Along the Trail: Dr. Paul Gareau Interview

Molly: Tawnshi listeners and welcome again to Along the Trail, a podcast celebrating the work and ideas of Métis Studies researchers! I'm your host, Molly Swain, Métis PhD student at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Native Studies, and currently based in beautiful amiskwaciwâskahikan Edmonton, Alberta.

For today's episode, we are sitting down to visit with Dr. Paul Gareau. Dr. Gareau is Métis from Bellevue near Batoche, Saskatchewan and is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Native Studies. He is the Principal Investigator of The Métis Kinscapes Project, the president of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (CSSR), and a former research fellow for the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research (RCMR). Grounded in Métis Studies and Indigenous Studies as well as Religious Studies, Gareau's work centres on theory and methodology around relationality, gender, Indigenous epistemologies, land and place, and sovereignty/peoplehood.

Paul and I chatted about his academic journey, his lightening bolt moment, how walking to St-Laurent with his cousins led to his interest in Métis Religious Studies, Facebook relationality, why he has decided to only do collaborative work from now on, and more. Paul's work is probably some of my favourite in the field of Métis Studies right now, so I'm really happy to be able to share this conversation with you. Without further ado, let's get this Red River cart on the trail!

Molly: Thanks for agreeing to come chat with me this morning. I would love if you wanted to share a little bit about how you got into Métis Studies research, what brought you to the academy, to Métis Studies as a field in particular, and then what sparked your interest in Métis religion as a field?

Paul: So that's a huge question, Molly. And I love it. I'm really happy that we're having this conversation, cause it's always on front of mind and like in my heart, you know. My interest in Métis Studies goes back to the late nineties, when my brothers, both my brothers Jean and Guy did- they were doing school at the University of Saskatchewan, and in the U of S , so Guy was doing a Linguistic degree, I don't know why, it's like whatever, Guy, good job, Guy, you know, anyways, so great, great brother. But Jean was doing a Social Work degree at U of S and because they have to do Indigenous Studies as part of their overall like education, right? So they were doing a Métis Studies course. And This was their textbook in which they have the ambivalence articles. I even have the book that he gave me, they were reading *A New People*. And I was just like, you know, high school dropout and didn't know how school worked, but I was so intrigued by what they were doing. You know, like they were talking about having these great conversations about Métis history and identity and language and culture and nationhood and stuff like that. And I was just like, so enamored that I really wanted to go to U of S to do that. But then life made me, drew me away to Montreal instead.

It's just- that's what happened, life. I went to Canada World Youth. I met Lucy[1], we met in Québec and then we went to Benin on a cultural exchange program in West Africa. And we ended up all of us moving to Montréal because it's amazing. Right?

[1] Paul's wife (also awesome).

Molly: Yeah. Why not?

Paul: Why not? So I tried to go back to university. I went through CEGEP and I was just a high school dropout. Like, I didn't know how to do school, or I was kind of like a mature student who was just messed up about this, like tanking courses. Like I tried to do an Anthropology course in 2000, and I failed, cause I didn't know how to study or how to write or how to read a book or anything.

And then ultimately I went to do some CEGEP courses and I gained my confidence. And then I started school in 2002 at Concordia in Montréal, but I ended up doing Anthropology and I really didn't like it. I felt it was all really appropriative and it was always about culture, and I didn't want to, honestly, when I look back of it, I've always disdained this notion of taking people's culture and ideas and truth and, you know, presenting it in your own context. I've always wanted to go back home and to research at home. So I ended up in Religious Studies because I felt that was a lot closer to talking about, you know, the way I grew up in a Catholic space or whatever.

