

# **Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts**

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In this article, I present critical insights gained from attentiveness to the significance of the fort as a mythic symbol deeply embedded within the Canadian national narrative that reinforces the troubling colonial divides that continue to characterize Aboriginal-Canadian relations. I argue that forts have taught, and continue to teach, that Aboriginal peoples and Canadians live in separate realities. One way to rethink these relations, overcome these teachings, and decolonize educational approaches is to consider a curriculum sensibility called Indigenous Métissage. Indigenous Métissage is a place-based approach to curriculum informed by an ecological and relational understanding of the world. I provide a textual example of Indigenous Métissage that tells the complex story of a rock known to the Cree as *papamihaw asiniy*.<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION: FORTS AS MYTHIC SYMBOLS OF COLONIALISM IN CANADA

The things we give ourselves to, we become part of and they can own us.  
(Lightning, 1992, p. 244)

Fort Edmonton Park is a large historical interpretative site constructed along the banks of the North Saskatchewan River that has been designed to portray the growth of Edmonton, Alberta from fur trade fort to city. Some time ago, I spent an afternoon touring the site with my family. My memories of the place, derived from a childhood visit perhaps thirty years earlier, were focused on the impressive size of the pointed wooden stakes used to construct the exterior walls of the fort, as well as the height of the four corner towers. I remember peeking through the defensive slit holes of those corner towers and imagining what it was like for people to look at each other through a tiny hole in a wall. I was conscious of these memories as we ap-

proached the open gates of the fort.

On the way, we encountered a small *Indian*<sup>2</sup> camp occupied by present-day actors presumably playing their ancestors during the height of the fur trade era. There was a grandma making beaded jewelry, a mother drying some meat, a father fixing some snowshoes, some children playing, and a baby resting in a cradleboard propped up against a tipi. The tourists remained silent or spoke in whispers as they stood in the middle of the camp, and only occasionally did someone approach an actor to get a closer look or ask a question. Perhaps they, like me, felt as though they were intruding on the personal lives of this museum family.

We left the camp and entered the fort. While we were touring the numerous buildings, I overheard a woman say to her companions, "The Indians are dancing outside." Curious, I followed the group to a larger Indian camp constructed just outside the walls on another side of the fort. There were three tipis set up among the trees, two fires burning, some bannock and meat being cooked, singers sitting in a circle around their drum, and young people in powwow outfits preparing to dance. Visitors touring the park had left the confines of the fort and were crowding into the limited space to view the activities that were going to take place. I stayed and watched too, mostly because I was fascinated by the problem of making sense of the contrasts arising from the experience of being outside, inside, and then once again outside the walls of the fort. What I had traversed was "a crude social and spatial dichotomy" (Payne & Taylor, 2003, p. 10). In this reconstructed site, the space outside the fort walls was clearly an anthropological realm—a museum-like exhibit presumably depicting authentic renditions of Indian people and culture. Inside the walls was a more industrious place where newcomers laboured in the interests of civilizing a country and building a nation. Peers (1995) noted that virtually all major historic fur trade sites in Canada replicate this pattern of displaying Aboriginal peoples and Europeans on opposite sides of the palisades. "Interpretation at all reconstructions currently depicts a social and racial gulf between Europeans and Native peoples that denies the extraordinarily cross-cultural nature of the trade" (p. 108). These divisive civilizational myths on display at Fort Edmonton Park that day are not unique to that place. Rather, they constitute dominant and recurring threads of Canadian history and what it has meant to be a Canadian.

By using the term myth in association with forts, I don't mean to argue

that the historical reconstruction that I witnessed at Fort Edmonton Park is false or inaccurate. Instead, I believe that myths are actually truths about culture and conventional views of history that have both been deeply influenced by the stories of our country that we have been told in school. These truths are the idealized versions of history that are simplified and made coherent when we “select particular events and institutions which seem to embody important cultural values and elevate them to the status of legend” (Francis, 1997, p. 11). This is how versions of history become idealized and mythologized. Following Barthes, we can say that:

[M]yth takes a purely cultural and historical object...and transforms it into a sign of universal value...it turns culture into nature. It is this duplicity of myth, a construct which represents itself as universal and natural, which characterizes its ideological function. (Allen, 2003, pp. 36-37)

The point here is that official versions of history, which begin as cultural and contextual interpretations of events, morph into hegemonic expressions of existing value structures and worldviews of dominant groups in a society.

