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This paper examines contribution that historian, Olive Dickason, has made to Métis historiography. In doing so, it also examines the ways in which the origins of Métis culture and identity were represented in historical studies of the 1970s and 1980s. The question of who the Métis are is being raised publicly as a result of the recent Powley court decision. However, the question of Métis origins is not a new one; the 1970s and 1980s saw the first major period examining the history of the Métis. It was during this same period that Dickason completed her studies and produced her early work on North American contact. When determining Métis origins, the convention has been to focus on prairie peoples of French Catholic descent. Some works, though, examine Métis people outside of the prairies, pointing toward a more diverse understanding of Métis peoples and origins. While Olive Dickason follows many of the conventional patterns, she expands the literature by revealing a fluid development of Métis identity from the point of contact. In order to be able to speak of the Métis peoples and determine who has aboriginal rights as a Métis person, identity needs to be determined not only from external historical sources, but also from internal sources within the Métis communities.
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My masters work has often felt as though it had a life of its own that sometimes threatened to defeat me. As it moved through its many manifestations, there are a number of people who helped me win the battle. First, my supervisor, Dr. Dianne Newell, who taught me perseverance in the midst of the storm. My thanks also go to Dr. Laura Moss who took time out of her schedule to speak to a stranger. To Dr. Olive Dickason, who was helpful in the formative stages of my research. Of course, I thank my sister Grace and my mother Kate Wright for their constant support and faith in me, without whose love and sacrifices I know I would not have made it to where I am now. To my grandfather, Ichiro Inoue, I say thank you for believing in me and in the value of my education. My network of friends, particularly Jackie and Cara who lived with me and dealt with my immediate breakdowns, Dan for his eternal support, his computer and a place to work, Danna for always being a shoulder to lean on, and the many others who believed in me when I was ready to give up the fight. Finally to my cohort at UBC who have challenged, bantered and encouraged me.

Who are the Métis? Despite the number of times the question has been asked, the answer remains ambiguous. Fur-trade history, Canadian national history and discussions of aboriginal rights have tended to recognise two dichotomous categories: Native and non-Native. Although they are part of the aboriginal world, the Métis have rarely been specifically addressed as an historic category in the manner of aboriginal peoples unless it is with reference to Louis Riel, or the 1869 and 1885 Métis and Indian battles for the Northwest. Politically, the 1982 Canadian Constitution in section 35 recognised the Métis as a separate aboriginal group with “existing rights.”¹ The problem with the Constitution, though, is that it does not determine who qualifies as a Métis person nor does it define the nature of their aboriginal rights. Because of the constitutional shortcomings, it is now left to the courts to determine who the Métis are as a legal category.²

¹ Section 35 currently reads: “Rights of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada – 35.(1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed. (2) In this Act, “aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes the Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada. (3) For greater certainty, in subsection (1) “treaty rights” includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired. (4) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the Aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.” U.K. Canada Act 1982 (1982), cl 1, Schedule B (Constitution Act 1982), s. 35. An interesting current discussion of the battle and legacy of section 35 can be found in Ardith Walkem and Halie Bruce, eds. Box of Treasures or Empty Box? Twenty Years of Section 35. (Penticton: Theytus Books, 2003).

² Harry Daniels points out that using the legal system to establish the definitions of aboriginal rights is not necessarily the preferred method: “…we are led to the courts now. We would rather reach a negotiated agreement, but what choice to we have?” Taking rights claims to court is necessary because the politicians would not address the issue in constitutional discussions. Harry W. Daniels, foreward to Who Are Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples?, ed., Paul L.A.H. Chartrand (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2002), 13.
So who are the Métis? Are they Native or non-Native? Robert Young, in theorizing cultural and racial hybridity, addresses the ways in which categories of identity were created in the 19th century through a desire for fixed identities in a changing society and re-enforced in the 20th century through post-colonial discussions of "self and Other" that were conceived to deconstruct the categories of 19th century empires. Despite the fact that today's society is more accepting of diversity, we live in the fallout of 19th century ideas and Young points out that surprisingly few models for understanding diversity exist. Even the post-colonialist studies "[threaten] to reproduce the static, essentialist categories [they seek] to undo." Young's argument helps explain the tendency to ignore the Métis as they complicate the Native/non-Native dichotomy by nature of their mixed ancestry.

Are the Métis a 'non-Native' peoples? When self-identifying, Métis people certainly consider themselves Native through their connection to the land and their distinct culture that incorporates Native ideals. In social settings, too, the public commonly regard Métis peoples as Native. Many people who consider themselves Métis have not been recognised as Native people by governments.

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5 For example, Howard Adams describes the discrimination he faced as a Métis person finding a job in Howard Adams. *Prison of Grass: Canada from the native point of view*. (Toronto: New Press, 1975), 3-4.
6 This is not to say that Métis people have never been recognised by provincial and federal governments. They are now included in section 35 of the Canadian Constitution Act (see footnote 1), however, historically, their recognition has been variable. More often than not, when recognised, it is to distinguish from 'Indian'. Also see John Giokas and Robert K. Groves, "Collective and Individual Recognition in Canada: The Indian Act Regime" in *Who Are Canada's Aboriginal Peoples?* ed, Paul L.A.H. Chartrand (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing), 46-47.
Certainly the Métis do not fit within the definitions of the Indian Act. Some Native groups also maintain a distinction between themselves and the Métis. As a result of their uncertain recognition, Métis groups see themselves as Canada’s “forgotten peoples.” Though the Métis are not always recognized officially, they are not entirely forgotten in historical studies. From an examination of historiography, a general understanding of the Métis emerges: a group not limited to the prairies, that existed before the battles of the Northwest, that continues to exist now, and a peoples who are diverse in culture. In order to determine what constitutes a Métis person or community, though, the historiography also reveals that a full answer requires a combination of both external and internal factors.

