

New Directions and Revisionist Histories in Métis Studies

Monique Giroux

Volume 47, Number 2, Summer–Fall 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1058012ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aca.2018.0027>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this note

Giroux, M. (2018). New Directions and Revisionist Histories in Métis Studies. *Acadiensis*, 47(2). <https://doi.org/10.1353/aca.2018.0027>

New Directions and Revisionist Histories in Métis Studies

IN THEIR INTRODUCTION TO A *Métis Studies Bibliography* (2016), authors Lawrence Barkwell and Darren R. Préfontaine point to the significant growth of Métis/Metis studies¹ since they (along with Leah M. Dorion) published their first bibliography in the late 1990s.² Not only has the number of articles, books, blogs, and multimedia sources expanded exponentially, so too has the diversity of the field of study. Particularly important is the work of Métis scholars such as Jennifer Adese, Chris Andersen, Adam Gaudry, Brenda Macdougall, Zoe Todd, and Chelsea Vowel, among others, who are contributing their voices to an area of study that, for too long, was shaped primarily by scholars who were not part of Métis communities. These Métis scholars, along with Métis community members and non-Métis academics, have added greater depth and breadth to Métis studies in recent years, publishing in fields as diverse as political science, literature, law, language, history, art, and music.

The six books reviewed here provide a sampling of this diversity and growth: Chris Andersen's *"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*; Robert Foxcurran, Michel Bouchard, and Sébastien Malette's *Songs upon the Rivers: The Buried History of the French-Speaking Canadiens and Métis from the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Across to the Pacific*; Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall's edited collection entitled *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility and History*; Michel Hogue's *Metis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People*; Dale Gibson's *Law, Life, and Government at Red River, Volume 1: Settlement and Governance, 1812-1872*; and Gerald J. Ens and Joe Sawchuk's *From New Peoples to New Nations: Aspects of Métis History and Identity from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-first Centuries*.³

1 Throughout this essay, I switch between Métis and Metis (no accent) based on the preference of the author I am discussing. Although inconsistent, it is intended as a sign of respect for the authors who often provide well-reasoned explanations for their use/omission of the accent. Brenda Macdougall suggests, for example, that use of the accent underemphasizes Indigenous and non-French European ancestries; see Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010, 260-1). In contrast, Chris Andersen uses the accent to emphasize the "French, non-tribal influences in the creation of Métis nationhood"; see Anderson, *"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 211.

2 Lawrence Barkwell and Darren R. Préfontaine, *A Métis Studies Bibliography: Annotated Bibliography and References* (Winnipeg and Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute Press and Louis Riel Institute, 2016). Lawrence J. Barkwell, Leah M. Dorion, and Darren R. Préfontaine, *Resources for Metis Researchers* (Winnipeg and Saskatoon: Louis Riel Institute and Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1999).

3 Chris Andersen, *"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); Robert Foxcurran, Michel Bouchard, Sébastien Malette, *Songs upon the Rivers: The Buried History of the French-Speaking Canadiens and Métis from the Great*

A mix of two races or an Indigenous nation?

Sociologist and Native Studies scholar Chris Andersen's book *Métis* is the first monograph to boldly and unapologetically oppose mixed-race definitions of the Métis. In doing so, it addresses the colonial logics of blood and purity that shape mainstream understandings of Métis and other Indigenous identities. While Andersen acknowledges that the Métis emerged from relationships between Indigenous women and European men, he challenges the notion that hybridity and bio-racial and/or symbolic/cultural mixed-ness are foundational to what it means to be Métis.⁴ As he points out, "having 'mixed-ancestry' is a characteristic of all Aboriginal people" (75). Whether this mixed-ancestry is European and Indigenous, Inuit and Cree, or Cree and Blackfoot (among myriad other possible mixes), Indigenous peoples (and all peoples for that matter) are "mixed" in diverse ways; focusing on a person's blood quantum problematically ignores nation- or tribal-specific aspects of belonging.⁵ Drawing on this refutation of racialized identities, Andersen argues that understanding Métis as a hybrid of two races (that is, Indigenous and white) is an act of misrecognition. Instead, the Métis need to be understood as a people or nation, with political, social, economic, and historically based relationships and social structures that are, without qualification, Indigenous.