So that's essentially where I ended up doing Religious Studies, throughout my BA and I did a History and Jewish studies in my MA, you know, cause I felt like that was a lot closer to how- it's like I was looking for the Métis, I was looking for what my brothers had in Concordia, and couldn't find it, because it wasn't in Anthropology or Cultural Studies. I didn't want to learn about like Andean culture or like Korean culture, you know what I mean? Like all these different options and things. I really didn't like it cause I never felt comfortable with it. So I ended up doing with it just because it felt a lot more like it was a chill place. There was no, there was no okimaw there, you know? People didn't care. It was just like, you're studying religion, how seriously can you take yourself? There's no big shots, right? And I freaking loved it. So there are some big shots, but I didn't talk to them, I was talking to the non-big shots. So I ended up going to do a PhD at Ottawa U with Lori Beaman in religious pluralism, diversity in Canada. Cause I wanted to talk about identity. So talking about religion, identity, conservatism... I ended up doing lots of work around evangelical Catholics and youth and sort of see the intersections of like agency and those kinds of questions. I also did a Gender Studies degree in Religion. So really focusing on identity, agency, and religion. Like religion as a social category. But then in a Canadian studies course, Brenda Macdougall did a presentation on wahkotowin and it was a grad course. It was three of us in the Institute of Canadian Studies.

And I was like, you know, the, those moments of clarity? Before that I was like, what the hell am I doing? This is not where my heart wants to be. And then Brenda was just talking and I was like, she was talking about Métis. She was talking about the west. She was talking about relations and relationality.

And I was like, [gasps].

Molly: The clouds parted and the beam came down onto you.

Paul: For sure. Like, it was absolute clarity. I was like Paul on the road to Damascus, but struck by the lightning of Métis Studies.

Molly: So I really love that because I feel like in a lot of ways we had almost parallel academic journeys because I also, I wasn't a high school dropout, but I tried to go to university right out of high school, basically tanked everything because I didn't really want to be there. I ended up in Montréal and was also feeling really isolated as an Indigenous person and not able to access really any Indigenous content at McGill. And I ended up doing a lot of Religious Studies courses because sort of

similarly I was looking for a way, I think, to help me understand my childhood and being raised Catholic in that way.

Paul: Oh my God, yeah, exactly.

Molly: Yeah. And then I just stumbled across, or I think actually Adam sent it to me, Adam Gaudry's PhD dissertation. And I remember reading it and being like, I can do this? This is the kind of thing I can do?

Paul: That's it! I can do this?

Molly: And it just totally changed what I thought was possible in the university. I love that we both had that lightning bolt moment, sitting out in the east, being like what are we doing with our lives?

Paul: Exactly. What are we doing here? Like this isn't even the Métis Homeland. It was just so serendipitous that that happened, you know? That's crazy. Yeah, so I just cannot believe that this is happening in Ottawa, this Oblate university that's so bicultural and kind of Federalist and weird, and you know, like this weird culture anyways, it was an interesting space to be in, but it really wasn't Indigenous. It was very institutional and Brenda was just there with Nicole St-Onge and just doing the brigade work.

So, I'm a very charismatic person and I essentially just walked up into the office and I essentially invited myself into one of their research meetings and I was like, "you know, we should be talking about religion or whatever," I just talk. And then people are like, "oh, okay, well then go do that research, then." "Off you go!" That's how I worked to my way into this job. So I got the research job and we were doing lit reviews and stuff like that, and looking at Oblate historical records. Cause they were looking at the brigade, looking at sacramental registries and brigades. To map out women's roles as cohesive centres for brigade governance.

And that's essentially the work that we're doing now. Like that's the centre of it. But they're looking at sacramental registries as a data set to make those theoretical connections, to make those genealogical connections and say that women were extremely important to economic- whereas everyone else was like, "men are so important. The man name is important. The man job is important," you know, like Ens or whoever. And that was just like, for me, I was just like, "this is dumb too." So Brenda, essentially I remember- it's all serendipitous, Molly- I was outside of the library at the University of Ottawa and I'm like, "shit, I don't got a job anymore. Oh, I don't got no funding anymore, but I've got a job anymore." And at that moment, like "ding!" my phone rings and it was Nicole St-Onge on Facebook. She was like, "Hey, so are you looking for a job?" I'm like, "yes, I am." So I ended up being the project manager for two years. So I ended up doing that, which is essentially working with a lot of like old families.

Molly: So Nicole St-Onge like pings you on Facebook, and then you get into this position where you're a project manager. What was the project?

Paul: The DAD- so the digital archives database. Yeah. So what we were doing is we were databasing all of these sacramental registries across the buffalo hunting dioceses and places like Protestant dioceses and Catholic dioceses throughout the Prairie is really, and it was like really amazing, cause it was just me and these students, and we're looking at these long records, like Oblate records of these

themes, but then all the names came in and then you just, you could do whatever you want with that data.