The purpose of this article is to consider the implications of these troubling insights for curriculum and pedagogy today. The fort, as a colonial artifact, represents a particular four-cornered version of imperial geography that has been transplanted on lands perceived as empty and unused. If we consider the curricular and pedagogical consequences of adhering to the myth that forts facilitated the civilization of the land and brought civilization to the Indians, we can see that the histories and experiences of Aboriginal peoples are necessarily positioned as outside the concern of Canadians (Donald, 2009). This reductive Canadian national narrative weighs heavily on the consciousness of Aboriginal peoples and Canadians, and continues to influence the ways in which we speak to each other about history, identity, citizenship, and the future (Francis, 1997; Saul, 2008).

Building on the insight shared by Lightning (1992), it can be stated that Canadians have given themselves so deeply to this mythic national narrative that the story has come to *own* the ways in which they conceptualize their past and present relationships with Aboriginal peoples. It has also significantly shaped the character of the institutions that have been established, maintained, and conventionalized in Canadian society. For the most part, these institutions operate according to epistemological assumptions and presup-

positions derived from the colonial project of dividing the world according to racial and cultural categories (Willinsky, 1998), which serve to naturalize assumed divides and thus contribute to their social and institutional perpetuation. Universities and schools are predicated on these colonial frontier logics<sup>3</sup> and have both served to enforce epistemological and social conformity to Eurowestern standards. Unquestioned, these idealized standards become part of official curriculum documents and find expression in the form of outcomes, goals, and objectives. I argue that the historical prominence of the fort, and the colonial frontier logics that it teaches, traces a social and spatial geography that perpetuates the belief that Aboriginal peoples and Canadians inhabit separate realities. This problem of separation, as traced by the fort walls, has become a significant curricular and pedagogical concern today.

As an educator with a keen interest in reframing curriculum so that it better serves the needs and priorities of Aboriginal communities, I have spent much time considering how such fort teachings have found expression in the stories told to children in classrooms, teaching them to divide the world in these ways (Willinsky, 1998). Historical, social, and cultural understandings of the concepts of fort and frontier have become conflated with ways of organizing and separating people according to race, culture, and civilization. The enduring message is that Aboriginal peoples and Canadians occupy separate realities. A critical social issue now being acknowledged by governments and jurisdictions across Canada concerns the roles that Aboriginal peoples, communities, and their diverse perspectives can and will play in the future of Canadian society. Provincial governments across Canada have recently introduced significant policy shifts in their curriculum documents that require meaningful consideration and exploration of Aboriginal perspectives across subject areas. Suddenly, the fort walls have become permeable. Teachers, now confronted with the spectre of Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms, are naturally finding it difficult to relinquish the more comfortable stories of Canada that they have been told and grown accustomed to telling (Donald, 2009). Such acknowledgements, initiatives, and resultant tensions suggest the need for curricular engagements that help us reread and reframe (L. Smith, 1999, pp. 149; 153-154) Aboriginal-Canadian relations in more ethical ways. Here we must ask a critical question: On what terms should this rereading and reframing be done?

With reference to curriculum, the tipis and costumes approach has been applied in classrooms for many years, but leaves teachers and students with the unfortunate impression that Indians have not done much since the buffalo were killed off and the West was settled. Attempts at the so-called inclusion of Indigenous perspectives have usually meant that an anachronistic study of Aboriginal peoples is offered as a possibility in classrooms if there is time and only if people are still interested. What are required are curricular and pedagogical engagements that traverse the divides of the past and present. Such work must contest this denial of historic, social, and curricular relationality by asserting that the perceived civilizational frontiers are actually permeable and that perspectives on history, memory, and experience are connected. To do so would foster the creation of an “ethical space” between Aboriginal peoples and Canadians that would, in turn, enable a collective rethinking of the ethical terms and conditions by which future interactions and engagements can and will be guided (Ermine, 2007). Attentiveness to *ethical space*, as Ermine (2007) conceptualized it, can help decolonize curriculum and foster the creation of a transactional sphere of public memory (Simon, 2000) in Canada wherein Aboriginal-Canadian relations can be decolonized and re-imagined. If colonialism is indeed a shared condition, then decolonization needs to be a shared endeavour. I am convinced that decolonization in the Canadian context can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared past, and engage critically with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together.

