Book Proposal

“New Directions in Métis Peoplehood”

Edited by Chris Andersen, Adam Gaudry, Jennifer Adese and Brenda Macdougall

1.0 General Description

The chapters in this volume explore the intricacies of the Métis people and our communities, in support of our historical and contemporary existence. These multidisciplinary contributions explore the current complexity of Métis identity in the context of on-going North American settler colonialism, while at the same time affirming the continuity of a collective Métis existence. The volume’s specific focus is on issues relating to Métis nationhood, with specific emphasis on the claims of others (what we see as logically illegitimate) to Métis-ness while lacking contemporary and historic connection to Métis collectives. These works explore the differing experiences of Métis communities, past and present, identifying the common threads that connect Métis people through time and space, and respecting the past and present limits that Métis have placed on their communities. The contributors have been selected to ensure a broad disciplinary representation and to ensure that these issues can be explored using a variety of disciplinary methodologies. By examining these many elements of Métis nationhood, this volume will move scholars towards a more sophisticated and respectful understanding of Métis people and our corporate existence as an Indigenous people who have long understood ourselves as such.

2.0 State of the Field

We envision this project as the culmination of the recent growth of the field of Métis Studies. In the context of demonstrating the scope, purpose and contribution of the proposed volume, we will detail some of the more important changes in the field of Métis studies as it has unfolded over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We will also explain how our proposed volume fits into and extends the literature and in that context, how we envision its specific contribution. We wish to make the specific note here, which we will expand below, that Métis studies has been afflicted by the nagging presence of racialization throughout its genealogy. That is to say, the scholarship, whether in single author monographs or in edited collections, has largely taken for granted the link between Métis identity and mixed ancestry origins, rather than a people-based analysis that scholars in this volume have adopted.

The field of Métis studies evolved out of earlier scholarship on Métis issues largely undertaken by historians, and later ethnohistorians, rooted in the racialization of Métis in earlier scholarly efforts. This scholarship explored issues relating to what ‘Métis’ means and who the Métis people are but this generally took place within the context of relationships with the sub-arctic fur trade and the “opening up” of the Canadian west through the so-called Riel Rebellion in
1869-70 and the North-West Resistance in 1885 (in which the Métis people engaged in various armed conflicts with the Canadian state over its presumptions of sovereignty claims to territory that the Métis saw as their own, shared with other Indigenous relatives). Throughout much of the twentieth century, Métis issues were investigated utilizing conventional historiographical methodologies, which focused in particular on the role of the Métis leader Louis Riel, who was hanged by the Canadian state in 1885 for his role as leader of the Northwest Resistance. Perhaps the largest treatment of the Métis was that of French historian Marcel Giraud, who’s monumental two-volume, 2,000 plus page The Métis of Western Canada stood as the historiographical standard on the origins, flourishing and eventual (political) demise of the Métis.

During the field’s initial development, very little scholarship on Métis issues was synergistic, but instead consisted of fairly isolated examinations that have since come to be regarded as classics (see Morton, Stanley, etc.). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, four PhD theses were completed that fundamentally altered the methodologies and conclusions through which Métis studies had until then been examined. Sylvia Van Kirk, Jennifer Brown, Jacqueline Peterson and John Foster each explored the origins and rise of Métis communities in the Upper Great Lakes and on the northern plains, their relationship to the fur trade, and the gender relations therein. These advancements in the study of the Métis people came together in 1985 in the first edited collection on Métis Studies, co-edited by Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown and titled The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America (University of Manitoba Press). This volume was groundbreaking in that it brought together for the first time many the top scholars investigating Métis issues. It documented, in great detail and with lasting sophistication, a number of issues pertaining to origins, the internal complexity of the Red River locale, language, material culture, diaspora, and other issues that continue to shape the way that scholars talk about Métis today.

Despite various debates regarding Canadian obligations to the Métis, (culminating in a classic debate between Tom Flanagan and Doug Sprague), and the continued analyses of Métis economic dynamics (Tough, Ens), the 1990s’ most in-depth examination of Métis issues is likely the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). Among its various emphases’, RCAP formalized and officially sanctioned the notion of “other Métis”, meaning those communities who have recently started self-identify as “Métis,” based on the mixed ancestry of their ancestors. As we will note below, the deep racialization of the logics that undergird these self-identifications have continued to play themselves out in more recent scholarship.