But it was just being part of it. So that was my introduction into the world of Métis Studies, really. Cause like doing that work, that database was for Métis people and it was about the Métis Nation. Brenda was always like, "yep, we're about the Métis Nation here," you know, it's about the Homeland and it's about the Prairies. So for me it was like a really great sort of side to what I was doing in my PhD. You know, where life brings you, right? This was like, "thank God I'm doing this." I was so happy. So I'm in that, and I'm doing this work as I'm finishing off my degree stuff in 2016 and then in that, I was at this really amazing conference on Métis-as-tribe, this sort of like trying to understand Métis identity. And at that it was like, Adam was there, Jesse Thistle were there were like all these young, like fun, fun academic people. And then Maria Campbell and like Brenda and Nicole, Chris Andersen, like freakin' Nick Vrooman, you know, the little tiny, that little Montana nugget man, he was amazing.

I was taking notes for this, but it was like, the most life-changing event. And this event happened three days after my son was born and I'm here, like writing these notes and they're like, "aren't you a dad? Shouldn't you be at home?." And I'm like, "yes, I should." It was just so weird. It was just like this weird alien space that was so life-changing, and I talked to Adam about it too. Rob Innes was there and like frickin Michel Hogue was there. It was really amazing. And it was really changing for us, like Jesse too, because Jesse was like the first time he was sitting as a leader at a BA student with Carolyn Podruchny. Just talking about Métis identity and all these different layers, like talking about the Nehiyaw-Pwat, talking about empire, or talking about Métis kinship structures, Métis women, you know, the role of language, the role of Métis politics. It was really cool. Chris was writing the book *"Métis"* at that time. So like he would go up and finish drafts of it and then come down and hang out and stuff. And it was just incredible. So that was the Ottawa experience for me. And then from that I met Chris. So then when there was a job offer at Faculty of Native Studies, he essentially texted me on Facebook, he's like, "so did you hear about this like, job?" so I ended up applying and I got it. And it was just really cool.

Molly: I love this Facebook as a space of sort of, almost professional relationality. Cause I mean, I get that too, getting messaged about job postings or "share this with the people, you know."

Paul: I absolutely love the relationality of Facebook and you see it too with like Idle No More and stuff like how effective it was to mobilize Indigenous relations and networks. Right. So, yeah, I always got my jobs on Facebook. I love it. I have no skills. I just have- [laughing]

Molly: You just have a good Facebook friends list.

Paul: Exactly, it's like who you know, right? Yeah.

Molly: So, at the U of A you are the principal investigator of the Kinscapes Project out in Lac Ste-Anne. How did you get involved in that? How did that project start?

Paul: I guess it goes back to the last question you talked about, about my love for religion, because I grew up in a French Canadian village where we grew up very French. My dad is Métis, there are Jobins and Bremners, and in proximity to Batoche. We were and knew about Métisness and we were at the flashpoint of racism, you know, and white settler dispossession on all these different layers. So we grew up in that. And for me, it was always, I always just hated that racism ever since I can

remember, I just hated it, like hated how our village responded to the Cree and Métis, you know, intersections in the village or outside or whatever. It felt like this whole place, this environment of Batoche was fragmented.

This whole place, from this whole region that I absolutely love. I love every single inch of this place. Like, that's my Homeland. Like if I see pictures of people, like they take pictures of trees and the aspens, it's like, I recognize those aspens, you know, it's like, I recognize that bush, like that' s home. And the only place as a kid growing up that I found that there was intersections of relations was at the pilgrimage site, St-Laurent de Grandin, near where I grew up and where I had some key moments in my life that really resounded and still resound with me, where me and my mononcle Alphonse, we walked to the pilgrimage site from Bellevue, which is like 11 clicks. Like I've never walked that far with my cousins, and we're all laughing and gossiping and talking about like how, like we walked by this house and we're like, "oh, look, my cousin once has a crush on a guy and they're going to date" or whatever. And I'm like, "this is so much fun" and we see the land. And you know how Batoche it's like very hilly and Aspen trees and fields. And then we'd go across the ferry, across the river to the site and that at the site, there were Natives there and Métis and white people there, like everyone was there, camping and visiting and going to church in the grotto.