To help with rereading, reframing, and reimagining the relationships connecting Aboriginal peoples and Canadians, and thus facilitate the decolonization process in educational contexts, I suggest a curriculum sensibility termed *Indigenous Métissage*. Indigenous Métissage is a research sensibility that imagines curriculum and pedagogy together as a relational, interreferential, and hermeneutic endeavour. Doing Indigenous Métissage involves the purposeful juxtaposition of mythic historical perspectives (often framed as commonsense) with Aboriginal historical perspectives. The ethical desire is to reread and reframe historical understanding in ways that cause readers to question their own assumptions and prejudices as limited and limiting, and thus foster a renewed openness to the possibility of broader and deeper understandings that can transverse perceived cultural, civilizational, and

temporal divides. One central goal of doing Indigenous Métissage is to promote ethical relationality as a curricular and pedagogical standpoint. Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or invisibilize the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a particular person understands and experiences living in the world. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference.

The remainder of this article is dedicated to a detailed examination of Indigenous Métissage as a research sensibility and a textual example of Indigenous Métissage focused on the story of *papamihaw asiniy* or *flying rock*.

#### INDIGENIZING AND REPATRIATING COLONIAL SPACES: INDIGENOUS MÉTISSAGE

One of the central curricular and pedagogical challenges of decolonization is to contest the assumption that the historical experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada are their own separate cultural preoccupations. In settler societies with significant and influential Indigenous populations, such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, the growing involvement and prominence of Indigenous peoples in the public affairs of the nation has made this separation untenable. Indigenous peoples are increasingly asserting notions of historical consciousness, citizenship, and nationhood that are informed by their place-based philosophies, ceremonial practices, and ontological priorities in relation to their lands as they know them (Borrows, 2000; Turner, 2006; Stewart-Harawira, 2005; Nakata, 2007). These assertions contest colonial frontier logics by instead emphasizing the relationality and connectivity that comes from living together in a place for a long time. The implication here is that colonialism is a shared condition wherein colonizers and colonized come to know each other very well.

Based on this position, I argue that curricular and pedagogical work dedicated to the goal of decolonization in Canada must engage critically with the colonial nature of the relationships connecting Aboriginal peoples and Canadians and the logics that circumscribe them. The relationships are deeply rooted in colonial processes and must be understood as a series of layers (McLeod, 2002, p. 36). The layers symbolize the sediments of experi-

ence and memory that come to characterize the contested cultural terrain in which particular places and contexts have a shared, albeit contested, significance. The spirit and intent of this emphasis on the notion of layeredness is to foster attentiveness to an ethic of historical consciousness. This ethic holds that the past occurs simultaneously in the present and influences how we conceptualize the future. It requires that we see ourselves related to, and implicated in, the lives of those who have gone before us and those yet to come. It is an ethical imperative to recognize the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences are layered and position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people similarly are tied together. It is also an ethical imperative to see that, despite our varied place-based cultures and knowledge systems, we live in the world together with others and must constantly think and act with reference to these relationships. Any knowledge we gain about the world interweaves us more deeply with these relationships and gives us life.

In working towards a relational, interreferential, and decolonizing curriculum, I have spent the last several years conceptualizing a textual and interpretive sensibility called *métissage* that could be applied to curriculum studies in Canada (Donald, 2003; Donald, 2004). *Métissage*, from which the Canadian word *Métis* is derived, is a word of French language origin, loosely translated into English as crossbreeding that originally referred to racial mixing and procreation as detrimental (Dickason, 1984, p. 21). More recently, *métissage* has been used to denote cultural mixing or the hybridization of identities as a result of colonialism and transcultural influences. Glissant (1989) analyzed the cultural hybridity of the people of the Caribbean and asserts that it is an expression of the sense of displacement, dislocation, and lack of collective memory experienced as a result of the history of slavery and colonialism. The intermixing of people from all over the world in the Caribbean region has caused, almost out of necessity, a reconciliation of the values of literate societies and repressed oral traditions (Glissant, 1989, pp. 248-249). The result has been the growth and nurturing of a particular kind of *métissage* or cultural "creolization" praxis and process that expresses an ongoing rapprochement between cultures and people usually essentialized and considered to be at odds (pp. 140-141).

