could not afford them. When Campbell-Letendre assured Bentley no health care had been delivered to Kelly Lake in quite some time, he approached CanHear founder Martin Heinrich about doing a campaign for Kelly Lake. Approval to proceed came immediately. Heinrich also owns Provincial Hearing Consultants based out of Hamilton, Ontario. This campaign challenged second dimensional power relationships since it addresses issues of non-decision-making and neglect. Heinrich and Bentley were determined that CanHear—a private firm—would make this campaign work, with or without government assistance. This challenged the traditional power relationship between the government and the community and challenged the notion that a private sector-Aboriginal relationship will necessarily lead to the marginalisation of the latter actors.

The first order of business was to have the hearing abilities of the community tested. Charles Horn, then a consultant for Kelly Lake, was able to contact Fran Thornton, the audiologist responsible for north-eastern BC. A recent hire from Britain, Thornton's position had sat vacant for the previous eighteen months resulting in quite a backlog of cases. Despite having never heard of Kelly Lake, she did commit to visiting the community for two days of testing.

The *Hearing Aid Act of British Columbia* is overseen by the Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Consultants and the Act makes no allowances for giving away hearing aids in the province. Specifically, the Act states: 'sale' means a transfer of title, conditional sales contract, lease, hire purchase or any other contract where a person disposes of, and any other person acquires, a hearing aid, but does not include wholesale transactions." (Government of British Columbia, 1996).

Before agreeing to go to Kelly Lake, audiologist Fran Thornton requested that Bentley receive permission from the Board to do this campaign. The Board was willing to give verbal permission but not written. Part of challenging the existing power relationship in the health care



sector is to be willing to attempt to influence taken-for-granted preferences and approaches—third dimensional power issues. The bottom line was that the campaign was going to happen with or without permission. The goal in the hearing aid campaign, apart from offering the service to the Métis, was to get other private sector health providers to see the benefits of such campaigns, as well as to encourage the government to provide future services for the community.

Horn had put a request to the school board for access to the school in order to test and have a waiting room for clients. The school is a modern facility that had been closed two years earlier due to budget cuts. It is also the only building suitable for such testing. Repeated requests were denied by the Peace River School Board who cited liability issues, even though the people of Kelly Lake had offered to insure the building for the testing periods. Interestingly, the school has been made available to multinationals when they wished to hold meetings there (Campbell-Letendre, personal communication). Testing was ultimately done in a resident's kitchen. The elements were not kind and Elders had to walk through stormy conditions. With ten people at a time crammed into the kitchen, testing was not of the quality it could have been. However, Campbell-Letendre made the best arrangements possible given the lack of cooperation by the school board (See Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2



2004 Kelly Lake School. Access denied. Bentley. Personal Collection.

Test results were shipped to Provincial Hearing Consultants and the aids assembled. Chris Auty, National Sales Manager for GN Resound (Danish hearing aid manufacturer), offered to supply, free of charge, any hearing aids that may be required. Not only were they free, they would be the best quality aids available. Once assembled, Heinrich, Auty and Bentley left for Kelly Lake for the actual fittings. In the end, seventy-two people were tested with seventeen requiring aids.

Figure 3



2004 Chris Auty fits Lyle Letendre with hearing aid in community member's kitchen. Bentley. Personal Collection.

The objective of the campaign was, first and foremost, to provide necessary health care. Secondly, this was an opportunity to empower the community and its leadership. The provincial government, although officially required to provide health care services for all British Columbia communities, offered only minimal assistance and at the local level, authorities with the school board refused to allow the use of the school. This was a curious stance for a local government agency to take as it only served for negative media coverage for the Board of Education. With his experience in hearing aid campaigns in Mexico, Heinrich was aware of how governments can slow down and impede a campaign. Similarly, in this case, the minimization of government involvement es-

essentially altered the prescribed health care model of service delivery, shifted power towards the community and fast-tracked the campaign. The campaign went from concept to delivery in three months. In the end, lack of governmental assistance was fine as it allowed for more interesting media coverage by CBC Radio and The Raven's Eye News. For instance, the front page of Raven's Eye featured the headline, '*Rare Health Services Come to Métis of Kelly Lake*' (Taillon, 2004). While it was not a huge campaign when compared to government programmes, it did draw services into the community that the government would not deliver.

A second campaign for Kelly Lake took place in September, 2005. As with the first campaign, Thornton went to the community and tested the hearing capabilities with the results being sent to Provincial Hearing Consultants in Hamilton. GN ReSound provided any aids that were required. However, since access to the school in Kelly Lake had been denied on the first campaign, it was determined that a second request would not be made. The people of Kelly Lake went to Grande Prairie, Alberta for the fitting of the aids. Hearing Aid Practitioner, Joanne Lafond, and Office Manager, Kristina Wold, of Soundwave Hearing Care in Grande Prairie, offered to donate their time, opening on a Saturday, as well as the facilities at Soundwave, in order to fit the required aids. While this required the residents of Kelly Lake to travel to Grande Prairie, it also meant that a proper setting for the campaign was secured. It also allowed Lafond and Wold to develop a relationship with the people of Kelly Lake.