In recent years, a number of anthologies have been published pertaining to Métis issues, geographies and identities. In 2007, Ute Lischke and David T. McNab co-edited The Long Journey of a Forgotten People: Métis Identities and Family Histories, which made use of the common trope coined by Métis political leader Harry Daniels in the 1970s about the Métis being a “forgotten people.” The book includes scholarship on so-called eastern Canadian Métis communities, as well as locating early Métis origins in British military personnel and their mixed-blood descendants; legal dynamics in the production of Métis identity; and one especially poignant
autobiographical account of Métis identity. What is perhaps most interesting is the volume’s use of a racialized notion of the Métis, based on a “Métis-as-mixed” discourse that both diminishes the historical presence of the Métis people of the northern plains. It engages in fairly direct historical revisionism through which historical individuals, communities and activities are rendered Métis by virtue of their supposed “mixedness” rather than connection to a historically self-ascribing Métis community.

In 2012, Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall co-edited Contours of a people: Metis family, mobility, and history (University of Oklahoma Press). This comprehensive volume, the heir apparent to Peterson and Brown’s 1985 The New Peoples, is a comprehensive account of historical Métis ontologies, particularly as they related to their fundamental mobility, and the manner in which this historical mobility fails to square with how the Canadian state then (and now) understands appropriate (and legal) land use and occupancy. The volume is geographically expansive in scope from the Great Lakes to British Columbia to the upper regions of the United States. This largely historical volume must be understood for the sophistication of its theorizing, the creativity and expansiveness of its empirical evidence, and the rigour of its methodologies. However, while Contours represents a great leap forward in terms of how we theorize historical Métis community and nation, many of its chapters cannot seem to escape the clutches of racialization and an incorporation of broad range of mixed communities who did not understand themselves “as Métis” until quite recently, which clouds the analyses of several otherwise fine investigations.

Finally, in 2013 Christopher Adams, Gregg Dahl and Ian Peach co-edited Métis in Canada: History, Identity, Law and Politics (University of Alberta Press). This edited collection brought together leading scholars in a number of related fields of research, including history, anthropology, political science, sociology and Aboriginal rights law to explore in a multidisciplinary fashion the various elements through which the idea of Métis identity has been constructed in the academy and the policy field. The editors make the point that recent trends in legal jurisprudence (particularly the celebrated 2003 Supreme Court of Canada Powley decision) have reconfigured how we think about Métis identity in Canada. With several exceptions, however, the edited collection continues to rely on an explicit “Métis-as-mixed” discourse, even though it undertakes a more sophisticated analysis of Métis nation’s own use of racialized discourses for their own purposes.

Most recently, the field of Métis studies has undergone an explicit bifurcation in which, on the one hand, an increasing number of individuals, organizations and communities in eastern Canada (particularly in Quebec and the Maritimes) are beginning to make posthumous claims to Métis identity. Several scholars affiliated with these movements have begun to publish scholarship in support of these claims that relies heavily on racialized discourses; on the other and partly in reaction, Métis scholars have begun to write according to a more explicitly nationalistic position. While this bifurcation has so far mostly taken place in the context of online media (Facebook and Twitter debates, as well as various blogs, etc.), it is beginning to spill over into academic scholarship. It is within this latest context that we see this volume
making its most lasting contribution, as a timely intervention during a developing historically important debate.

3.0 Scope, Purpose, Contribution

In the spirit of previous edited volumes, we see the scope of this volume as geographically, theoretically, methodologically and empirically expansive. The editors will write a lengthy but concise introduction that will set out a trajectory of what we mean by “Métis” and who we think the Métis are, historically and today. This will include a discussion of the genesis of the Métis people on the northern plains, the rise of their economic and political power, the growth of Red River as a metropolis, and their eventual political marginalization following their defeat in the Northwest Resistance if 1885. In contrast to the previous abovementioned edited collections, the book is presented in support of the idea of a single Métis people, a position that has support in Canadian constitutional law as well as international law as it applies to Indigenous peoples.