Reflecting on the social and cultural dynamics at play in the Caribbean context, Glissant (1989) conceptualized *métissage* as a cultural process that

requires a shift in thinking from a preoccupation with individual imagination and identity (intention) to an emphasis on group consciousness (relation) (Dash, 1995, p. 91). This group consciousness can only be established if people are willing to negotiate and work past persistent racial and binary categories of difference that serve to essentialize and segregate identity. For Glissant, this notion of creolization “is an active, affirmative principle of cultural heterogeneity and innovation” (Zuss, 1997, p. 167). With this point, Glissant emphasized that human relationality becomes an organic cultural process when we work to see beyond parochial and imposed understandings of self, history, and context.

In the field of education, Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt & Donald (2002), working with autobiography as a critical point of departure, theorized *métissage* as a curricular practice that can be used to resist the priority and authority given to official texts and textual practices. This curricular form of *métissage* shows how personal and family stories can be braided in with larger narratives of nation and nationality, often with provocative effects. The metaphor of the braid (exemplified by the Métis sash and sweetgrass) and the notion of the *métissage* researcher as the weaver of a textual braid are integral to *métissage* praxis because they provide a certain unity of vision regarding the relational ethics guiding the work (Chambers et al., 2008, p.p. 141-142). The metaphor of the braid addresses the question: “What does *métissage* look like” (p. 141)?

The act of weaving a textual braid of diverse texts provides a means for *métissage* researchers to express the interconnectedness of wide and diverse influences in an ethically relational manner. The assumption is that braiding in these ways will facilitate a textual encounter of diverse perspectives that creates a provocative interpretive engagement. The creation of texts and stories that emphasize human connectivity can complexify understandings of the significance of living together that traverse perceived frontiers of difference. One of the vital beginnings for such a project is an awareness of the “historically constituted present state of affairs, with the capacity for illuminating how any humanly livable future begins by acknowledging those historically derived debts and obligations that are part of any identity of the present” (D. Smith, 1999, p. 10). We must pay closer attention to the multiple ways our human sense of living together is constructed through the minutiae of day-to-day events, through the stories and interactions which always are



imbued with a living principle of reciprocity, and hence moral responsibility for a shared future. After all, as *kainai* Elder Andy Blackwater advised, our tipis are all held down by the same pegs now.

So, rather than viewing *métissage* as a solitary research and textual praxis, this form of *métissage* relies on collaboration and collective authorship as a strategy for exemplifying, as research practice and text, the transcultural, interdisciplinary, and shared nature of experience and memory. *Métissage*, in this example, calls for authors to work “collectively to juxtapose their texts in such a way that highlights difference (racial, cultural, historical, socio-political, linguistic) without essentializing or erasing it, while simultaneously locating points of affinity” (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142). Intimate relationality in specific contexts and the implicative nature of experience are key aspects of this work. As a research practice, *métissage* is focused on relationality and the curricular and pedagogical desire to treat texts—and lives—as relational and braided rather than isolated and independent.

However, there is a clear need to theorize, in curricular terms, colonial relationality and recognize the ironic intimacy of colonizer and colonized (Nandy, 1983). What is needed is a theory of *métissage* focused on colonial experience that demonstrates that Aboriginal peoples and Canadians have deeply historical relationships that continue to manifest themselves in ambiguous ways to the present day. An acceptance of this interpretation of history, however, hinges on the recognition that “there is no hors-Indigène, no geopolitical or psychic setting, no real or imagined terra nullius free from the satisfactions and unsettlements of Indigenous (pre)occupation” (Findlay, 2000, p. 309). This recognition is necessary to counteract the systemic ways in which Indigenous knowledge systems, values, and historical perspectives have been written out of the ‘official’ version of the building of the Canadian nation. This “writing out’ has led to a massive misunderstanding of Indigenous perspectives on the part of the average Canadian citizen. So, how can we reread history to show that the actual interactions between Aboriginal peoples and Canadians were, and continue to be, more complex than colonial binaries can possibly recount?