The misrecognition of Métis as mixed-race has negative implications for the (Red River) "Métis Nation" – a term that refers to the Indigenous nation that emerged in the central plains of North America in the late 18th century and is most often used in this way to identify a single Métis people, in contrast to the conceptualization of Métis as mixed-race individuals across the continent. A mixed-race definition implies, for example, that First Nations and Inuit are not "mixed"; from there it follows that Métis people are less Indigenous than First Nations or Inuit. It furthermore denies Métis their sovereignty as a political entity, turning Métis identity into a catchall category for anyone with some Indigenous ancestry. This includes those not claimed by an Indigenous nation. The reduction of Métis identity to mixed-ness has indeed become increasingly evident in recent years as census numbers – which Andersen critiques in

Lakes and the Mississippi across to the Pacific (Montreal: Baraka Books, 2016); Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall, eds., *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012); Michel Hogue, *Metis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2015); Dale Gibson, *Law, Life, and Government at Red River, Volume 1: Settlement and Governance, 1812-1872* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015); Gerhard J. Ens and Joe Sawchuk, *From New Peoples to New Nations: Aspects of Metis History and Identity from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-first Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

- 4 John Ralston Saul's *A Fair Country* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2009) promotes the symbolic/cultural conceptualization of what it means to be Métis. That is, his argument that Canada is a métis nation does not require establishing blood or kinship ties to a self-determining, Indigenous nation that claims its own membership. Instead, being métis within Saul's conceptualization only requires the appropriation and integration of a few Indigenous symbols (e.g., the totem pole) or cultural elements (e.g., a supposed emphasis on consensus as a key element of governance) into the dominant culture.
- 5 See Kim Tallbear, "Native American DNA," in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, 2nd ed., ed. Tania Das Gupta, Carl E. James, Chris Andersen, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, and Roger C.A. Maaka (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018), 196-202.

detail – show an unprecedented surge in the number of self-identified Métis. Numerous groups in eastern Canada are now fighting for recognition as Métis while accepting anyone who claims to have an Indigenous ancestor – that is, all mixed-blood people.⁶ Referencing this surge in self-identifying Métis, Andersen points out that the census as well as Supreme Court of Canada decisions like the Powley Case⁷ are seen by many as neutral or objective. Yet instead of just recognizing pre-existing categories, they produce classifications: the census and Supreme Court of Canada have provided a means for mixed-blood people to identify as Métis. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult in recent years for Métis to assert a single Métis Nation identity. Understood as neutral and objective, the classifications produced through the census and court decisions have created myriad new Métis identities.

Although focused on the Métis, Andersen's work reaches beyond Métis studies as it addresses how colonial thinking reduces Indigeneity to biology and undermines Indigenous claims to political sovereignty. An important book in this regard, it nonetheless suffers from challenges related to tone and audience. In particular, Andersen's writing is often dense and is aimed at a highly specialized audience. His word choices are, moreover, sometimes divisive in their bluntness, which might keep readers from being open to his message. For example, his "soup kitchen" analogy – that "Métis" is not a soup kitchen for Indigenous individuals and communities disenfranchised in various ways by the Canadian State" (24) – comes across as poorly worded in light of the poverty faced by many Indigenous people, although the broader point that he is making is important. These tendencies create a missed opportunity, since the issues he writes about need to be acknowledged and understood outside of academia if they are to have a significant impact for Métis people. Additionally, Andersen's rather uncritical use of Benedict Anderson (i.e., he only touches on the problem of a seemingly natural linking of nation and state and of nationhood with modernity) raises questions about what nationhood means from Indigenous perspectives. Might there have been ways to frame Métis peoplehood that rely less heavily on the elements of nationhood defined in European contexts? Here I am thinking in particular of the work of Métis scholar Zoe Todd, who presents a compelling argument for recognizing human-fish relations, as well as Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson's description of both human and animal nations.⁸ Despite these issues, "*Métis*" is, without a doubt, essential reading for everyone who studies the Métis, Indigeneity, and/or race and racialization as it provides a powerful critique of Métis racialization and an example of the impact of racialization on Indigenous nations.