And you're surrounded by these aspen and Saskatoon berry bushes along the path of the Stations of the Cross. And like, it was nighttime when we had candles and the candles would drip on your hands and we'd sing, there'd be English services, French services, Cree services. The mornings, they would have pipe ceremonies and the drum would be played in the grotto. It was all these confluences of good relations that I seen in a really fragmented racist landscape, right? And then the kids would run everywhere. There was this place called a buffalo pit and we would just run up and down that buffalo pit, but it was like a ravine like this. And we'd be like, "Raaahhhh!" Like all the way down, it'd be like, climb back up- kids would ride their bikes over the edge. We'd have all these stories about the kid who rode his bike over the edge of the buffalo pit and like broke his neck or something. And we were like, "yeah!" So like, it was such a magical place because we all came there together. You know, we made that sacred. So for me, I've always wanted to go back to that place and to be there and understand it more. I wanted to understand it more deeply than what was always presented as like "the Catholic Church has this institutional hold on your identity and your morality and your sense of like direction," you know?

And it just never jibed with me, that kind of disciplinarity never ever jibed with me, in my experiences of- whatever limited that was- of that St-Laurent moment, you know?

Molly: Yeah. So you saw the pilgrimage at Lac Ste-Anne as sort of a reflection of what you were experiencing in your childhood. Is that what drew you to that?

Paul: Yeah, and because it was also so obvious to come to Edmonton, and Chris was also trying to figure out how to get me here to do work like that. So for me, it was like, "that's where I should be doing," but the very critical important thing that I keep asserting is that those aren't my stories. That isn't my place. Right? Like Lac Ste-Anne? That belongs to the Métis Nation here, and the families here. It's different, but the same. People have the same emotional and fervent experiences that I had back in St-Laurent they have here. It's almost exactly the same. So for me, I want to centre those stories for the Métis families here, because I also want to centre those same stories for the Métis families where I grew up, you know, of that safe place, where we can visit all together.

Molly: Yeah. Do you see yourself in the future taking what you're doing with the Kinscapes Project here and then extending that back home as well? Do you see that as your long term?

Paul: Well, yeah. And that's like, that's also my spiritual long-term goal too, is to go back home and reconnect with our families. Because of the fragmentation of our communities, there's been a lot of dispossession of our political alliances through kinship. Right. And I grew up with Métis families, like my cousins, and now those same cousins are affirming their Métisness as they're reconnecting. And we want to, and I've been talking to my cousin too, is that like to see how we can do this together and position ourselves at St-Laurent in a peoplehood way, that we would do ceremony and we would do visiting and eating and visit and being together at that place to make it sacred, to continue that sacred location or that sacred storied place.

So to build more stories and to hear stories of St-Laurent, you know, cause it's always forever in my heart and I can never, I can never forget it. I've been doing this like I'm 44 now. And I'm still thinking about this. That was the whole reason I went to university was to come back home. So I'm still on the trajectory of going back home.

Molly: So this actually kind of segues into something else I was hoping that you would talk about a little bit because I just, I love the way that you've articulated this when we've had conversations in the past. And that's that you have said that you don't want to do any solo work in the academy anymore, which I absolutely love because so much of academia is sort of fetishized as the Lone Academic. I was wondering if you could speak to that a little bit, how you came to that choice, what kinds of decisions that you're making to ensure that you are moving forward in ways that allow you to work closely with other people and navigate that in a space that really rewards the solo work over the collaborative, relational work.

Paul: Oh my God. Yeah. There's so many layers. Keep thinking back to St-Laurent, maybe I'll talk about it in a roundabout way. I'm thinking back to St-Laurent, but in kindergarten, do you know those picture books, those scrapbooks that you get and you're like Grade One, Grade Two, Grade Three, and it's like all this information on the back sheet, it's like, "who do you want to be? Boys, you know, fricking rodeo guy or, you know, I don't know, cowboy, whatever." Like if a girl was like hairdresser in like nursing, like, you know, like milkmaid or whatever, it was so gendered and weird. And I remember telling my mom I'm like, "Mom, can you write in like how to be the ferryboat driver at St-Laurent like to drive the ferry around" and Mom's like, you can see in her beautiful handwriting, she's like "ferry boat driver." and I put my little check mark next to it. I still have that at home and I still think about that as being like, that's an amazing job because you're constantly visiting with people and helping them cross a river to between two important sites of this place that we all live together in, right. And I keep thinking back on how symbolic that need was for me to constantly be in a position where I can visit and do this work that's underneath my own volition and my own competency, you know, to be a ferry boat driver, you have to be smart enough to have mechanics of it, to know the weather patterns. You don't even know that whole space, but you're constantly visiting with people as they go across, because you've got 10 minutes to get across.