Following Findlay (2000) and L. Smith (1999), I suggest that an Indigenous approach, a sensibility conceived and developed in this place we now call Canada, would work best. Indigenous *Métissage* begins with specific Indigenous historical and cultural perspectives as initial points of inquiry, and

works to expand the inquiry by showing how the process of colonialism has filtered and altered those perspectives until something is produced that the larger Canadian society recognizes and comprehends as theirs. I have several reasons for using the term Indigenous in combination with *métissage*. First, Indigenous *Métissage* is focused on interpreting and reframing the historical and contemporary interactions of Aboriginal peoples and Canadians. The significance of these interactions will certainly be informed by Indigenous philosophies, ethics, and ways of knowing, but will not be specifically limited to those perspectives. Therefore, the use of the term indigenous does not connote an exclusionary type of *métissage* done for, by and with Aboriginal people only. The term is used to draw attention to the idea that the kinds of interactions that I have in mind with this type of inquiry must be interpreted in a Canadian context. In that sense, they are specific in origin or indigenous to Canada; they could not happen elsewhere.

Second, Indigenous *Métissage* is about particular places in Canada. There are sites across Canada that have contentious histories in that the stories that Aboriginal peoples tell of them do not seem to coincide with Canadians' perspectives on those same places. Often, cities, towns and communities across Canada have been built on places that have specific cultural, spiritual, and social significance to Aboriginal peoples, and Canadians living in those places do not and cannot have those same connections. Such affinities for significant places in the cultural landscape are often mapped through oral histories. Aboriginal peoples come to know the land and identify with significant places through the stories. The place-stories, as mnemonic triggers, locate and narrate the events of the land called home. A place-story, as oral tradition, "anchors history to *place*, but it also challenges our notion of what a place actually *is*" (Cruikshank, 1994, p. 413). Stories that Aboriginal peoples tell about places in Canada can trouble historic myths and prompt Canadians to question the depth of their understanding of the familiar places that they call home (Donald, 2004; Blood & Chambers, 2006; Blood & Chambers, 2008). Indigenous *Métissage* works to interpret mixed understandings of these places as a way to explore deep historical relationships to particular places in Canada. In the context of Canadian education, place-stories can help people reread and reframe their understandings of Canadian history as layered and relational, and thus better comprehend ongoing Indigenous presence and participation. For these reasons, place has become a key aspect

of Indigenous Métissage.

Third, to provide an aperture into the unique character and complexity of particular places, interpretations stemming from Indigenous Métissage are grounded in the use of a specific artifact that comes from a particular place. The artifact must be considered *indigenous* to the place in that it is perceived to belong there, naturally or characteristically. Artifacts are products of culture that are symbolic of added meaning or significance, “tangible incarnations of social relationships embodying the attitudes and behaviors of the past” (Beaudry, Cook, & Mrozowki, 1991, p. 150). Artifacts are imbued with meaning when human hands craft them, but also when humans conceptualize them as *storied* aspects of their world. A rock can be considered an artifact when it is fashioned into an arrow point. At the same time, a rock can also be considered an artifact if it is directly associated with a particular place and the history, culture, language and spirituality of a people. It is worthwhile to quote Holland and Cole (1995) at length here:

An artifact is an aspect of the material world that has a collectively remembered use. It has been, and in the case of living artifacts continues to be, modified over the history of its incorporation in goal directed human action....their material form has been shaped by their participation in the interactions of which they were previously a part and which they mediate in the present. They are, in effect, one form of history in the present. Their history, collectively remembered, constitutes their ideal aspect. (p. 476)

In other words, even though most artifacts are tangible, there are subtle and abstract meanings and concepts—metaphysicalities—attached to their physical matter that emanate from their history, their use and the ways they are presently being conceptualized based upon this history.