In short, this volume fits squarely into a critique of the recently (and heavily) racialized tendencies to self-identify as Métis in geographical regions with no historical Métis presence. Toward that end, the ten articles are written in support of the Métis nation – its origins, its contours, and its limits – with an eye for tracing its complexities, its contradictions and the realities of the colonial contexts is must necessarily work within the boundaries of. As such, the volume’s contribution is precisely a reinvigoration of a lens of peoplehood through to understand to understand the manner in which Métis scholarship has been racialized, the drawbacks to such an approach, and the varied contexts within which nationhood-based understandings of Métis identity demonstrate great potential for future scholarship.

3.1 Titles and Abstracts

Foreword – Maria Campbell

Introduction

The introduction will set out the stakes for this book and more specifically the importance of a focus on peoplehood for thinking not just about the Métis, but Indigeneity more generally. In recent years, volumes on ‘Métis identity’ have tended to place along side one another racialized and peoplehood notions of Métis: this book makes peoplehood its explicit focus, with an eye for demonstrating the complexity of Métis peoplehood, historically and today. It takes an explicitly multidisciplinary approach, including scholars from many social sciences and humanities disciplines.
Métis History

Heather Devine (University of Calgary): “Old Trails and New Directions (Revisited): Métis History in an Uncertain World”

This chapter examines the traditional uses of history in ethnocultural communities in general, and Indigenous communities in particular. It argues that the community-driven focus of Native Studies is not conducive to carrying out historical research in a traditional “Western” manner that favours academic freedom and personal autonomy over community priorities and concerns. In these contexts, this chapter will specifically discuss issues relating to current and proposed research priorities for Métis history in five major contexts: 1) ongoing community based research; 2) archival and community-based research in ‘grey literature’; 3) theoretical discussions into the historical ethics involving Indigenous individuals and relatives; 4) research on specific historical topics for the purposes of litigation; and 5) revisionist research into new and existing historical themes.

Chris Andersen (University of Alberta): “The Ghosts of Relatives past: Archives, databases and ‘Métis’ identity making in the age of Internet”

A major pathway through which people have come to self-identify as Métis in particular has been through the discovery of more or less distant Indigenous ancestors by way of a growing cadre of digital resources, including official archives, databases, chatrooms and webpages (such as Facebook). Indeed, for the first time, people possess the ability to self-identify as Métis in a way that requires no family or community connection. Compounding the complexity of these new modalities of self-identification are the fact that such claims are ironically buoyed by the recent work of Métis scholars who have produced online databases that, although in the interests of the Métis people, are also used to base less legitimate claims to Métis identity as well. This chapter explores the promises and pitfalls that a reliance on “necro-communities” (Gaudry, forthcoming) contained in databases has for self-identification as Métis, and offers strategies that encourage community contextualization for otherwise largely decontextualized identity resources.

Sherry Farrell Racette (University of Manitoba): “Taken by Riel and Party By Force”: Women, Families and Collective Action during the Red River Resistance

As much as Red River documents reveal about the collective actions of men in the Red River Resistance of 1869-70, they are relatively silent on the roles of women in resistance. Deeper analysis reconstructs female-centred “family nests” that mobilized collective action, often only recorded as the actions of men. The Michif terms neetwawis (my male relative) and neeshpow (my brother-in-law) places women at the centre of matrifocal networks connecting husbands,
fathers, sons, nephews, uncles and cousins. Genealogical records reveal that relationships between husbands and wives, mothers and daughters and the powerful connections between sisters, particularly older women, the network of grandmothers that formed the backbone of the two Métis resistance at Red River.

Cheryl Troupe (University of Saskatchewan): “Michifs, Halfbreeds and Old People: Reflections on Community Engagement with Qu’Appelle Valley Metis”

Primarily descended from nineteenth century buffalo hunters, and later, twentieth century road allowance communities, Metis in the Qu’Appelle Valley have used a variety of terms to describe themselves, their families and communities. This paper will examine the ways in which these communities have chosen to employ terms such as Michifs, Halfbreed, Metis and Old People to describe themselves in both a historical and contemporary context. It will also examine how work over the past decade working with these communities in the areas of historical and community-based research, curriculum development, community engagement, advocacy and public health policy and program planning has been guided by, and challenged by these descriptors.