The attempt to identify a single Métis group in history faces difficulties from the outset. Those who are now known as the Métis were once disparate groups identified by different names. As mixed communities developed, they had various names including, ‘bois-brûlés’, ‘burntwood people’, ‘country-born’, ‘halfbreed’ and ‘chicot’. The variance is a result of time, location and gender. ‘Country-born’, more often than not, referred to women and some of the terms made reference to a particular native heritage or to a particular language spoken. More recently, ‘halfbreed’ and ‘métis’ became the most

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7 Though it is highly problematic, the Indian Act designates ‘status’ Indians who are entitled to rights under the Constitution. Some prairie Métis were specifically excluded from the Act, while the majority of Métis do not conform to requirements of band membership or are of families that were never on the Indian registry. Giokas and Groves “Collective and Individual Recognition,” 43-44, 48-54. For the current Act, see Canada. Indian Act. R.S. 1985, c.1-6, s.l.
10 From the same Latin root as the common Spanish term ‘mestizo’, ‘métis’ is simply the French word denoting mixed ancestry/race. Though it once had the same derogatory connotation as ‘halfbreed’, it is now the generally accepted official term in Canada.
widespread terms denoting English and French speakers respectively. ‘Métis’ is now the official term for both English and French-speaking peoples. In English, the accent is frequently dropped and the word can be capitalized or in lower case form.\textsuperscript{11} For the purposes of this study, I am maintaining the original, accented form and capitalizing when referring to the group of peoples who conceive of themselves as a separate and distinct peoples. I will also use the lower case métis to refer simply to people with mixed Native-European ancestry regardless of identity. By using the two different forms of the word métis (Métis and métis) I will also maintain and convey the original intent of individual historians as much as possible.

Historical origins are essential to determining current rights, however, since communities were not always known as ‘Métis,’ it is important now to develop a common language to allow the communities the potential to receive common rights.\textsuperscript{12} The existence of Métis aboriginal rights was recently confirmed in the 2003 case of R. v. Powley. Steve and Roddy Powley were arrested on October 22, 1993 in the Sault Ste. Marie area of the upper Great Lakes for hunting moose without a licence. The moose had been tagged for food and the Powleys argued that they were exercising their aboriginal rights as Métis to hunt. After the appeal and cross-appeal, the Supreme Court of Canada supported the Ontario courts when finding in favour of the Powleys.

The Powley decision on the existence of Métis aboriginal rights not only raises the question of aboriginal hunting rights, it opens the discussion of Métis rights more


generally. In having to determine the legitimacy of Métis claims, the Supreme Court began to define who is Métis under the law, asserting that ‘Métis’ “does not encompass all individuals with mixed Indian and European heritage; rather, it refers to distinctive peoples who, in addition to their mixed ancestry, developed their own customs, and recognizable group identity separate from their Indian or Inuit and European forebears.”

Furthermore, to claim Métis rights under section 35, a person must demonstrate the elements of self-identification, ancestral connection and community acceptance. The Powley decision also established the ‘pre-control,’ rather than ‘pre-contact,’ test to determine the historical importance of the rights being claimed. However, the judgement of the Supreme Court of Canada also formally recognises the limitations of its decision and the ambiguity of the working definition of ‘métis’ in ruling that decisions would have to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. The problems of identification thus continue, making it a useful point now to review and reflect on the historiography of the origins of Métis identity.

While *Powley* will undoubtedly spawn new research in communities trying to assert their Métis aboriginal rights, the considerable body of historical research that already exists on the origins of the Métis deserves careful examination. These works raise such questions as: Why is it that some communities of mixed ancestry have been

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 In the *R. v. Van der Peet* decision of 1996, it was ruled that in order to claim an aboriginal right, it must be established that the claim “meets the test of being integral to the distinctive culture of the aboriginal group claiming the right” Canada. Supreme Court. *R. v. Van der Peet.* [1996] 2 S.C.R. 507. [http://www.lexum.umontreal.ca/csc-scc/en/pub/1996/vol2/html/1996scr2_0507.html] Internet. Accessed June 11, 2004. In asserting the right as existing pre-contact, the aboriginal group could be exercising it in a modern fashion and could include the resumption of a claim after interruption (*Van der Peet*). However, in the case of the Métis, as the “pre-contact test” would be unfeasible, the court instead instituted a “pre-control test.” The claiming of an aboriginal Métis right, then, essentially follows the same regulations established in *R. v. Van der Peet*, with the time frame being after contact and the establishment of a Métis community, but before the establishment of effective European control (*Powley*).
considered Métis while others have not? What are the distinguishing characteristics of a Métis community? Olive Dickason is one historian who has made a considerable contribution to the subject of the Métis. She has been influential in the area of Canadian First Nations history because of her text *Canada’s First Nations* and because she herself is Métis in a discipline that is, in Canada, dominated by non-Native peoples. However, Dickason’s contribution extends beyond *Canada’s First Nations*. Both her life and her work on the Métis deserve closer attention.

Dickason’s writing first emerged during a period from the late 1970s through the 1980s that saw a large increase in the number of works on native peoples generally, and the Métis more specifically. Her work both influenced and was influenced by the events and publications of the period. The context of Dickason’s work is not only essential for understanding her work; the same context is the roots of Métis historiography. The political context and Dickason’s own life also reveal the social implications of historical work.

The subject of Métis origins has been examined by a number of authors and scholars both in an academic and social context, providing an array of views on the topic. As the field initially developed, Métis were primarily equated with the prairies. More particularly, Métis studies focused on people of French Catholic descent. As the historiography of the Métis developed, the prairie focus remained, along with the focus on French heritage. Despite the ongoing prairie focus in Métis historiography, the more open intellectual environment of the seventies and eighties did allow for new approaches and understandings of the Métis.
August-Henri de Trédmaudan and Marcel Giraud produced two of the foundational texts on the topic of Métis history in Canada. De Trédmaudan’s work, *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l’ouest canadien* was published first in 1935. It was written at the behest of the Société Historique Métisse, whose members were the survivors of the 1885 Métis battle at Batoche. With de Trédmaudan began the prairie bias of Métis history. The Métis in de Trédmaudan’s west are a product of canadien, French, Scottish and Irish fathers and native mothers. While some of these people did speak English, de Trédmaudan asserts that the Bois-Brûlés (de Trédmaudan’s term for the French Métis) were more numerous and that it is to them one must look to identify the characteristics and mentality of the Métis. Written to refute official documents about the Métis and the rebellion that disparage both, the characteristics of the Métis that de Tédmaudan privileges are those that were typical of the Batoche fighters whose position he wishes to defend. In choosing to do so, his work becomes focused on a specific Métis community that reflected French origins on the Canadian prairies. Although de Trédmaudan’s intent is clearly stated, *Histoire de la nation métisse* sets a narrow precedent for studies of the Métis.