By bypassing the traditional model of health care delivery, a non-zero sum outcome was achieved wherein all partners benefited. Audiologist Fran Thornton was the only government employee willing to join in this campaign. Thornton gained credibility in the eyes of the people of Kelly Lake as she was not reflective of the bureaucratic relationships to which the Métis had been accustomed. The residents of Kelly Lake benefited as they received testing and the aids. CanHear, Provincial Hearing and GN ReSound profited from the invaluable publicity they received. Bentley also benefited as he was given the opportunity to coordinate the event and then write about it. This was a win/win/win campaign with the residents of the community given the power to make it happen. In a national context these shifts in power relationships may sound trivial. To the people of Kelly Lake the shift is monumental.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The Kelly Lake case study has demonstrated the complex ways in which the three dimensions of power (with the foci on decision-making,

non-decision-making and societal structural contexts) play out in ongoing relationships among the Kelly Lake settlement, various government agencies, other Aboriginal groups and private industry. It has demonstrated that the power relationships among this group of players is nuanced, multi-layered and never fully stable. It also provided examples of practices used to bolster, contest or alter those relationships. In the case of Métis people of Kelly Lake, the fiduciary relationship touted to exist between the Métis and government agencies (in the housing, health care, education and natural resources sectors), was found to be lacking, leading to examples of first, second and third dimensions of power, and to the marginalisation of Kelly Lake. In terms of the relationship with industry, while an exploitive approach was demonstrated by the resource extraction companies, the more recent agreement regarding alternative energy resources suggests that even this relationship is subject to power shifts. This shift was further demonstrated by companies involved with the hearing aid campaign; by envisioning a non-zero sum approach, all involved benefited and the residents of Kelly Lake gained a modicum of independence and power.

Given the way in which the Métis of Kelly Lake have begun to resist their marginal position within Canadian society as well as the rules and laws that reinforce that positioning (e.g. interpretations of Métis nationhood and the Canadian Constitution), we argue that the people of Kelly Lake are attempting to redefine who they are as active agents. This move towards redefining agency relocates understandings of power beyond the previously outlined three dimensions into a posited fourth dimension. According to Digesser (1992) while the first three faces of power are predicated on the idea that the agency and subjectivity of actors (e.g. the nature and needs of A's and B's) are given, the fourth dimension of power postulates that subjects are social constructions and, therefore, agency is contingent. In other words, the fourth dimension of power is linked to the formation of agency and its operation. Under this conceptualisation, agency is not based on essential interests or 'true' desires; instead it is created and normalised within society. As such the methodological question becomes "What kind of subject is being produced?" (Digesser, 1992:980). This dimension of power is, therefore, 'a tool for describing the identities and norms that sustain' the other dimensions of power (Digesser, 1992:991); it can also be seen as an opportunity to question how we know what we think we know about power, identity and agency.

In the case of the Métis of Kelly Lake, attention to this fourth dimension of power provides an opportunity to unravel how their subject positions have been shaped and to identify the ways in which this has af-

fecting their agency. Drawing heavily from Foucault, Digesser outlines that fourth dimensional power is most clearly visible when the resistance against it is great since the formation of subjects is always resisted by human beings who never completely fit the mould of 'normal.' Thus, this fourth dimension is evidenced by the way in which the residents of Kelly Lake have chosen to resist their 'normal' marginalised identity and are redefining themselves as active agents. It is also evidenced by their own nuanced definition of what it means to be Métis; the community is, in effect, producing their own subject identity and agency. This in turn, contributes to the on-going, evolving political debates regarding who are Canada's Métis, what rights ought to flow from that definition and who gets to decide.

For the people of Kelly Lake, activities such as the hearing-aid campaign (with its direct involvement of the private sector) have challenged the normal practices for delivering health care to Aboriginal peoples; through this activity they are also redefining their agency. By rejecting the power relationships of the past and creating new ones in the present, it is possible that the seed has been planted for more balanced power relationships in the future. Auty (GN ReSound) states that GN ReSound is now looking at bringing the Kelly Lake model of hearing aid campaign to remote communities in Russia and Bulgaria (Auty, 2005). A community of one hundred and fifty Métis people are having a global impact because they dared to question what is accepted as 'normal' in our society.

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### Note

1. Non-decision-making is defined as "an act that suppresses potential issues and ensures that they do not even enter the decision-making process" (Scott 2001, 58). See Crenson (1971) "The Un-Politics of Air Pollution" for a cogent example. A decision, by contrast, is a choice among alternative modes of action (Lukes, 1974).

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