6 This phenomenon is most recently addressed in the work of Adam Gaudry and Darryl Leroux. See, for example, their article entitled "White Settler Revisionism and Making Métis Everywhere: The Evocation of Métissage in Quebec and Nova Scotia," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 116-42.

7 In the Powley decision (2003), the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that the Métis in and around Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, had the constitutionally protected, Aboriginal right to hunt for food. It also established a legal test intended to determine the Aboriginal rights of Métis groups in other areas.

8 Zoe Todd, "From Fish Lives to Fish Law: Learning to See Indigenous Legal Orders in Canada," *Somatosphere* (1 February 2016); Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 57-61.

Coming from the fields of history, anthropology, and law, Robert Foxcurran, Michel Bouchard, and Sébastien Mallette are some of the most vocal opponents of the nation-based definition of the Métis. While not initially positioned as such, their book *Songs upon the Rivers* attempts to dismantle the so-called “exclusionist” definition of Métis identity (i.e., the single Métis Nation definition). It begins by focusing on what they consider to be the forgotten history of French speakers in North America, tracing their economic, political, and social roles in the history and settlement of the United States and Canada. Opening with a discussion of racial mixing in the east, they follow French-speakers/settlers (canadiens) down the St. Lawrence, into the Great Lakes, and through the regions now known as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. They then trace the history of French-speakers into the west-central region of North America (where the term “Métis” become common) and south down the Mississippi River and into Louisiana. In doing so, the authors attempt to delineate the emergence of une nouvelle nation canadien across this vast territory, arguing that the forgotten history of French-speakers has been used to deny the legitimacy of extant (Métis) communities on both sides of the Canadian/American border. This takes the authors into a final chapter focused on terminology, where they vehemently oppose what they call “Métis Prairie-centric nationalism” (359).

As suggested by this radical switch in emphasis, *Songs upon the Rivers* suffers from an unclear trajectory and startling lack of engagement with contemporary scholarship in cognate areas. Although it is true that, for a long time, historians diminished the contributions of French-speaking peoples in the settlement of North America, there are numerous contemporary scholars who have worked to redress this issue – many of whom are not cited in this book.⁹ But perhaps addressing a lack of scholarship on French-speaking people in North America is not the point: the larger ideological issue that the authors undertake is the dismantling of Red River-centered histories of the Métis. However, this idea is only addressed head-on in the last chapter; and even there, the authors fail to engage with what Indigenous scholars are saying about belonging and political sovereignty (i.e., that belonging and sovereignty are central to Indigeneity). Instead, the thread that runs throughout the book is the implicit belief that to be Indigenous one only needs to have a few Indigenous ancestors and possibly be part of a group that has been marginalized in the face of North American Anglo culture. They similarly fail to acknowledge the importance of female kinship networks which are so vital to Métis, focusing instead on French ancestors and a scattering of Indigenous women¹⁰; in this way, maternal kinship ties largely disappear under a heavy emphasis on French lineage.

Just as problematically, *Songs upon the Rivers* frequently and uncritically adopts colonial language; this undermines the authors’ overall message that large swaths of

9 For example, Carl Brasseaux, Dean Louder, Eric Waddell, Nicole St-Onge, and Christian Morissonneau are not cited.

10 As Jennifer Adese notes, “In contrast to popular Franco-centric and patrilineal narratives of Métisness that attempt to seat its origins in Québec or other points eastward, my Métisness – and indeed that of most of the people I know who are Métis – cannot be dislocated from our maternal relations”; see Jennifer Adese, Zoe Todd, and Shaun Stevenson, “Mediating Métis Identity: An Interview with Jennifer Adese and Zoe Todd,” *MediaTropes* VII, no. 1 (2017): 1-25.