Giraud’s work, *Le Métis Canadien: Son role dans l’histoire des province de l’Ouest*, appeared in 1945, ten years after de Trédmaudan’s. Written using academic conventions, Giraud approaches the topic from an opposite perspective to de Trédmaudan, while continuing to reinforce the idea of a prairie Métis. Giraud begins his extensive study with a discussion of the western landscape followed by a discussion of

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17 Trédmaudan’s Métis were large in stature, French, Catholic, and a buffalo hunter of the prairies. Ibid 46-67.
native and European communities before examining the history of the Métis. In doing so, Giraud is engaging in a type of geographical determinism typical of the inter-war and wartime decades.\textsuperscript{18} Though the native people are more directly connected to the landscape, of the Métis, he states, "[c]ette personnalité, où le primitif revit à côté du civilisé, n'a pu elle-même se former que dans l'isolement prolongé des pays de l'Ouest et dans le contact ininterrompu de l'indigène," (this personality, where the primitive is revived next to the civilised, could only be formed in the prolonged isolation of the West and in the constant contact with the native) indicating that they are as much a result of natural isolation as of human development.\textsuperscript{19} If the landscape is an essential factor of Métis development, then the Métis are a natural phenomenon unique to the prairies. As well as privileging the prairie landscape, Giraud argues that the French métis were the only group to assert themselves as a separate nation.\textsuperscript{20} Although Giraud recognises the Scottish heritage of some métis in the west, he argues that this minority was subsumed by the more dominant French Métis culture.\textsuperscript{21} As to the intermixing in the north and the east, Giraud argues that the peoples of mixed ancestry in other regions did not recognise themselves as separate group.\textsuperscript{22}

Though Giraud's lengthy work contains much information about the history of the Métis, according to Jennifer Brown, it is neither definitive, nor intentionally objective.\textsuperscript{23}

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\textsuperscript{18} One example of a contemporary who exhibited similar, strong geographical determinism is Donald Creighton, who published \textit{The Empire of the St. Lawrence} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).

\textsuperscript{19} Marcel Giraud. \textit{Le Métis Canadien, Son rôle dans l'histoire des province de l'Ouest}. (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1945), 292.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 379.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 292.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 291.

\textsuperscript{23} Jennifer S.H. Brown. “People of Myth, People of History: A Look at Recent writings on the Metis” \textit{Acadiensis} 17(1), 153.
“civilized” societies, and using sources of the Hudson’ Bay and of traders without acknowledging their biases. However, despite its limitations, *Le Métis Canadien* continues to be recognised as a valuable work, just as Giraud, himself, continues to be recognised as a prominent scholar of the Métis. As one of the first academic studies of the Métis, *Le Métis Canadien* influenced the direction of Métis studies by setting out the primacy of the prairies and French heritage in Métis identity.

Interest in de Trédmaudan and Giraud was renewed during the later growth of Métis history. *Histoire de la nation métisse* was reprinted in 1979 and was translated under the title *Hold High your Heads* in 1982. Giraud’s work was also translated and reprinted under the title *Métis in the Canadian West* in 1986. The appearance of these reprints coincided with the growth of indigenous and Métis history in the 1970s and 1980s. The increase in public and academic recognition of indigenous peoples was largely due to the widespread opposition that Aboriginal communities and organisations mounted against the federal government’s 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy.  

Another contributing factor was the inclusion of section 35 in the 1982 Constitution Act. Constitutional recognition was a major step for the Métis as it was the first federal recognition of their aboriginal heritage. Aboriginal and Métis works such as Harold Cardinal’s *Unjust Society* (1969), Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* (1973) and Howard

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24 The 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy was proposed by the Trudeau government to make Native people equal citizens in Canada. Through this proposal, among other things, Indians would lose special recognition granted by the British North America Act of 1867 and the Indian Act would be repealed. Native people nationwide rose up in protest, seeing the White Paper as yet another assimilationist policy that denied the self-government they sought. The White Paper had been written without any Native consultation and if their status was going to change, Native people wanted to have control over that change. Olive Dickason. *Canada’s First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*. 3rd ed. (Toronto: Oxford UP, 2002), 377-379.

25 Prior to their inclusion in the Canadian Constitution, their aboriginal status was uncertain. Though in section 94(2) of the BNA Act, the Federal government was given fiduciary responsibility for “Indians and Lands Reserved for Indians” this did not necessarily include the Métis.
Adams' *Prison of Grass* (1975) publicised the reality of the situation of native peoples in Canada. Adams' and Cardinal's works were both types of polemical histories outlining the development and nature of systemic and social racism in Canada. They were written in response to the government's claims that Canada was an 'equal society' that promoted multiculturalism. The two works were widely accepted because both Cardinal and Adams were well-educated, well-spoken leaders. Published between these two works was Campbell's startling autobiography, *Halfbreed*. This, too, was widely read and its personal nature forced people to recognise the difficult situations of many métis peoples. *Halfbreed* continues to be widely read and was recently recognised as part of Campbell's contribution to the development of Canadian understandings of native peoples.26

The three aboriginal writers, Cardinal, Adams and Campbell, shared the dual objective of educating the Canadian public on the historical and contemporary injustices inflicted upon indigenous peoples as well as informing native peoples that their individual experiences are shared.27 While the three works have political implications, they were not explicitly intended to impact political policy in the same way as the publications and actions of the Native Council of Canada (NCC). Some of the briefs and essays outlining the NCC's political assertions about Métis nationhood are contained in


27 Cardinal clearly states his purpose when he says, "[a]s an Indian writing about a situation I am living and experiencing in common with thousands of our people it is my hope that this book will open the eyes of the Canadian public to its shame." Harold Cardinal. *Unjust Society*. (Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig, 1969), 2. Adams does not have a statement of purpose, however, it is implied when he points out the lack of literature on the effect of colonialism. He also indicates his hope to "unmask both the white-supremacist and the white-liberal view what the natives were warring savages without any government, who craved white colonization." Howard Adams. *Prison of Grass*, xi. Maria Campbell is clear in her purpose when she addresses her readers, saying "I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country. I want to tell you about the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams." Maria Campbell. *Halfbreed*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 8.
the 1979 collections, *We Are the New Nation: The Métis and National Native Policy* and *The Forgotten People: Metis and non-status Indian Land Claims*. Harry Daniels, who was the leader of the NCC at the time, was editor of both collections. The political purpose of the NCC and its publications complement the objectives of Cardinal, Adams and Campbell by offering pragmatic policy alternatives to help the socio-political situations outlined by the three authors. Collectively, these works all serve to increase the knowledge of the Métis situation in Canada, though none of them provide focused explanations of Métis origins.