And people have to chill the F out to just go across. So I still think about academia as in that same way, as a ferry boat driver who's oriented towards visiting. So for me, it's like, I don't want to be an okimaw. I keep thinking about that word and how perfect that word is. I do not want to be a big shot. And I never wanted it. I hated big shots. Because they're always so alone, like they were like, "we're supported by institutions that lift you up" and you do all this work, and I'd rather be collective and collaborative, and it also helps me keep in check in terms of my humility too. Because it's so easy, look at Joseph Boyden. He was just lifted it up into the stratosphere and then his frickin' wings

melted off because he was so out of touch. So for me, all of this collaborative research is about grounding my own sense of humility, but still have people to talk to and have ideas and to share that. Right. So that we're not possessive about knowledge or not possessive about ideas and stuff, and to always keep collectivity and community in check. The biggest problem with institutions, even Native Studies, is that it's so isolating and it's just made for that.

So for me, I'm always trying to go back home and with COVID, it's the worst feeling because I can never go back home. So I have all these sort of impediments to going back to community and it drives me nuts. So, because I'm not from here, from Edmonton, but I'm building up my own community here. I need to go back home and I want to, and I just, it seems like the university or life, or, you know what I mean? All these different things are impeding me from doing that. And it's causing me somewhat of an existential crisis. Cause we're always asked to be authentic, to sort of certify our authenticity. And how can you as an individual do that, you know, our identities are co-constituted by other relations. So we can't forget that in academia.

Molly: Yeah. I love how you frame this and I love how your priorities are really not the professional or the academic, your priorities are the relational. As you were speaking, I was also thinking about how much better the work is when you're doing it, I mean, and I'm just speaking from my perspective, working with you, is I feel like that's been some of the most generative- I remember seeing you give a talk on Métis as bad Catholics. And that was such a brainwave for me, you know, growing up in a place where I'm in Catholic school, I'm being raised Catholic, but my dad is so critical of the Catholic Church. And then seeing you talk about this and bring that nuance into it and foreground Métis self-determination in our interactions with the Catholic Church, right?

Paul: That's thanks to Indigenous Studies disciplinarity, you know what I mean? Otherwise, we would still be reading white men and analyzing Métis identity, honestly. I keep thinking about the problems with the beautiful resonance of this notion of bad Catholics, like over and over again, I talk to Métis that I meet here and whatever about being bad Catholics, and everyone gives me a sly look and they're like, yeah, they do this face. Like, yeah, baby. That's, that'd be like old and young, everyone. Like all these Métis are like super bad Catholics. And for me it's such an intriguing aspect to a resonance of a Métis identity thing. You know, like a Métis nationhood part of it. And it's about religion because the Métis are always seen in two ways, like as suckers, assimilated suckers, or like syncretous, right. Of this reified category of white institutional religion and in this other reified category of Indigenous traditionalism. Religion and spirituality. And I kept thinking how bad Catholics is this really great sort of flashpoint that represents Métis identity in a more self-determined way.

So the sovereignty of Métis nationhood and peoplehood relations, right? So like both internal and external engagement. So for me, it's always been this really great theoretical engagement that intersects with Religious Studies and Indigenous Studies or Native Studies to sort of flesh out this one last thing that we never talk about: religion and Métis. We always talk about language and everything else, but this never really gets unpacked from a Métis sovereignty perspective.

