

Culture



Jacqueline PETERSON, Jennifer S. H. BROWN (eds.), *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Metis in North America*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1985. 266 pages, \$25.00 (cloth) / F. Laurie BARON, James B. WALDRAM (eds.), *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, Regina : Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986. 306 pages, Can. \$15.00 (paper) / Dolores T. POELZER, Irene A. POELZER. *In Our Own Words: Northern Saskatchewan Metis Women Speak Out*. Saskatoon : Lindenblatt and Hamonic Publishing Inc., 1986, 161 pages, \$12.95 (paper)

Joe Sawchuk

Volume 7, Number 1, 1987

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078784ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078784ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Sawchuk, J. (1987). Review of [Jacqueline PETERSON, Jennifer S. H. BROWN (eds.), *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Metis in North America*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1985. 266 pages, \$25.00 (cloth) / F. Laurie BARON, James B. WALDRAM (eds.), *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, Regina : Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986. 306 pages, Can. \$15.00 (paper) / Dolores T. POELZER, Irene A. POELZER. *In Our Own Words: Northern Saskatchewan Metis Women Speak Out*. Saskatoon : Lindenblatt and Hamonic Publishing Inc., 1986, 161 pages, \$12.95 (paper)]. *Culture*, 7(1), 78–80.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1078784ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1987

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

cette « apparente tendance à la panmixie des dernières décennies » est toutefois plus intéressante parce qu'il en appelle à la réorganisation de l'économie matrimoniale selon des critères non encore définis, plutôt qu'à la seule motivation personnelle des mariages.

Le cheminement méthodologique est clair, comme la compilation des résultats, distributions statistiques pertinentes et précises. On aurait aimé une meilleure intégration des tableaux au texte. Enfin ce chapitre présente un intérêt par les diverses comparaisons proposées par l'auteur entre Châteauponsac et d'autres régions françaises.

La lecture de *Mariage en Limousin* a, à notre avis, le principal mérite de rendre concrets les liens entre un phénomène qui caractérise une société dans son ensemble—pensons au changement de la structure de l'emploi maintes fois invoqué—et un processus comme le choix du conjoint qui revêt une dimension individuelle certaine. L'utilisation judicieuse de méthodes statistiques, servant ici à démontrer ces liens, contribue donc parallèlement à asseoir la pertinence du recours à cet outil dans la recherche en sciences sociales.

Si la qualité d'un ouvrage scientifique est de bien répondre à une question, c'en est une autre que de susciter des critiques ou des interrogations qui pourraient conduire à une meilleure connaissance du sujet traité. À ce titre *Mariage en Limousin*, nous a également intéressée.

Du fait que le concept de cercle endogame occupe une place centrale, il est décevant de n'en trouver aucune définition. Il aurait été intéressant de soulever la question de l'importance et du rôle des individus dont la sortie des cercles de mariage coïncide avec l'émigration, et ce, en dépit des problèmes de sources qui s'y rattachent. Par ailleurs, il aurait été utile de retrouver dans le texte, ou en annexe, des statistiques sur les mariages en présence comme peuvent en fournir des estimations tirées des recensements. Indépendamment de cette évaluation de l'envergure réelle des cercles de mariages, des données sur les effectifs en âge de se marier auraient été pertinentes.

Une autre considération de type conceptuel s'est posée : l'homogamie constitue-t-elle la plus fréquente, voire la seule stratégie matrimoniale des groupes sociaux ? Ne faudrait-il pas d'abord tenter de définir les comportements collectifs en matière de choix du conjoint plutôt que de supposer qu'ils sont nécessairement orientés vers l'homogamie ? À la fin de l'ouvrage, G. Boetsch ouvre la voie à cet exercice en soulignant que les facteurs intervenant dans le choix du conjoint sont encore inconnus pour les dernières décennies étudiées, mais ce questionnement n'a ici qu'un rôle secondaire. C'est dans ce chapitre, qui justement cerne l'évolution des mariages dans leur globalité, qu'on aurait dû le rencontrer.

En définitive le travail réalisé demeure d'une grande qualité. L'attention portée à la critique des sources, dont nous avons pourtant peu parlé, prouve la rigueur de l'étude. D'autre part, nous avons apprécié l'organisation générale des chapitres, la constitution des annexes et les nombreuses références bibliographiques. Bref, un ouvrage à lire pour qui se passionne de démographie historique, d'anthropologie sociale, d'histoire quantitative et de génétique des populations humaines.

1. Maître de recherches, C.N.R.S.
2. Attachés de recherches, C.N.R.S.

Jacqueline PETERSON, Jennifer S. H. BROWN (eds.), *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Metis in North America*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1985. 266 pages, \$25.00 (cloth).

F. Laurie BARON, James B. WALDRAM (eds.), *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986. 306 pages, Can. \$15.00 (paper).