An exploration of Métis origins was undertaken in the three-volume bilingual series, *The Other Natives: the-les Métis*, published by the Manitoba Métis Federation in 1978. D. Bruce Sealey, Antoine S. Lussier and A.S. Morton contributed examinations of Métis origins in the first volume while J. Legassé made his contribution in the second volume through a reprint of one of his earlier articles. Sealey, in his study of early Métis nationhood argues that it is "[o]nly in the Northwest [that] the mixed-bloods emerge as a dominant group with an identifiable history and culture uniquely their own." Though members of the "mixed-bloods" may have had an identifiable culture, Sealey argues that it was not a cohesive one. He recognises the English and French-speaking Métis equally and identifies three lifestyle patterns that cross all the communities – permanent settlers near trading posts, semi-settled farmers, and hunters and trappers. According to Sealey, a catalyst was required for these disparate groups to become cohesive enough to form a

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28 As leader of the NCC, Harry Daniels also played a key role in the inclusion of the Métis in section 35 of the Constitution. Daniels, "Foreward", 12-13.
30 Ibid, 6-7.
national identity. With knowledge of Métis history, one might infer that this catalyst was the 1869 battle at Batoche or the 1885 battle at Red River, however, Sealey does not explicitly state what, if any, this catalyst was.

Morton’s article, “The New Nation” takes up where Sealey leaves off. Beginning with the rivalry of the Hudson’s Bay and Northwest companies and coalescing more strongly through the arrival of the Selkirk settlers and the battle at Red River, Morton sees the Métis as having formed their identity as a separate nation by 1882. He, like Sealey, argues that it is through a period a crisis that the Métis became a ‘New Nation’. By connecting the need for crisis with the difficulties in the Northwest, Morton intimates that the Métis are a phenomenon of the prairies and, more specifically, of Manitoba. Both Lussier and Legassé also privilege Manitoba as the space of Métis development. Lussier supports earlier studies such as de Trédmaudan’s and Giraud’s by asserting the French Catholic characteristic as essential to Métis identity. However, while highlighting the French Catholic identity, he recognises two types of Métis: “Anglo-Indian and Franco-Indian.” Legassé in the historical section of his article also dilutes the French focus by arguing that the numbers of English-speaking Métis in 1870 nearly matched those of the French. Though the four articles open the discussion of Métis origins further by examining different elements of the culture they all work within a

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31 Ibid, 13-14. The catalyst to which Sealey implicitly refers is the battle for the Northwest that begins with the Selkirk settlers and ends with the 1885 battle at Batoche. Though Sealey does not offer a date for the catalyst or for the cementing of a Métis identity, it would be somewhere between 1812 and 1885.
34 Ibid, 16.
narrow framework that essentializes the prairies as the only place where Métis peoples exist. The prairie framework in turn limits the extent to which any one of the authors can expand or question the discussion of Métis culture.

Prairie Métis have often been the focus of historical study as a result of the extensive studies on Louis Riel, the 1869 conflict at Red River (Manitoba) and the 1885 battle at Batoche (Saskatchewan). The emphasis on prairie roots combined with the fact that many outspoken Métis have been from the prairies has led to the common misconception that Métis peoples exist only in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. John E. Foster stepped away from the prairies in his 1985 examination of Métis identity. In his contribution to the 1985 collection, *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis*, he provides a useful approach to answering such questions as: When did groups begin to identity as Métis? How was membership determined? What was the effect of treaties on Métis populations? Are there regional bases for identification? Foster does not answer these questions; instead, he offers a tripartite approach to examining Métis society. First is to examine the roles of the men; second, the roles of women; and third, the experience of the family, focusing on the relations between husband and wife. These three arenas, Foster argues, "served to define the social circumstances of shared experiences" that eventually became identified as Métis. Foster’s work allows for a more general understanding of Métis by displacing the regional focus in favour of a community-defined one. Though Foster lacks many of the answers to the questions he raises, his

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37 Ibid, 87.
family-based approach offers the possibility for peoples outside of the prairie provinces who are not of French descent to legitimately be recognised as Métis.

Foster was not the only scholar in the 1980s to question the primacy of the prairies. As studies of the Métis increased, they also became broader in scope. Though recently the Ontario government tried to argue in Powley that there were no rights-bearing Métis in the province, the Great Lakes are one major region outside of the prairies that has received study. Jacqueline Peterson's and Harriet Gorham's articles – 'Many Roads to Red River' and 'Families of Mixed Descent in the Western Great Lakes Region', respectively – are scholarly examinations of the Métis peoples of the Great Lakes. However, much of the work on the Great Lakes is found, not explicitly in studies of Métis people, but, rather, in contact histories. In more general histories, the study of contact blends with the emergence of new identities in Canada. Indeed, studies of general contact can offer some of the best insight into the development of a Métis identity. These works are often primarily academic without a political purpose for rights claims. They provide insight into how the Métis could develop – a nation that is a mix of cultures with a separate identity in the aboriginal world.

Though contact histories became a popular topic later in the twentieth century, developing through scholars such as J. R. Miller, Robert White, and Gilles Havard, their roots can be found in the 1980s with such works as Sylvia Van Kirk's "Many Tender

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38 Though fur-trade histories certainly had been written before the late 20th century, people like Miller, White and Havard shift the ways in which contact is addressed. Miller begins the shift by speaking in term of "Indian-White Relations" or native-newcomer relations. White and Havard further shift the examination of contact by addressing the ways in which contact was mediated by both Native peoples and Europeans. Their work also, then, begins to shade the area between fur-trade/contact history and Métis history. See J.R. Miller. Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). Richard White. The Middle Ground: Indians, empires and republics in the Great Lakes region. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991). Gilles Havard. Empire et Métissages. (Septentrion: Quebec, 2003).
Ties”: Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870. Van Kirk’s work is a feminist study of fur-trade history, examining the roles of native, métis and European women. The need for native women early in the fur-trade, Van Kirk shows, often resulted in the genesis of mixed families. Female children (country-born) of these mixed families were in-between cultures finding themselves in a role separate from their Indian mothers. Native women had negotiated between the Native and European worlds in the fur-trade, but as the population of métis women increased, they became preferred by fur-traders as wives.39 Marrying métis women became “the vogue” because, according to Van Kirk, “acclimatized to life in the West and familiar with Indian ways, [a mixed-blood woman] could also make a successful adaptation to white culture.”40

Though often raised in native communities, children of mixed ancestry were aware of their paternity. Some fathers even took the initiative by trying to keep their families as a unit, housing both mother and children in the posts and by establishing European-style education for their children.41 Though marriages to mixed-blood women came to predominate over marriages to native women, these women could still face prejudice as a result of their native heritage. With the larger influx of European women in North America and the increased racism of the Victorian era, the position of even the métis women was challenged.42 At times privileged, while at other dimes discriminated against, these métis women existed in a shifting balance between European and native worlds. Although Van Kirk labels some women of mixed ancestry as “Métis,” she

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40 Ibid, 96.
41 These schools were, in the end, mostly unsuccessful, but they show the ways in which fur-trade fathers tried to affect the lives of their métis children. Ibid, 106.
42 Ibid, 171-172, 201.
frequently uses the term “country-born,” a phrase that was common for early children of mixed ancestry. Language such as that used by Van Kirk draws together peoples across the nation who shared the characteristic of being born of mixed ancestry. However, Van Kirk’s terminology does not necessarily assert the unity of “country-born” children to the Métis. The steps to understanding the development of the Métis as an identifiable group are left to other scholars. Van Kirk, for her part, focuses the discussion on the role of women, providing insight into Métis origins by showing the ways in which they developed and became segregated from both native and European societies.