French-speaking North America became Indigenous, reinforces Eurocentric notions of settlement, and betrays Métis inclusionists' tendency to assert their Indigenous identities at the expense of Indigenous nations.¹¹ The authors, for example, suggest "the French *Canadiens* and Créoles [whom the authors consider Métis] would be the first to explore and settle the lands that would become Canada and the United States" (20). Yet, as Emma Larocque notes, the notion of settlement denies the deep-rooted and settled presence of Indigenous peoples.¹² Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Mallette also write that the *Canadiens* opened the American west (23) and that "the *Canadiens* were . . . part of an empire that had the ambition to control much of North America" (385). These comments raise questions about the line between French-speaking Indigenous nations and French-speaking colonizers that are simply not addressed by the authors. It is certainly true that hard-and-fast lines of identity between Indigenous nations and between Indigenous and settler nations cannot be drawn; but the authors' elision between French-speakers as colonizers and French-speakers as Indigenous nations ultimately plays on the tired trope of the French as the good colonizers.

Contours and borders

Identity debates centre around the issue of boundaries, whether national, sociocultural, political, or geographic. *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History*, an anthology co-edited by historians Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall, is an expansive exploration of Metis peoplehood and belonging from all the aforementioned perspectives. The foreword, written by respected Metis elder Maria Campbell, provides a powerful overview of the cultural, political, and social aspects of Metis life, highlighting continuity of lifeways in the context of a rapidly changing world. Avoiding theoretically dense language, Campbell provides an example of Metis peoplehood in practice, making the concept accessible to a non-specialist, non-academic audience. The introduction that follows addresses the main questions posed by the authors. What binds Metis people and communities together? What separates them from others? And what does being Metis mean in specific times and places? That is, what are the contours of the new people known as the Metis? The authors argue that Metis peoplehood centered and centres on geographic familiarity with an expansive area and is rooted in physical mobility and an entrepreneurial spirit based in social and cultural exchange with a kin network. The foreword and introduction thus contribute a cohesive way of thinking about the Metis.

The chapters that follow explore a wide range of topics and contexts. The first two chapters after the foreword and introduction – one penned by Jacqueline Peterson and the other co-written by Nicole St-Onge and Carolyn Podruchny – focus on Métis ethnogenesis. The topic of national emergence is addressed in Gerhard Ens's chapter on the Battle of Seven Oaks, while Peter Bakker examines the

11 This opposition to Indigenous nations is documented in Gaudry and Leroux, "White Settler Revisionism and Making Métis Everywhere," 132.

12 See Emma Larocque, *When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse 1850-1990* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press), 7.

sociocultural context that allowed the Michif language to emerge. Mobility and geography/space are at the heart of Philip Wolfart's chapter on aspatiality and Étienne Rivard's chapter on orality and territory. Victor Lytwyn, Michel Hogue, and a team of co-authors led by Mike Evans provide three chapters that focus on Metis in Fort Frances, Montana, and the central interior of British Columbia respectively. A provocative contrast to these chapters is Daniel Blumlo's chapter on mixed-blood – not Metis – children of Russian fathers and Aleut, Alutiq, and Tlingit mothers. Two chapters bring attention to the role of Metis women, namely Lucy Murphy's chapter on Metis in Wisconsin and Dianne Payment's chapter on Metis in the Northwest Territories. The book closes with a chapter by Chris Andersen analyzing the implications of recent court cases related to the Metis and a chapter by Brenda Macdougall exploring historiographic questions. Together, these chapters provide an excellent overview of contemporary Metis studies, lending clarity and specificity to the concept of peoplehood through place- and issue-based examples. Despite being at times repetitive (largely due to the fact that each chapter can be read on its own), this anthology provides a multiplicity of voices and topics that is a welcome addition to the literature.

While *Contours of a People* explores what it means to be Metis in various places and contexts, historian Michel Hogue's *Metis and the Medicine Line* examines how Metis living in the American/Canadian borderlands navigated an externally imposed dividing line. Hogue begins by situating Metis as a borderland people who emerged in what is now Manitoba and North Dakota – a Plains Indigenous nation. He then considers how an increasingly militarized border, along with legal definitions of nationality and race, complicated the borderland lifestyles of the Metis in the 1870s and beyond. Although the focus is on physical migrations, Hogue also addresses ways in which Metis – by choice and necessity – crossed boundaries of citizenship, (racial) identity, and legal status. As Hogue demonstrates, Metis understood who they were as a people but deftly navigated social and political categories created by outsiders to their benefit; at the same time, the divergent economies, laws, and social systems imposed north and south of the border shaped Metis communities in different ways. Hogue thus brings attention to the survival strategies of an Indigenous people confronted with two colonial administrations intent on dispossessing them of their lands and shows that Metis and other Indigenous peoples continued to assert their pre-existing territorial rights and sovereignties in the face of colonial invasion.