Métis Politics

Daniel Voth (University of Calgary): “A Less Threatening Mixture: Métis People within Canadian Political Science”

In the 1950s a body of thought emerged that explored to what degree Canada, Quebec and the United States were fragments of their European colonial antecedents. Indigenous peoples were cast in this thought as making very little contribution to Canadian political culture due to the lack of racial and cultural mixing. More recently John Ralston Saul argued in 2008 that not only did Indigenous peoples mix widely with settler peoples, but that this mixing gave rise to the “Métis” as the building blocks of the Canadian state and its political culture. In less obvious ways key sections of foundational work by James Tully and Alan Cairns have adopted these logics in their understanding of Métis people. Taken together, the effect of this analysis frames the Métis as less threatening to the Canadian settler political order, and in doing so, politically disempowers Métis people. The chapter carefully traces these effects, and then concludes by offering emerging alternatives to conceptualizing Métis politics.

Robert L.A. Hancock (University of Victoria): “The Potential of Peoplehood: Reconfiguring Metis Political Possibilities”
This chapter seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the study of Metis politics and political organizations by outlining the possibilities that adopting a peoplehood perspective. Derived from the work of Cherokee scholar Robert K. Thomas and developed by others, a peoplehood framework situates contemporary debates at the community level and beyond. Offered in contradistinction to a more typical approach based on Western models of nationalism, I argue that a shift in emphasis to the peoplehood model provides an Indigenous model of community and collective understanding better suited to the aspirations of Metis because it escapes the traps of state recognition in favour of collective self-identification in Indigenous contexts. To develop this analysis, this paper employs wahkohtowin (“being a good relative”) and niwahkomakanak (“[all] my relations”) as foundational concepts for a Metis political identity predicated on the peoplehood model, reflecting the profoundly relational character of this identity and its roots in the kinship networks of the northern plains.

Shalene Jobin (University of Alberta) and Kirsten Lundquist (University of Alberta): “Métis youth self-determination within the context of community governance and Métis Studies”

Situated in the intersections between Indigenous governance theory, Indigenous feminisms, and alternative Indigenous youth pedagogies, this chapter examines how Métis youth self-determination relates to Métis Studies and Métis community governance. Using the experience of facilitating Métis youth workshops that connects young Métis to Indigenous governance models, history, government, and policy formation, several themes emerge as areas of opportunity for Métis youth led self-determination: integrating Métis traditional cultural activities into educational opportunities, peer-based knowledge sharing, social and gender justice training, spiritual learning and relationship building with Elders.

Métis Art and Culture

June Scudeler (University of British Columbia): “He’s Leather and I’m Naughahyde”: Métis Literary Studies

Indigenous literary nationalism, a nation-centred reading practice, prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing as a specific act of sovereignty. Cree-Métis scholar Deanna Reder stresses the importance of “craft [ing] new ways to access texts that interpret the influence of literary traditions specific to each nation or develop evaluative techniques and vocabulary.” Instead of focusing on hybridity, which is how Métis literature has traditionally been situated, this chapter uses Métis ways of knowing to consider how writers and literary theorists conceptualize Métis history and identity. Beginning with Louis Riel’s poetry and ending with Gregory Scofield’s re-interpretation of Riel’s voice in Louis: The Heretic Poems (2011), this chapter will reposition Métis writers and scholars as creators of knowledge rather than objects of study and in doing so, reveal and celebrate the longstanding community of Métis literary expertise.
Jennifer Adese (Carleton University) “Reading Away From Race: Reading Wahkohtowin in Métis Children’s Literature”

Children’s literature is a site where many of the complex components of Métis peoplehood coalesce. In light of this, this chapter focuses on a critical examination of two popular children’s books – Flour Sack Flora (2001) and Flour Sack Friends (2003) – authored by Métis children’s book author Deborah Delaronde. Scholarship on these books, like much Métis literary criticism, reads the text through the lens of hybridity, meaning that its authors are preoccupied with understanding Métis people racially, and in tracing out representative fragments of whiteness and Indianness. To respond to this, the chapter offers a close and “peopled” reading of Delaronde’s books, informed by understandings of the Métis concept of wahkohtowin. In de-emphasizing hybridity and focusing on the significance of Métis land-based knowledge, Métis kinship relationships, and the use of the Michif language, such a reading approach challenges reductive lenses of literary criticism. The chapter ultimately argues that “reading wahkohtowin” makes for an important move away from “reading race.” It calls for more accountable readings of Métis children’s literature that are anti-racist and anti-colonial, and principally concerned with understanding and interpreting Métis children’s literature in the context of Métis peoplehood.