A complement to Van Kirk’s study is Jennifer Brown’s *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Families in Indian Country*, published in the same year, 1980. Though the focus of Brown’s study is the lives of Scottish fur-traders of both the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Northwest Company, the work provides insight into the development of mixed communities. The emergence of a new identity in this context, Brown argues, becomes apparent by 1800, when those of mixed heritage, though often reclaimed by native communities, recognise their ancestry as different from the Native one.43 People of mixed ancestry also begin to be acknowledged by the companies and treated differently as a result.44 Her conclusions about identity begin to break down the use of 1869 as the foundational cornerstone of a Métis nation. In contrast to the early works written in the Manitoba context, Brown adds a greater consideration to the English-speaking members of a Métis nation, thus further questioning the centrality of French Canadian roots.

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In addition to her book, Brown also contributed to Métis studies through a collection co-edited with Jacqueline Peterson. *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis* provides a number of essays exploring the Métis outside of the Riel context. The collection includes Foster’s article; an article by Olive Dickason exploring the differences of identity on the East coast and the Northwest; one by Irene Spry examining the métis in Rupert’s Land before 1870; a study of the métis in Grand Cache, Alberta by Trudy Nicks and Kenneth Morgan; and an article by John S. Long on the early fur-trade métis of the Treaty 9, James Bay area. These offer new insights into early Métis communities that are not often considered as such. Though the different communities may not be connected or share a homogenous Métis identity, the studies in *The New Peoples* show how they have unique cultures and identities. The community in Grand Cache, for example, does not often question its own identity; Nicks and Morgan point out that when one visitor asked if they were treaty Indians, non-status Indians or Métis, they could not answer. 45 Despite their own ambiguous identity, they were identified as a Métis community under the Alberta Métis Betterment Act. 46 Recognition of Métis peoples in the Treaty 9 area is similarly ambiguous. Some métis were included under treaty as Indians, while others were specifically excluded because they were seen as a separate group. 47 The opening of the Métis discussion exposes ambiguities while also raising further questions about Métis origins.

46 Ibid, 171.
Perhaps one of the most open-minded examinations of the Métis appeared late in the eighties. Inspired by Howard Adams, Don Purich questioned Métis origins, development and rights in his book, *The Metis*, in 1988. Though his work focuses on the prairie Métis, Purich recognises the limitations of the prairie concept, pointing out that there are people who are considered Métis in many other parts of the country. Instead of arguing for a specific definition of Métis, Purich addresses the problems of identification. He offers some of the definitions made by Métis councils, while also pointing out that the courts will have a role to play in outlining who gets rights as a Métis person. In the end, he argues that Métis identity needs to be self-determined. Like his discussion of the prairies, he also privileges the French connection without overriding the Scottish influence. Unlike Giraud or de Trédmaudan, Purich argues that the French connection is the stronger one, not because of numbers or dominance, but because of an ongoing connection to Quebec. He does not say that the French subsumed the English-speaking Métis, rather, he points out that the distinctions between the two groups eventually faded. Though not, strictly speaking, an academic work, and not a work produced within a Métis community, Purich’s study is an historical examination with social and political purpose that offers a positive contribution to Métis scholarship.

The works of the post-White Paper period raised new questions because of the ways in which they broke open earlier frameworks for understanding Métis history. The questions they answered and examined, though seemingly obvious today, were ones that had not previously been explored. As a result, the period of the seventies and eighties in

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49 Ibid, 9-14.
50 Ibid, 16.
Métis historiography provides a number of insights into Métis identity and origins, opening the discussion for further study.

The first, most simple conclusion about Métis origins is the primacy of the fur-trade. Though often discussed in the prairie context, the fur-trade was a Métis beginning across the continent. Métis communities developed out of the integral need for contact between European and native peoples in trade with an added factor of freedom that did not always exist during colonial periods. Intermarriage was useful for kinship ties, facilitating trade. Native women played important roles due to their knowledge of fur treatment and life in the country generally – many European women did not withstand the life in North America easily. Finally, there was a general lack of European women so that men seeking female companionship often turned to native or métis women.

Marriage patterns and family ties reflected the varying role that race played in the development of Métis communities. Cardinal and Adams expose the effect of colonialism in developing systemic racism against métis peoples as well as native peoples. However, studies such as Van Kirk’s show that women of mixed European and Native ancestry were at times given privilege over native women. The Métis existed in a world between European and native that Young argues needed to be erased in the Victorian period. With a greater influx of Europeans, Métis were no longer considered useful and were seen as a lower race because of their native heritage. As policy developed, the government’s focus on race rather than culture in negotiating treaties deprived the Métis of the opportunity to assert their own, separate aboriginal identity. The idea that native ancestry had a negative effect on the Métis people is maintained

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51 Van Kirk, “Many Tender Ties,” 192, 198-199.”
52 Young, Colonial Desire, 4.
through early studies such as Giraud's, which considers the development of the Métis as a form of negative miscegenation.

Language variations in the historical sources and subsequent studies, like race, reflect varying understandings of the Métis. When de Trédmaudan uses the term, "bois-brûlés," he equates it to Métis. Indeed by using the "bois-brûlés" as the dominant group that became Métis, he uses it to specify who became a valid Métis community. Van Kirk, as well, uses a variant term distinguishing métis people: "country-born." These children are not a nation of peoples, rather, they are distinguished simply by their place of birth. While the examples provided by de Trédmaudan and Van Kirk are historically accurate, they both become used to delimit who actually reflects the Métis identity.

The biases reflected in historical sources support Foster's argument that externally defined meanings of Métis identity are limited. External sources do not necessarily recognise the elements of identity that exist within the community. In order to provide a fuller understanding of how Métis identity is understood, studies need to incorporate an examination from within the community. Although Foster focuses on the family, community members also interacted to form a distinct culture. Children of mixed ancestry began to create their own identities; being bicultural, they existed in two worlds finding an identity that was a mixture of the two. Though it has been argued that the emergence of a new identity was a result of conflict, Métis identity can be seen developing much earlier than 1869 as a result of a variety of factors including, isolation, survival and rejection from other communities. Therefore, despite the need to explore Métis culture from within families, external factors also contributed to its development.
Van Kirk and Brown, for instance, show how external forces caused people of mixed
descent to seek an identity that did not fit easily into established ones.