So I wrote a chapter in the *People and a Nation* book on operationalizing Indigenous Religious Studies to understand this ambivalence around Métis identity and religion. And I was so happy to do that as a stepping stone to fully explore these peoplehood relations that the Métis do throughout history. It makes a lot more sense to me to focus on Métis sovereignty and self-determination than to reinterpret these different like white ways of institutional analyses on this topic. So for now my own feelings about this is like, it's really good to flesh out these disciplinary and theoretical frameworks, like live in paper with colleagues and whatever. But now it's like, how does this land methodologically

in the community? So how do I position Métis stories of bad Catholics that are resonant with different communities?

So for me, that's my next step of then continually breaking away from these disciplinary structures of the university and research, of like being a "participant observer" and to really do good research that doesn't exploit Métis people. You know what I mean? And that's my constant preoccupation: my constant preoccupation is never steal knowledge and truth from people. Center truth and knowledge. And I want to make mention. Mandee McDonald's article on a hide tanning is probably one of the best critical Indigenous studies articles and research methods that I've ever read. If I could do like Mandee did, that would be amazing work.

Molly: Yeah, I love how you kind of brought it full circle, you know? Cause it seems like Anthropology was teaching you a specific way of doing academia that you really chafed against. And so now it's like almost through Indigenous Studies, you've come back around to being what Anthropology would consider to be a bad academic, but through Indigenous Studies.

Paul: I think so! Yeah. I'd rather be a good relation than a good anthropologist, I guess, but like, not to shit on Anthropology or anything but whatever, you know, that's my own experience of it. I celebrate Indigenous Studies disciplinarity for centering Indigenous ways of being, for centering the flourishing of Indigenous communities. You know, and peoplehood relations, as well as being extremely wonderfully critical of settler colonialism in that legacy.

Molly: Yeah. That has been one of the big themes. I've only done three of these chats. But it seems like it comes a point where everybody reaches this place where they really need to resist what the academy is pressuring them to do or how the academy is pressuring them to approach their work. So whether that be, it was considered kind of inappropriate to be working so closely with the Nation, or it's inappropriate to be prioritizing community over, you know, professionalization or whatever it is. But, that seems to be what everybody brings into the academy is this drive to foreground contributing to collective knowledge and collective wellbeing. And community participation and community engagement over what the academy wants you to do, which is to often extract information and to extract knowledge and then to repackage it for other academics or for the university.

Paul: For white academics. Yeah. But I think that's also sort of like indicative of Métis identity in the first place. And this whole amazing book The People and the Nation, it's all based on the premise of pushing back against racialized understandings of Métis identity, which even Métis, because it's so discursive, we've been sort of complicit and we're also reifying those mixed identity structures as well, instead of seeing it for kinship relations and kinscapes. Right? So Brenda's work and Chris's work. Those are the two people that I think about and use the most. They're my relations. I'd rather do relational scholarship too. Like Jennifer Adese, who's Métis from here, but works at U of T Mississauga. She was like, "I just focus on Indigenous scholars," she said it to me in a conversation just to say, like, we have to, these people are, are reflecting relationality in their scholarship.

And it made me think that the problem with possessing knowledge and exploiting knowledge, and this extractive research methodologies, they're all forms of bad relations. And I want to do scholarship that is implicitly about good relations. It's about wahkotowin, scholarly wahkotowin. How do you do that work and centre people's ideas, so that the knowledge that I'm engaging our relatives, you know, because another thing that I abhor is when people are talking about all this

knowledge that they just know, it's like all these objects of knowledge, instead of knowledge as relations, you know what I mean?

Like I love Chris's work because his ideas are like relatives to me. And so is Brenda's, like the reason why Brenda's presentation to me all those years ago, they were relatives to me and I could feel them and understand them way more than I could structuralism or like, whatever, like salvage anthropology or whatever ideas, even Canadian nationalism. Those things never made sense to me, cause they never resonated with me. And that's always been my issue, like as a kid with like learning disabilities and hyperactivity or whatever, for me, if it's about good relations, I will totally love it and I'll do it.

Molly: Yeah. And I think this actually brings us really smoothly into talking a little bit about the RCMR so I know you're an RCMR Research Fellow, how did you get involved with that and what has the RCMR done or provided to facilitate your work?

