



# First Nations, Identity, and Reserve Life: The Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia

*Simone Poliandri*

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Issues of identity figure prominently in Native North American communities, mediating their histories, traditions, culture, and status. This is certainly true of the Mi'kmaq people of Nova Scotia, whose lives on reserves create highly complex economic, social, political, and spiritual realities. This ethnography investigates identity construction and negotiations among the Mi'kmaq, as well as the role of identity dynamics in Mi'kmaq social relationships on and off the reserve. Featuring direct testimonies from over sixty individuals, this work offers a vivid firsthand perspective on contemporary Mi'kmaq reserve life.

Simone Poliandri begins *First Nations, Identity, and Reserve Life* with a search for the criteria used by the Mi'kmaq to construct their identities, which are traced within the context of their different perceptions of community, tradition, spirituality, relationship with the Catholic Church, and the recent reevaluation of the iconic figure of late activist Annie Mae Aquash. Building on the notions of self-identification and ascribed identity as the primary components of identity, Poliandri argues that placing others at specific locations within the social landscape of their communities allows the Mi'kmaq to define and reinforce their own spaces by way of association, contrast, or both. This identification of others highlights Mi'kmaq people's agency in shaping and monitoring the representations of their identities. With its theoretical insights, this richly textured ethnography will enhance understanding of identity dynamics among Indigenous communities even as it illuminates the unique nature of the Mi'kmaq people.

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