Although the works of the seventies and eighties expanded the field of Métis
studies, establishing a foundation upon which further studies could be built, they did not
fundamentally change the understanding of North America’s new, distinct cultures.
Giraud and de Trédmaudan established a school of thought that saw the Métis as a
uniquely French, Catholic, prairie phenomenon that developed its identity through the
battle for the Northwest. Much of the later work followed this pattern. With notable
exceptions, such as Brown and the studies on the Great Lakes, the eighties were a
variation on the theme of prairie, French-speaking peoples who were forced into
developing a new identity.

It is within this context of 1980s Métis studies that Olive Dickason appeared. In
many ways her project reflects the thinking of the time; however, although other people’s
writing on the Métis are often regarded as more pivotal, she adds new depth, with a
unique perspective, to the historiography. Dickason’s work on the Métis, though
included in the 1985 Peterson and Brown collection, is often forgotten in favour of her
larger, more prominent work on native peoples. She is most recognised for her text,
*Canada’s First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from the Earliest Times*. First
her general project, though, is a branch of her study that explores Métis origins, reflecting
on a process of contact and the resulting mix of cultures and peoples. In combination
with her own life story, Dickason’s work adds to the understanding of the Métis history
in Canada.
Dickason’s life reflects her success as a historian. She spent much of her professional life as a journalist. Her journalism career took her from a position at Regina’s *Leader Post* in 1944 to a position as Women’s Editor for the daily *Globe and Mail*, which she ended in 1967. It was only then that she returned to her studies, which she had left in 1943, to begin her work as a professional historian. At the age of 57, Dickason completed her PhD in 1977. Dickason’s work as a historian has since been important to studies of Canadian history and First Nations history because she was using new approaches and studies of Canada’s Indigenous peoples. As a Métis historian, she endeavoured to have Indigenous peoples recognised in Canada’s national narrative and to show the importance of history in current political relations between non-Native and Native Canadians.53

Dickason’s revised PhD dissertation, *The Myth of the Savage*, appeared as a monograph in 1984. It is a history about the period of contact in which Dickason moves through the first contacts, outlining preconceived ideas (myths) of “savages” held by Europeans while working in Native reactions to the newcomers. Using the methodological conventions of the seventies, Dickason’s source material for her dissertation was entirely documentary. She reasons that, dealing with concepts of the period she studies “has meant a reliance on printed works, as they would have received the widest distribution.”54 She later commented that even at the time of her studies, she supported the use of oral sources, her work was, in its approach, standard history of the

day. Dickason was, however, unique in that she used colonial documentary sources to criticise those colonial understandings of Indigenous peoples. She also discredited the view that Europeans thought they encountered a homogenous people (Indians, generally speaking). The sources are used to expose the flawed Eurocentric ideas of ‘civilization’.

Although Dickason’s source material in *The Myth of the Savage* reflects historical conventions, her subject matter and sources analysis are far from conventional. Sources from the perspective of a European metropole are used to uncover prejudiced views of the peoples encountered in the ‘New World’. Her research attempts to understand both sides of contact and in doing so, begins to examine the process of métissage. *The Myth of the Savage*, thus, marks not only the beginning of Dickason’s career as a professional historian, but also the first of her works on the mixing of cultures in Canada. Her articles “From ‘One Nation’ in the Northeast to ‘New Nation’ in the Northwest: A Look at the Emergence of the Métis” and “Frontiers in Transition: Nova Scotia 1713-1763 Compared to the Northwest 11869-1885,” first published in 1982 and 1986 respectively, directly address the issue of Métis development. They reflect an undercurrent of her work at that time that examines the development of a ‘New Nation’ of Métis peoples in North America. She builds on this in her subsequent publications that address a wide variety of

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57 Using written European sources allows Dickason to make conclusions about the mythological bases for conceiving New World peoples. For example see, Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*, 17-22.
58 I have chosen to keep the French to describe the development of a new peoples and culture for the lack in English of a single word to describe the phenomenon.
Native issues in Canada from political recognition, to lands rights, to the inclusion of Native peoples in Canadian history. Dickason’s work on the Métis deserves a closer examination as it adds a unique perspective to understanding of the dilemmas and approaches to Métis history and to the body of literature on the Métis generally.

Dickason’s contribution to the study of the Métis begins in *The Myth of the Savage* when she points to the French policy of creating a single people in Canada as a beginning of métissage. In France, Dickason argues, early conceptions of different peoples were linked to skin colour. There was, at first, the belief that all people were basically white, darkening due to sun exposure or later due to culture. Dickason argues that “[t]he idea of the basic whiteness of Amerindians was [gave] impetus to the seventeenth-century French drive to evangelize and to intermarry with them.” If skin colour could change and people could be converted, the native peoples could also be ‘civilised’. Intermarriage became officially sanctioned through a policy to create one race. Though the French policy had the goal of assimilating Amerindians (Dickason’s word), the results were otherwise. According to Dickason, France “unwittingly helped to prepare the way for … the development, among the Métis of the Canadian Northwest, of the sense of a separate identity.” It was the very policy of the French that served to undermine the assimilationist project. Dickason shows that the roots of Métis identity can be traced back to the early contact of the French and native peoples in North America, well before 1869. If the roots of Métis identity existed as a result of contact,

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61 Ibid. 146.
63 Dickason. “From ‘One Nation’,” 1.
then the conflicts of the Northwest are not necessarily the key to identifying Métis peoples.

At the time of early contact, there were social factors other than official policy that Dickason recognises as having produced métissage. One such factor was the mutual exchange of children. The Amerindians and the French each exchanged children for their own reasons. For the Native people exchange was a way of forming and cementing alliances with other nations; for the French, exchange facilitated access to the customs of the Native peoples through children for the purpose of trade. Missionary work, too, served to create a mixed culture. Though the missionaries intended to spread a single faith, Native peoples could accept Christianity within their own understanding of culture. When taking part in Christian rituals, so important to the church, Dickason points out that Native peoples did so by ascribing different understandings to the meanings of such rituals. Baptism, for instance, could be performed in recognition of its importance to the French, thereby solidifying a native alliance with the French. However, Dickason is quick to argue that moments of cultural meeting such as these did not necessarily create a new people; the adoption and borrowing of ideas between the French and the Native peoples affected each society without either side necessarily identifying a common culture.