Métis Futures

Adam Gaudry (University of Alberta) - “Building the field of Métis studies: Towards transformative Métis scholarship”

In Indigenous studies, Métis studies takes on a kind of double-duty, examining both Métis culture and the unique legal-political status of Métis people in Canada which is distinct from the “common curriculum” on First Nations issues. Métis studies scholarship, then, must develop its own people-specific history that is legally and politically distinct from most of the other Indigenous nations. This paper identifies three goals for the field of Métis studies which will allow us to further develop transformative Métis studies scholarship, first, a successful field of Métis studies must increase the centrality of Métis communities in the field of Métis studies. Second, Métis studies should support Métis peoplehood, defending the authority of the Métis Nation, as a self-determining Indigenous people, to define its own membership. Third, Métis studies scholars should increase the capacities of their academic units to recruit, train, and graduate Métis studies scholars as Métis studies specialists.

Conclusion

The editors will conclude the volume with insight on how these new developments contribute to a broader understanding of Métis peoplehood in scholarly activity. It suggests that this
approach to peoplehood opens up new lines of intellectual inquiry that will not only produce further insight into Métis issues, but do so in a way that respects Métis communities and the Métis Nation as collectives capable of producing their own meaning and able to tell the most authoritative stories about their history, culture, and identity. It will end with some suggestions for future research that uses a peoplehood lens to examine Métis issues.

4.0 Audience and Competing Titles

The interdisciplinary nature of the text provides readers with varying lenses with which to view Métis peoplehood. This volume will be of use to any discipline interested in the experiences of Métis identity, Indigenous Studies, History, Political Science, Historical Sociology, as well as various sub-fields of study interested in nationalism.

Additionally, Indigenous studies is becoming increasingly interested in Métis issues and this volume is perfectly situated to capture that growing interest. As such, Indigenous studies students, as well as students who study Aboriginal issues more generally, represent a major audience for this book. The Métis are, for various reasons, the fastest growing Aboriginal population in Canada, suggesting that no student should graduate with a degree in Indigenous studies without exploring issues relating to Métis issues and identity.

Finally, policy makers interested in Métis issues in Canada and internationally also represent an important audience for this book. In this context, it is important to note that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (formerly Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) has recently drawn Métis issues under its ambit and contributed significant resources to exploring various facets of Métis identity, community, history, and geographical regions. This has manifested itself in increasing provincial attention in most ministries (health, statistics, criminal justice, land and resources, etc.), but also increased funding for research various government agencies undertakes on its own accord.

Competing titles:


5.0 Editing Process to Ensure Coherence and Integration

The proposed volume emerged in part from presentations at a number of workshops held at two subsequent Métis Workshops in advance of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association annual meetings. We have selected papers that highlight the complexities of Métis peoplehood and we have recruited several additional papers in order to add some additional perspectives on these issues.

The coherence and value of the book for a variety of audiences will be enhanced by an extended introduction that seeks to illuminate the importance and the logical coherence of understanding the Métis people in the context of peoplehood. The introduction will also help to situate the perspectives of the contributors and indicate how the papers are linked to the overall theme. This chapter will be made available to all authors with a request for their feedback and so that they can address relevant themes in their writing. A concluding chapter will identify topics of further research in this area.

We are currently providing authors with feedback and suggestions on their papers in order to sharpen the focus on Métis peoplehood and to encourage them to refer to each other’s papers. We will provide similar feedback on the newly recruited papers. This is particularly important in a volume like this which draws on different disciplinary traditions. Draft workshop papers will be made available on a website to all of the volume participants. When we have all of the completed second drafts, we will post these drafts on the website and make a final request to authors to refer to each other’s work.

6.0 Length and Schedule for Completion

Length
Introductory chapter 7,000 words
10 chapters @8,000 words each 80,000 words
Conclusion 5,000 words
Total 92,000 words

Schedule for completion
End of July/2016: Editors send proposal to press
End of August: Initial chapter drafts sent to editors
End of September: Editors post authors’ chapters for integration
End of November: Authors return revised chapters to editors
End of Jan/2017: Editors write introduction; introduction is sent to authors for their information.
End of February: Editors ensure comparability in formatting and referencing
End of April: Completed volume sent to the press.