Paul: So I was the first RCMR Fellow in 2017 or something. So I was the test case. I don't know if it was a good test case, but like honestly better people showed up after me I would say, i.e. Kisha Supernault. Like doing great works, but for me, like RCMR is an important cornerstone for our Métis Studies work that we're doing at the U of A and the Faculty of Native Studies. Like we are so lucky to have this place, all those years ago when I was listening to my brothers talk about Métis Studies in U of S, I am there now, you know? That dream has been fulfilled by being there. And the RCMR is a big part of that. So if it survives- I'm happy it's surviving now- but through all these whatever, funding, and austerity, whatever this is an important site to bring Métis scholars together from everywhere.

I think there's some work to do to, to reach out to other Métis scholars in different institutions, but like to keep those relationships going and building. So for me, the RCMR fellowship that I did really helped me- flushed out these ideas I'm talking about now. And also it was the community that helped me think, it was the community that helped me think through things, right? Like talking to you, those relations helped me think through things or experience things to find more resonant ideas and understandings of these things that I'm talking about. So it's an important relation to have in the institution that we, we live in and work in, and thrive in. Right.

Molly: So I know I've kept you a little bit longer than I said I would. I do have a couple of closing questions. So I guess, to close out and, you know, I think you've spoken to this a little bit. But what would you say your favorite work and ideas are that are coming out of Métis Studies in particular right now?

Paul: Of my own work or of like-?

Molly: Just ideas that you're encountering that are coming up in Métis Studies that you like.

Paul: So *A People and a Nation* has been like a happy place. I feel really proud of this and like really excited about it. Chris's article on peoplehood and nationhood has been something I have really centered in on to understand nationhood, how it's shaped through spirituality, through religion. And kinship. Right? So all of that nationhood/peoplehood work that Chris is articulating in that book and that people are picking up on it is really fantastic. So, de-centering mixed race racialization when it comes to Métisness, focusing on kinship as an important, like political aspect of identity, right. It is informed by Kim TallBear's work on seeing how relations are co-constituted and how the Métis, we also need to see our peoplehood relations with humans and more-than-humans as well. And that

those constitute us as well, because sometimes I feel with whatever political dynamics people get siloed and separated, and we're not reminded how we need to politically help each other and remind each other of these places that we live in together.

Right. So that's when I talk about St-Laurent I think about the aspen, I think about the Saskatoon bushes. And I think about the river, like these are all my relatives really, and relatives of my nation. So that aspect of Chris's, and then Brenda's work. Like she just put out a new chapter in the book that Chris and Nathalie had produced on Daniels, she's talking about kinscapes. I'm still working through it, but all of her work on kinscapes is really exciting for me. I use it in the title of our research thing that we're doing, our project. This relational geography is really important to like overcome this fragmented way we look at the land and like people and seeing where the Métis live in that. Cause we're not First Nations people, we are a nation amongst nations. So how does that work? Right. So I find that Chris and Brenda's work in a really interesting way for me, really helped me think through my own sense of doing theory, methodology, axiology, doing that work together. Right. So, yeah.

Molly: Yeah. That's great.

Paul: Well, so me and you are doing this article, this chapter forever- it's going to fly, it's going to fly, we're going to do it. We're so into it, but we're on the same page of looking at like Métis experiences of Métis religion, and the Métis Nation and unpacking how all these things that we're talking about that I've been talking about: the androcentric and racist interpretation of Métis experiences of religion, and centering Métis women in governance and kinship to really see how Métis have operationalized religion as relations to the benefit of Métis nationhood. So looking at the Batoche battle flag, and then looking at the Section 35 experience of Chalifoux and Guy Lavallée praying out the Métis Nation to the government who doesn't want to hear shit about shit, all about the Métis, you know. So yeah, we're doing that work now together and it feels like these are really great stepping stones in the work that we're doing overall and Métis Studies.

Molly: Yeah. So my last question, I feel like you have answered it really well, but if there's anything- the last question is what keeps you excited about doing the research that you're doing and what are you working on now? And I think you've spoken to both of those things, but if you want to say anything else about that, you are welcome to. And/or if there's anything else that you wish I had asked, or that you'd like to say, now's the time.