When examining the development of the idea of a New Nation of the Métis, Dickason argues that a fully developed sense of new nationhood was a phenomenon of the Northwest alone. Although there was métissage on the east coast, it was closer to becoming the ‘One Nation’ that French official policy envisioned. At first, early

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64 Dickason, Myth of the Savage, 168.
65 Ibid, 252-253.
intermixing meant that “Acadians appear[ed] to have been well on the way toward realizing the official goal of ‘one race’.”\textsuperscript{66} When the Acadians and native peoples did not form one race, Dickason notes that the France sidestepped the racial issue by focusing on religion and declaring all Mi’kmaq to be Christianised.\textsuperscript{67} Despite this move, Dickason argues, a single identity never emerged. Instead, she points out that the French lived with the Native peoples in ways that were mutually beneficial. There were factors in the Northeast that facilitated a symbiotic relationship. The Mi’kmaq and Malecite land use at the time allowed for the French to establish an agricultural settlement that did not intrude upon valued native land.\textsuperscript{68} An allied relationship also benefited the French and the Native peoples in their separate conflicts with the common enemy, the English. Until the Conquest of Québec in 1759 and the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, the east was an enduring site of English-French confrontation. Having a common enemy, Dickason argues, prevented the development of a Métis identity:

\begin{quote}
[A common enemy] also did much to discourage the emergence of the Métis as a separate group. The tensions of protracted frontier warfare, lasting until the final defeat of the French in 1760, polarized the racial situation in Acadia even as it encouraged good relations. In other words, the children of mixed unions tended to identify with either the French or the Amerindians rather than considering themselves a separate entity.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

However, in the Northwest different conditions allowed, even encouraged, the identity of the Métis as a separate identity. There were differences in the exigencies of the fur trade, for instance. The Northwest simply had a less established French post than did the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] Dickason, “From ‘One Nation’”, 7.
\item[67] Ibid, 10.
\item[68] Ibid, 13. While agriculture often did create conflict, the particular situation of the East was such that the French preferred to use the tidal flats which the Indigenous people found them of little use.
\item[69] Ibid, 13.
\end{footnotes}
Northeast. There were also differences as a result of the ongoing competition between the French and English in the Northeast. While the Métis of the northwest were fighting the Canadian government in similar ways to how the Mi’kmaq fought English control, the Métis were also fighting for recognition as a distinctive community. On the east coast no such battle existed. Thus, according to Dickason, “in the Northeast during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whatever one’s biological constituency, it was cultural and spiritual conformity that determined one’s classification. Even as mixed-bloods grew in numbers in Acadia, they identified either with the French or the Amerindian....”

From Dickason’s first exploration in The Myth of the Savage to her studies of comparative métissages, she provides a whole picture of how it was that a unique culture and heritage could emerge in the Canadian Northwest. In many ways, Dickason’s work presages works such as Richard White’s Middle Ground (1991) and Gilles Havard’s Empire et Métissages (2003), which later question and develop ideas of cultural contact and blending despite colonialist intentions. Studies of contact, though, continue to be separated from specific explorations of the Métis. In Dickason’s work, both the study of contact and the examination of Métis peoples are linked. This conjunction is essential for realising the fluidity of identity. If Métis are linked to early stages of contact, the development of identity can be more clearly seen and understood; the Métis did not simply appear at a point in time through a singular conflict, rather, the Métis identity grew over a period of more than 100 years. Dickason begins, like White and Havard later

70 Dickason, “From ‘One Nation’,” 14.
do, by questioning the ways in which Native peoples and the French negotiated understandings of contact, however, this examination is then used in her subsequent studies to substantiate the development of a new peoples. As with many of the earlier academic works, White and Havard begin to question métissage within an ostensibly different discussion. There also continues to be a division between the academic and social spheres where neither intentionally breaches the territory of the other. Olive Dickason is one of the few academics who has also maintained a social base in her work on the Métis, and First Nations generally.

It is not only in her written work that Dickason has contributed to the development of a Métis historiography. Although the life of the historian is often separated from his/her research work, for Dickason the two have been inextricably linked. As much for her research, Dickason has been recognised as a strong Native academic. She herself is Métis, which is an identity that guided her research and determined her academic projects. Also, as her career developed and she became more widely published, her Métis heritage also became public, allowing her the opportunity to make contributions such as the section on Métis in Paul Magosci's *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* and her article "Making Claim" in the popular publication, *The Beaver*.

Spending her early years in Manitoba and growing up in northern Manitoba during the Depression, Dickason attributes her success to “luck.”

At the end of the trap line that she walked growing up, she and her sister befriended, and accessed the library of, a Scottish refugee. When Dickason headed south during the war years, she met Father Athol Murray (“Père”), who mentored and funded her education at Notre Dame

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72 Deme. *Olive Dickason's First Nations*. 
University. Although she was not fully aware of her Aboriginal heritage while at Notre Dame University, she was initially ostracised by her schoolmates because she “walk[ed] like an Indian” and frequently wore moccasins.\(^7\) She was exposed to her Métis heritage as a young adult. As a result, she focused on Aboriginal issues in her journalistic work. When she began her academic studies in history, she realised that Aboriginal peoples were represented in historical texts as frozen in a pre-Confederation, static existence.

Dickason’s growing awareness of her own Métis heritage, combined with her desire to affect the course of Canadian native historiography in her work, resulted in a body of work that reflects both the conventions of academic history as well as the desire to affect political change through social histories. Researching and writing when there was uncertainty around native rights and later when a concerted effort was beginning to question the basis of rights claims, much of Dickason’s work studied native people generally with the Métis as one part of this world. Because of the period in which she wrote and her own background, the political direction of her work was in many ways unavoidable.

Writing into an emerging Métis history field during a politically charged period of the 1970s and 1980s offered certain freedoms for Dickason’s writing as well as certain limitations. Dickason’s findings in many ways support assertions made by her contemporaries. For example, though the fur trade is not the focus of her research, it is recognised as the force behind cultural contact. Just as her contemporaries show, the fur trade is essential to the Métis heritage, even if this is not an integral part of its current culture. However, the two main ways in which Dickason reflects the paradigm of the eighties is, first, in privileging the French heritage of the Métis and, second, in her

\(^7\) Ibid.
argument for the development of the Métis as a Northwest phenomenon. The primacy of French contact is manifest in Dickason’s work in a few ways. Her research on contact history was focused on French colonialism so that any conclusions she makes in the Myth of the Savage are necessarily a result of French-Native contact. Dickason also supports the idea that the Métis are a specifically French and native mix in her identification of their culture as, for instance, expressed through their clothing, “which became a distinctive blend of Amerindian and French.” While she does not argue that the Northwest Rebellion created the identification of the Métis as a nation, Dickason does use the event as an example of their national identity. She specifically recognises that the English-speaking Métis were active in the events leading up to the Northwest Rebellion, which is more than many general studies such as Giraud’s or Lussier’s do. However, she later asserts that the Métis were “made to feel strangers in their own land” because the settlers who moved into Manitoba were from Ontario rather than Quebec, thereby returning to a conventional view of Métis as a particularly French mixture.