Dolores T. POELZER, Irene A. POELZER. *In Our Own Words: Northern Saskatchewan Metis Women Speak Out*. Saskatoon: Lindenblatt and Hamonic Publishing Inc., 1986, 161 pages, \$12.95 (paper).

By Joe Sawchuk,
University of Toronto

Two of the three volumes represented here are collections of papers presented at major conferences on the Metis. *The New Peoples* is of particular interest in this regard, representing as it does the first international conference on the Metis in North America, held in 1980, and hosted by the Newberry Library. That conference served as the impetus for several others, including the one held at the University of Saskatchewan in 1985, and represented here by the collection edited by Barron and Waldram.

These two volumes, encompassing some 31 articles in all, are best considered together, as they thus offer an insightful bird's eye view of the breadth and depth of Metis studies and research today; revealing the strengths as well as some areas of weakness needing further research. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the work as exemplified by these two volumes is the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary research on the Metis: while history

still appears to be the discipline most commonly represented, it is closely followed by anthropology, and to a lesser degree, education, economics, linguistics, etc.

However, one thing which immediately becomes clear when looking at these two volumes is that scholarly interest in the Metis populations is still a predominantly historical one. For example, in *The New Peoples*, none of the articles deal with contemporary issues facing Metis either in the USA or Canada, with the possible exception of Nicks and Morgan's paper on Grande Cache, where, while the emphasis is still primarily historical (the history of Grande Cache is treated from its inception to the present day) the reader is at least brought up to date with the 20th Century.

There appears to be very little concern with contemporary Metis political struggles, land claims, or ethnic identity in any of these papers. While there is an insightful discussion of the difficulty of defining the historical Metis, along with some of the political implications of this, both in the editors' introduction and R.K. Merton's afterword, it would appear from this particular collection of essays that very few scholars are interested in the issue from a contemporary point of view, although Peterson and Brown do mention that "history is still being made" in this regard (page 6). Barron and Waldram's volume appears to be much the same here. This is perhaps understandable, since for the longest time, historians were the only scholars who were interested in the Metis at all, but the interdisciplinary nature of more recent research does not seem to have broadened the field of interest much. There is, however, at least one new and welcome direction in research indicated in Peterson and Brown's volume: a renewed interest in Metis cultural life, represented by Brassier's study of Metis art, and Crawford's work on Metis linguistic distinctiveness.

By its title alone, one would expect Barron and Waldram's volume to bring a more contemporary bias to Metis studies. Yet here too, almost all the papers are concerned with historical matters. The book is divided into two sections: "The Rebellion Era" and "The Aftermath" but most of the papers in the second section fail to get much past the early 1900s. This is not meant as a criticism per se, just a question: where are the Metis of today? One notable exception to this trend is provided by Waldram who gives us a useful discussion on how the legislated definitions of "Indian" has affected the ethnic status of Metis, Non-status Indians, and Status Indians in the Canadian sub-arctic. This discussion could have been augmented by an examination of the effects of the Canadian Constitution on this ethnic status, but

Waldram does at least mention some of the possible implications.

This volume also provides us with a bit of potential fun, as it contains the closest thing to an ideological clash between scholars that we have in either of the two collections; Hatt vs. Flanagan on the issue of the Metis Scrip Commissions. Most of the scholars involved in Metis studies have been conspicuously polite to one another, perhaps overly so, but Flanagan has attempted to inject at least some debate into the proceedings with his deliberately (almost self-consciously) confrontational defense of the handling of Metis land grants. Flanagan is well known for his controversial notion that the 1885 Rebellion was totally unjustified in the light of governmental policy regarding Metis land grants, and that the Metis' claim to aboriginal status was a specious one. Despite the fact that Flanagan has obviously been inviting comment here, few of his colleagues have risen to the bait. In this volume, Hatt does attempt to do so, but he does not make use of all the material he could in refuting Flanagan's assertions, as Flanagan himself points out in his rebuttal. The confrontation therefore settles down to a rather tepid one. It had the potential for more!

I do have one minor complaint regarding Barron and Waldram's volume: it lacks a section on "Notes on Contributors." Given the wide range of academics currently interested in the Metis, it is likely that at least some of the names of the contributors would be unfamiliar to many of the people reading this volume, even those well versed in Metis academic literature and research. The volume also contains contributions from those working outside the academic field, such as Wayne McKenzie, of the Association of Metis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan. It is unlikely that someone unfamiliar with the Native political scene in Saskatchewan would know who Mr. McKenzie is. Barron and Waldram do mention Mr. McKenzie's political affiliation in their introduction, but a complete section on all the contributors would have been a welcome addition. Brown and Peterson's volume does have such a section.

