

BOOK REVIEW

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Navigating the *Medicine Line*: A Review of Hogue's Métis Borderlanders

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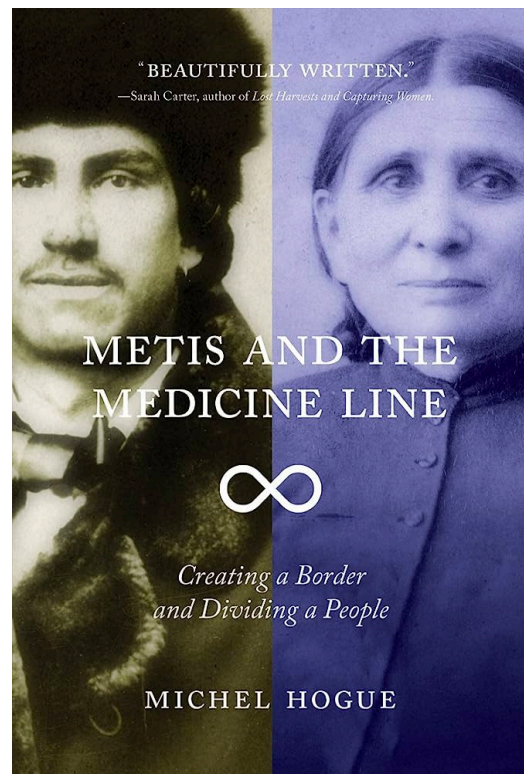
***Métis and the Medicine Line:
Creating a Border and Dividing a People***

By Michel Hogue

Regina, Canada: University of Regina Press, 2015
384 pages
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<https://uofrpress.ca/Books/M/Metis-and-the-Medicine-Line>

The two-time award-winning book *Métis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People* (2015) by Michel Hogue details the role of the Plains Métis in the creation of the Canada–United States border and the consequences that state lines brought to their communities. The Métis are descendants of 17th-century social, economic, and political kinships between transboundary North American Indigenous peoples and Europeans that united as a distinct nation in the late 18th century (Martens et al. 2011). Through 19th-century archival research, Hogue examines how the fur trade societies and notions of sovereignty and race motivated state officials in Canada and the U.S. to divide and manipulate nation-state borders in order to claim the North American West. The book challenges the traditional peaceful settlement tale of the Prairie West by accounting for decades of violent resistance



efforts against colonial state forces by the Plains Métis and other borderland Indigenous communities such as the Blackfoot, Cree, Gros Ventre, Lakota, Dakota, Nez Perce, Assiniboine, and Anishinaabe.

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Before Canada restricted border crossing mobility, the Métis would cross the 49th parallel in times of contest to find sanctuary on the other side. Métis refer to the border as the Medicine Line, the importance of the term evident throughout each of the five substantive chapters and the book's title. Chapter One describes the organisation of Métis societal, political, and economic affairs on both sides of the border by considering the environmental and economic exigencies of the year-round buffalo fur and provisions trade. The buffalo hunt was central to Métis life in the early 19th century and established political and economic networks across commercial, imperial, and national jurisdictions. Chapter Two explores the conflict between Métis and U.S. federal officials, as officials believed that Métis traders instigated Lakota resistance against U.S. expansion and compromised the governing of Indian Affairs along the 49th parallel. Also alluded to is the role of Métis in creating the border. Hogue details how political actors in Canada and the U.S. relied upon Métis intermediaries to conduct border surveys and diplomatic dealings with First Nations borderlanders.

Chapter Three concerns negotiations between the Métis, First Nations, and Canadian and U.S. officials in the 1870s through two case studies stemming from social patterns, economic rationale, fur trade economies, and ecological sustainability. The first case considers the attempt by Métis peoples to continue living in north-central Montana on the Fort Belknap Indian reservation; the second case regards the role Métis kin played in treaty negotiations between Prairie First Nations and the Canadian state. Chapter Four puts forth endeavours taken by Canada and the U.S. to displace Métis borderland settlements and the efforts Métis took in opposition. In Canada, Hogue examines the 1885 North-West Resistance, and for the U.S., he studies dualistic concepts of race, its failure to recognize Métis rights, and notions of Métis foreignness. Finally, Chapter Five recounts the North-West Half-Breed Scrip Commission in Canada and the Tribal Enrollment Commission at Fort Belknap to better understand what consequences confronted Métis families after the dissolution of their communities.

Hogue's research is thorough and compelling. However, a limitation of this book is that it overly generalises Métis. The author focuses on contentions between Métis and nation-states or First Nations communities but rarely considers political, social, and economic ideological strains within the Métis nation itself. When he reflects on Canada, only a fraction of his research is Métis-specific. Given that Métis representation in pan-Indigenous studies is disproportionately low, the book would have benefited from a more in-depth analysis of the Métis nation (Métis Centre @NAHO n.d.).

Hogue's exploration of Métis federal recognition and Métis border-crossing rights contributes greatly to border and migration studies. Whereas Canada

constitutionally recognizes Métis as an Indigenous group under Section 35 of the 1872 Constitution Act, they are not similarly recognized in the U.S. where they only receive federally recognized status if enrolled as a tribal member. In a 2018 news article, Kade Ferris, Métis descendent and member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in Belcourt, North Dakota, states: "they said to us, 'you up in Canada, you are Métis. You Métis in America? We do not know what to do with you so we are going to call some of you Ojibwe, some of you Cree'" (Hilleary 2018). *Métis and the Medicine Line* provides valuable historical context useful in unpacking and making sense of contemporary Métis recognition and identity politics.

Before the colonization of North America, Indigenous peoples did not face mobility restrictions, underlining the significance of the 1794 Jay Treaty. Great Britain and the U.S. signed this Treaty to allow Indigenous peoples to travel freely across the international boundary. It is still in effect today, permitting Indigenous peoples born in Canada—including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples—to freely enter U.S. ports of entry upon provision of documentation stating a quantum of 50 percent Indigenous blood at minimum. This book showcases how the Métis occupied and traversed both sides of the 49th parallel, underscoring the importance of the Jay Treaty within the scope of border and migration studies.

In summary, Michel Hogue weaves Métis history throughout *Métis and the Medicine Line*, creating a reflective, insightful contribution to academia. I recommend this unique read to those interested in bringing an interdisciplinary approach to critical border and migration studies in the Canadian and American context.

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