Metis and the Medicine Line is one of two books reviewed here (along with Chris Andersen's "*Métis*") that will undoubtedly make a lasting impact. Within Metis studies it presents an exhaustive amount of research, much of it coming from new and underused archival materials (the author having made use of 15 archives, many south of the border). It reminds readers of the need to remedy a body of scholarship that is most often framed from either a Canadian or an American perspective—that is, to transcend the 49th parallel. Furthermore, it presents the settler shaping of Metis identity without losing sight of Metis agency and acknowledges but does not overstate Metis distinctiveness from First Nations. For readers interested in history and Indigenous studies more generally, Hogue presents a model for addressing both broad issues affecting Metis communities while humanizing the people about whom he speaks – something particularly evident in the way that he weaves the story of

Antoine Ouellette and Angelique Bottineau's family throughout, creating an engaging and intimate narrative line. *Metis and the Medicine Line* is an important read for anyone interested in borderlands, in Canadian and/or American nationalisms as a tool to subvert Indigenous sovereignty, and in how race shaped 19th-century government policy.

(Re)Centering Red River

The final two books discussed here bring readers back to Red River as the centre of Métis emergence and life. Legal scholar Dale Gibson wrote his two-volume set *Law, Life, and Government at Red River* as a way to publish and provide context for the General Quarterly Court of Assiniboia records. Active between 1844 and 1872, the General Quarterly Court of Assiniboia was the first British judicial system established west of Toronto. These records therefore provide valuable insight into processes through which British and Canadian colonial officials claimed jurisdiction over Indigenous lands in what is now Manitoba. The first volume, subtitled *Settlement and Governance, 1812-1872*, is a "retelling of Red River history from a legal and governmental perspective" (xv), and thus gives readers insight into the context for the cases. The second volume, subtitled *General Quarterly Court of Assiniboia, Annotated Records, 1844-1872*, provides the actual records of 600 cases, along with Gibson's detailed annotations. Prior to the publication of these volumes, the complete records were only available in four, leather-bound books at the Archives of Manitoba.¹³

The first volume, the focus of this review, provides an overview of European trade in Assiniboia (what is now southern Manitoba) between 1670 and 1821 (the period addressed in the first chapter) and a much more comprehensive account of the legal systems established by the colonial government from 1822 to 1872 (with individual chapters addressing periods of no longer than 12 years). As such, it offers a window into how settler governments and the General Quarterly Court shaped the lives of people living in Red River. It is a welcome and important addition to scholarship for this reason. Despite its value, though, it could have used the critical eye of an Indigenous studies scholar to ensure the use of neutral language. Prejudicial phrases such as "rude residences" and "wilderness community" (xiv) and a reference to Rupert's Land prior to the 1600s being home to "none but Aboriginal peoples and profusely abundant wildlife" (3) are particularly striking for the way in which they reinforce notions of European development and progress. When Gibson then turns to the discussion of newcomers, Indigenous peoples are largely forgotten. It is true that the book provides an overview of a settler-imposed system (and the author is certainly sympathetic towards the Métis post-1870); yet it would have been helpful – not to mention more accurate – to provide frequent reminders of Indigenous presence, Indigenous sovereignty, and the pre-existing laws of Indigenous nations on which settlers imposed their own legal systems.

This critique is particularly applicable given the detailed accounts of Métis presence and agency in Red River available in the work of Métis-focused scholars.

13 Council of Assiniboia Fonds, District of Assiniboia General Quarterly Court, location P7538/1, P7538/2, P7538/3, P7538/5, Archives of Manitoba.