Paul: I'm so excited to work with you and I work with Jeanine LeBlanc too on pilgrimage stuff. So we looked at pilgrimage as peoplehood from a Métis Homeland perspective and a Mi'kma'ki perspective, which is really ironic because there's all these Eastern Métis who are absolutely race-shifting into Mi'kmaq identity and we're taking up this really great stance together. I think a peoplehood stance to talk about the realities of pilgrimage as peoplehood places for the benefit of our communities. Right? So working with student colleagues is the best thing ever, I'm so excited about the work we do together on this chapter. Writing together so much fun. Like I think about it all the time and I'm just so excited about this. So that's where I'm heading like, oh yeah. Okay. So another thing, can I have time to talk about this, working with Métis and Indigenous women is the best thing ever. Oh, I'm sorry. Sorry, boys, if whoever out there.

I'm also looking, with the Métis Kinscapes project, working with Chantal Fiola from University of Winnipeg on looking at Métis peoplehood kinscapes in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and Alberta. I don't know, there's something about Métis women who are about collaboration and engaging. And I

just, I always find myself the only man in the circle of like Métis women, which I love, but it also reflects something, you know, like-

Molly: Yeah I was going to say, I think it speaks well of you.

Paul: Does it, does it speak better to how Métis women are capacity makers and, you know, the cornerstone of how Métis identity is?

Molly: I would say so. Also thinking, from my Women's Studies background, I would say, you can talk about women as capacity makers, but you can also talk about women, and especially I think racialized and Indigenous women, as people who are always at capacity. And so the fact that you are not overloading women's capacity, I think speaks to how you approach, the work that you do and what you expect of people and how you interact with people as well.

Paul: That is super important, right.

Molly: Yeah, how you hold space as well.

Paul: Yeah cause women's labour often gets dumped on. Right. It's never been really valued. But I've never operationalized that in my work or in my life, you know? So it's like, that's the constant struggle as a man to center women's collaborative work and that we do this together. We do the labour together and we share it and all of it is important. Because otherwise you just got the parish priest, who's like, all the women are doing all the work for him, but he's the okimaw you know, like that's the dynamic.

Molly: Well Paul, thank you so much for being in conversation with me this morning. We had a lot of really interesting different themes throughout this conversation. And as somebody who also had a relatively weird, wonky, sideways way of getting into school, I love your story because I think especially for younger Indigenous students or Indigenous people who are wanting to go into university, there's this kind of fear that if you don't set yourself up perfectly, then you're not going to have success in school. And there are so many people in Indigenous Studies who didn't finish high school or dropped out or took a lot of time off or failed a lot of classes, but still somehow managed to make it work. People find all sorts of different ways to make it work.

Paul: That's called the half-breed hustle there.

Molly: Yeah, totally. 100%.

Paul: I must say that my success is only contingent on relationality. Like if it doesn't fit, I fucking fail. I totally fail at it. If it doesn't fit within my paradigm or my way of doing it, I just can't do it. So that's where I failed so many times throughout the education, but then I was able to like hustle my way in good relations in finding my way through it.

I want to take a moment to thank Nathalie Kermoal for all the work and dedication she does for the RCMR. Like it would not be the Centre that it is and the way it produces important knowledge and work for the Métis Nation without her drive and dedication and engagement with that. So I really want to take a moment to recognize her work and recognize her passion in this place that is all of

ours. I want to make sure that she's recognized for being an important part of Métis Studies everywhere.

Molly: Thanks again to Dr. Paul Gareau for the great visit, and thanks to you, the listener, for tuning in to the fourth episode of Along the Trail, a podcast celebrating the work and ideas of Métis Studies researchers. If you'd like to learn more about Paul's work, you can check out The Métis Kinscapes Project, his chapter "Mary and the Metis: Religion as a Site for New Insight in Metis Studies" in *A People and a Nation*, edited by Jennifer Adese and Chris Andersen, his chapter "Striking a Path Through the Wilderness: The Negotiations of Catholic Evangelical Youth in a Secular and Diverse Canada" in *Youth, Religion, and Identity in a Globalizing Context*, of which he is a co-editor, and his many other book chapters.

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And finally, thanks always to RCMR administrator Amanda Evans for designing our logo and setting up a lot of the backend stuff that makes podcasts happen, and to Faculty of Native Studies PhD student Wyatt Shiefelbien for his great rendition of Whiskey Before Breakfast, our intro and outro music. We'll catch you next time, along the trail!