Perhaps the most serious weakness revealed in both these collections is the relatively minor emphasis placed on examining the role of Metis women, either in an historical or contemporary context. This is a surprising omission, considering the increased interest in women's issues found in Native Studies in general. About the only paper that attempts to fill in this gap is Sylvia Van Kirk's *What if Mama is an Indian*, in the Brown and Peterson volume. This paper attempts to examine some of the ambivalent attitudes a particular family of English half-breeds felt about their Indian heritage in the 1800s.

On the other hand, the third volume to be considered here goes a long way towards correcting this prior lack of interest. Poelzer and Poelzer's volume represents one of the first attempts at focusing exclusively on Metis women's issues. *In Our Own Voices* is a collection of excerpts from interviews with Metis women in seven communities in northern Saskatchewan circa 1979. At first glance, this book would appear to be of the type we have seen too much of in Native Studies; that is, a collection of unrelated tape-recorded comments (by women, elders, teenagers, whatever) presented with little or no analysis, often accompanied by a few "arty" photographs. There seems to be a general assumption in Native Studies that a tape recorder and a Nikon camera are all it takes to produce a book. However, I am happy to report that this is NOT what we find in Poelzer and Poelzer's study.

While the principle interviewer (Irene A. Poelzer) collected the data in the form of unstructured interviews to better allow the subjects to define their own areas of particular interest, the resultant material has been subjected to careful content analysis, and is presented in a logical and informative manner. The various chapters of the book represent the special issues the Metis women themselves felt compelled to comment on: employment, religion, the generation gap, marriage, family, alcohol and drugs, etc.

Most importantly, while the authors let the Metis women "speak for themselves" (there is a generous amount of direct and extensive quotes from the interviews) they also have provided a general summary of what all the respondents said, plus some insightful comments about the significance of the statements. Still, I would have liked to see a bit more input from the authors, perhaps in the form of an afterword or summary, to give us a better over-all view of the issues discussed in the book. There is a tendency on the authors' part to treat these interviews as "holy texts;" as if too much analysis would water down the impact of the women's concerns. Still, this is a minor point. I highly recommend this volume; it is a pioneering effort at speaking to the issues of concern to contemporary Metis women, and one long needed in this field. In fact, all three volumes considered here are highly recommended to anyone interested in the current state of Metis studies.

Claude BLANCKAERT (Textes rassemblés et présentés par), *Naissance de l'ethnologie?*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985. 267 pages, 120F.

*Par Bernard Arcand
Département d'anthropologie
Université Laval*

L'ouvrage est le résultat d'une journée d'étude sur le thème du rôle historique des missions dans l'élaboration des sciences humaines, tenue à Crêteil en juin 1983 par le «groupe de recherches sur l'histoire de l'anthropologie» lié à l'Université de Paris XII. De l'aveu du directeur du groupe de recherches, responsable de cette édition et qui signe ici l'introduction au volume, il n'y a pas encore de synthèse possible et l'ouvrage ne peut offrir qu'une «série de coupes stratigraphiques», des «sondages ponctuels» et des «interrogations». Bref, tout pour rendre une recension plus difficile. Parce qu'il ne s'agit pas vraiment d'un livre, qui développerait un argument identifiable autour d'une ou quelques questions précises, mais bien d'un assemblage de contributions indépendantes à un colloque assez vaguement défini. Comme c'est souvent le cas dans ce type d'entreprise, plusieurs des contributions méritent attention mais c'est en vain qu'on chercherait une ligne directrice de l'ensemble. Et c'est ainsi alors qu'un titre peut devenir trompeur.

Le hasard, nous dit-on, fit que les participants au colloque s'intéressent exclusivement aux missionnaires américains du 16^e au 18^e siècle. Rien donc, par exemple, des stratégies jésuites en Inde ou en Chine. Et encore moins mention de l'Islam. D'emblée nous sommes limités aux Amériques où l'Europe affronte ceux qui lui semblaient être des vrais sauvages et où l'oeuvre missionnaire sera particulièrement lourde. Car il s'agit bien d'un cas: contrairement aux efforts missionnaires en Afrique, en Asie et à travers l'Europe même, le ministère demeure ici indissociable de la conquête coloniale, malgré les protestations occasionnelles contre sa violence; et malgré les entreprises jésuites au Paraguay qui inspirèrent les plus grandes utopies politiques, l'oeuvre missionnaire fut tout aussi exceptionnellement presque partout un échec.

Il y aurait sans doute là beaucoup à dire encore, mais l'attention des auteurs est portée ailleurs, sur les apports de ces missionnaires à notre connaissance des sociétés et des cultures amérindiennes. Selon leurs conditions de travail, les stratégies des ordres auxquels ils appartenaient et parfois, surtout poussés par leurs envies personnelles, les missionnaires ont laissé des témoignages. Bien sûr, leurs récits s'inscri-