Dickason’s focus on the Northwest Rebellion does more than simply emphasize the French factor, it also entrenches the idea of the Métis as a Northwest phenomenon. While she begins with the emergent métissage at contact, her conclusion follows the trend established by de Trédmaudan and Giraud of recognising the Métis as a purely prairie phenomenon. Although Peterson, Gorham, Nicks and Morgan extend the discussion of Métis identity beyond the boundaries of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Dickason’s work fits in with the dominant perspective that the Métis are a specifically

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74 Dickason, “From ‘One Nation’”, 14.
75 Ibid, 29.
prairie peoples. In this way, she contributes to a limited, rather than expansive understanding of a Métis nation.

Although in some ways reflecting the paradigms of the 1980s, Dickason is also different from her contemporaries. As her research on the Métis exists in a series within her work, she offers a more comprehensive examination of Métis identity. By beginning at contact, her work shows the emergence and existence of a Métis community prior to the influx of settlers to the Red River and the battles for the Northwest. Though she examines the Northwest Rebellion as an element of Métis history and an expression of their identity, it is not through the Rebellion that they gained their identity. Also, while her comparative article may be limited in scope by only making an argument for a singular moment in Acadian history to make a generalization of the Northeast, it makes an examination of the factors leading to the creation of a cohesive community in the Northwest that incorporates and extends the arguments of her contemporaries. By reflecting on these factors and connecting the historiography of contact and of the Northwest rebellion, Dickason recognises a fluid development of a Métis community rather than representing the Métis as a peoples that developed through a moment of conflict in Canadian history.

Dickason’s approach to métissage and the development of a New Nation is one of the ways in which she has contributed historiographically to the debate of Métis history. Her social contribution, though, is both overt and at times overshadowed by her academic contribution. Her identity as a Métis person became widely known later in her historical career as she self-identified as such in her publication of Canada’s First Nations. In her role as a Métis historian, she began to write more directly political pieces such as her
invited response to an article on the Oka crisis in 1992, “Michipicoten: Re-thinking Specific Claims Research” for the 1998 issue of the Indian Claims Commission Newsletter, or “Making Claim” for the February/March 2000 issue of the popular magazine The Beaver. Her political drive, however, can be more subtly visible in her earlier work with The Law of Nations (1989) as a bridge between the two periods. Though The Myth of the Savage may not be political in the same sense as her later works and although she chooses a different method than Cardinal or Adams did, Dickason asserts her political intent understatedly in her introduction, pointing out that the use of the terms ‘savage’ and ‘civilized’ could have been reversed.76 Her articles also support political claims, at least for those descended from the Northwest Métis, in a manner that is more profound when Dickason’s own background is exposed and recognised.

If Dickason’s work can be used for current discussions of Métis rights, so, too, can many of the studies that came out of the 1970s and 1980s. The questions that were asked then continue to be relevant now. Who are the Métis? Are they only a prairie phenomenon? If a catalyst is the key to the development of an identity of a New Nation, then certainly the battles for the Northwest are an obvious choice. Recognising the existence of Métis communities outside of the prairies does not diminish the value of the battles for the Northwest in Canadian history; instead, it allows for the acknowledgement of communities that may have developed more quietly outside the gaze of many conventional historians. To allow the focus of all Métis history to remain one of Batoche and Red River has given power to the narrative of Métis as prairie peoples such that other communities may disappear temporarily from the historical record. Dickason and many of her contemporaries argue that the Métis identity is unique to the prairie region,

76 Dickason, Myth of the Savage, xi.
however, in the expanding Métis historiography, people like Brown, Gorham, Spry and others argue that distinct Métis identities also developed outside the locales of the Northwest rebellions. Purich and Foster argue for a Métis identification that is self-determined and if Dickason’s point regarding fluidity of identity is considered, self-determined identity ought to play some part.

What are the characteristics of Métis communities upon which aboriginal rights can be claimed? Powley recognised that rights may vary across the country based on different communities. The historical studies of the post-White Paper era also show that there is not only one answer. Though the first works of de Trédmaudan and Giraud were clear in asserting which communities would have rights based on factors including French heritage, religion, location and lifestyle, the later studies showed that English-speaking Métis may have been equally widespread at the time of the early development of the communities. Scholars such as Sealey and Van Kirk show that there were a variety of lifestyles among the Métis and that different roles were played based on time and gender. Foster’s approach of questioning identity from within families allows for a more open definition of what may constitute Métis. Although Dickason supports the early conclusion that the Métis are a prairie phenomenon, her work actually allows for a more expansive view by asserting Métis identity as one developing out of contact, rather than conflict.

One complication that is evident when asking, “Who are the Métis?” is the problem of language. Though Harry Daniels may have been right in preferring to negotiate an understanding, the current role of the courts that was forced by the Powley arrest means a more concrete means of litigative definition has been set in motion.
Historically, the language varied between and among communities – it is these identities that are respected by historians such as Van Kirk when she uses the term ‘country born’. However, the fact that a Métis community did not initially identify under the label ‘Métis’ or may not now, as in the case of Grand Cache, should not now negate them from accessing rights as separate indigenous communities. Historians, rightly, respect the use of historical terminology in their studies. It is useful, then, to continue to have both social and academic works on Métis history in order to address the issue of rights from different perspectives. Scholars such as Olive Dickason gain particular authority when they meld the two worlds of the socio-political and academically grounded approaches both in their works and in their lives.

The combination of socio-political and academic histories of the seventies and eighties are quite useful in providing a background to Métis issues and concerns as the subject now receives new interest. Though other studies have been produced since the 1970s and 1980s and battles were fought politically before the successful Powley decision, much of the drive began in the eighties when Olive Dickason was establishing herself as a prominent historian. Of course, there were always Métis people who knew their own histories, and who fought for recognition, however, the seventies and eighties saw a shift in attitude that produced a larger audience willing to listen to the stories and a larger number of scholars asking the question: who are the Métis?
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