This includes the research of veteran historian Gerhard J. Ens, whose latest publication – a co-authored book with anthropologist Joe Sawchuk – synthesizes three centuries of Métis history and life. In *From New Peoples to New Nations*, Ens and Sawchuk explore Métis ethnogenesis and nationhood, government policy, the economic marginalization of Métis during the 20th century, and post-1960s Métis identity. Although Red River figures centrally in this narrative, the authors also consider Métis in the US/Canadian borderlands, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the Northwest Territories. Economics and politics are placed at the centre of Métis identity throughout, with the authors arguing that the Métis are a product of context and circumstance. They suggest that “outsider views conditioned government policy towards the Métis and the creation of Métis status and categories [which in turn] conditioned the ways in which the Métis viewed themselves in relation to other groups” (5). For this reason, they argue that Métis can only be studied “in contrast to and interaction with other groups” (5).

As the first general history of the Métis since the 1950s, the largely linear narrative traced in *From New Peoples to New Nations* provides an important, comprehensive overview of the Métis – one that contrasts with the piece-by-piece nature of anthologies – making it a significant addition to the literature. There are, nonetheless, three issues that require critical examination. First, the voices of Métis themselves are largely absent from the narrative (although less so in later chapters). Second, even though the book considers the concept of ethnogenesis, it does not take a clear stance on the issue of whether Métis are a single nation or many peoples of mixed ancestry, occasionally using the term “Métis” in contradictory ways.¹⁴ This might be an attempt to be neutral, but as a result the authors do not fully acknowledge the implications of the debate as laid out in the work of Andersen and Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Malette. Finally, the idea that Métis can only be understood “in contrast to and interaction with other groups” is problematic in that it undermines Métis agency and potentially reinforces colonial ways of understanding; while it is vital to address how settler government policies have shaped and continue to shape Métis identity/identities (as Ens and Sawchuk do in this book), scholars also need to move outside of settler-created frameworks – and even at times write without reference to settler peoples or policies – in order to recognize Métis on their own terms (as a nation that exists independent from the settler state)

Final thoughts

These six books demonstrate the continued growth of Métis/Metis studies across a variety of disciplines. Most exciting are the strong voices of Métis scholars – in this case Chris Andersen and Brenda Macdougall – who are speaking with and for their communities. With research aimed at understanding what constitutes the boundaries

14 For example, a section of their chapter “Economic Ethnogenesis” is subtitled “The Great Lakes Métis” (45). The authors indicate that these Great Lakes Métis constructed a separate identity, but then indicate that they “did not have an overt political consciousness of themselves as a ‘new people’ or behave in collective action, as would the Plains Métis further west” (47). Interestingly, their footnote regarding “proto-Métis” populations cites Jacqueline Peterson’s work from 1985 and 1978, but not her more recent article in *Contours of a People* (first published in 2012).

of Métis identity, their work is particularly important as a growing number of people – including authors Foxcurran, Bouchard, and Mallette – appropriate racialized notions of Métis identity. And the books by Michel Hogue, Gerhard Ens and Joe Sawchuk, and Dale Gibson together provide a thorough and compelling look at Métis life in the northwest, from the earliest years of European settlement to the end of the twentieth century. The robust debates around nationhood, belonging, borders, boundaries, and colonial policies represented in these books have, furthermore, the potential to impact areas of scholarship outside of Métis studies, including research on ethnicity, race, nationhood, blood quantum, recognition/misrecognition, tradition and continuity, borderlands, and Indigenous sovereignties.

Without wishing to downplay the important contributions of these authors, two overarching critiques noted above are worth re-emphasizing in closing. First, in some cases these books do not fully engage with the critical work of Indigenous scholars – in particular, those who are writing from distinctly Indigenous perspectives. Increased engagement with the growing body of scholarship penned by Indigenous theorists and thinkers would mark a vital shift towards a future where Indigenous frameworks and epistemologies are foundational to Métis studies. Second, these books tend towards academic esotericism: none are accessible reading (with the exception of Maria Campbell's aforementioned foreword). Given the importance of the issues addressed, these books thus point to the need for more public-facing scholarship on Métis topics (a trend already started by Chelsea Vowel, Adam Gaudry, and Darryl Leroux). In moving towards more accessible scholarship, the work of these authors could make an even more significant impact on Canadians (and Americans) who wish to better understand their past and the path forward.

MONIQUE GIROUX