I use artifact in a socio-cultural and historical sense to denote a living vestige fecund with contested interpretations of culture and identity rather than in an archaeological sense referring to findings fit for museums that attempt to capture and define meanings of culture and identity. Doing Indigenous Métissage allows a researcher to interpret the significance of an artifact to a place by showing how Aboriginal and Canadian perspectives of the artifact and place are rooted in colonial histories and logics that are both simultaneously and paradoxically antagonistic and conjoined. In many ways, these types of contradictions and ambiguities are reflective of what

it means to be an Aboriginal person in Canada today. Theorizing enables a thoughtful engagement with these uncertainties by providing a space to plan, conceptualize, strategize, and make cogent various forms of resistance to the logic of the fort (L. Smith, 1999, p. 38).

#### DOING INDIGENOUS MÉTISSAGE: THE STORY OF *PAPAMIHAW ASINIY*

What does a rock *mean*? To Aboriginal peoples of the Prairies, rocks are significant, and deeply spiritual, markers on the land because of their visual prominence on the open prairie. In the past, they could be seen from miles away and this enabled travelers to orient themselves as they travelled throughout their territory. Rocks were helpers in this regard and continue to be respected and honoured for providing guidance in this way.

Two tenets of traditional Indigenous philosophy support the notion that rocks are spiritual entities. The first is that rocks are manifestations of ancient forms of life that provide people with connections to the past. Rocks remind us of the creation of the world and human kinship with all subsequent forms of life stemming from creation and the work of the Creator (Hill, 2008; Little Bear, 1998, p. 18). Rocks are viewed as animate in that they have vitality to them, an internal hum of energy that, in a spiritual way, retells the stories of Creation. This energy reminds us of where the rocks have been and what they have seen prior to occupying their present place. As Willie Ermine (1995) explained, the fundamental insight gained from viewing energy in this way is that all existence is connected and that the whole of creation is enmeshed in each entity that comprises it (p. 103).

To the Plains Cree, considerations of life forms like rocks, as integral parts of nature, as energy, as heat, as movement are also insights into “*muntou*,” (Ermine, 1995, p. 104) the mystery of life that manifests itself in diverse forms. *Muntou* inhabits the rocks and the places where rocks dwell. To delve into the energy of these entities is to place oneself in a web of relationality and acknowledge the connectedness of all beings. In this view, rocks comprise the landscape and give energy to the world in the same way that plants, animals and people do. As such, they are considered the ancient relatives of more recent forms of life. This ancient connectedness makes them worthy of respect as our metaphysical elders in the world today. Indigenous languages allow for people to speak to and pay homage to rocks without being thought crazy

because the foundational philosophies that support the cultures conceptualize rocks as animate, as relatives, as spirits. As such, rocks have their own stories to tell. Vine Deloria (1991) expressed these ideas this way:

Power and place are dominant concepts – power being the living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe, and place being the relationship of things to each other...put into a simple equation: Power and place produce personality. This equation simply means that the universe is alive, but it also contains within it the very important suggestion that the universe is personal, and therefore, must be approached in a personal manner...The personal nature of the universe demands that each and every entity in it seek and sustain personal relationships. (pp. 22-23)

A second spiritual quality of rocks, deeply connected to the first, is that rocks are located at places that have a history—a story—and wisdom on how to live a good life comes from looking closely at the place and listening carefully, over and over again, to the story. Specific rocks become significant to the people when the story of how they got to their present place becomes an essential way of teaching about the land and living well on it (Christiansen, 2000, pp. 34-46; Bullchild, 1985, pp. 167-171). Read the words of Dudley Patterson, a Western Apache elder:

Wisdom sits in places. It's like water that never dries up ... You must remember what happened at them long ago. You must think about it and keep thinking about it ... You will be wise. People will respect you. (Basso, 1996, p. 126)

The important point about rocks and place-stories is that the rocks, as animate entities, have an energy to them that is forever in flux—constantly changing, transforming, combining and recombining. This cyclic energy is what gives the rock its spiritual quality.

When one sees the world in this way there are two general premises that result. One is that the constant flux process of energy means that everything is related through the cyclic nature of energy flows. The second is that we must look at the world holistically and search for regular observable patterns in nature as a way to make sense of the world and our place in it. As *kainai* scholar Little Bear (2000) explained, the earth is the place “where the continuous and/or repetitive process of creation occurs. It is on the earth that cycles, phases, patterns—in other words, the constant motion or flux—can be observed” (p.78). This search for patterns accounts for the emphasis

on renewal in Indigenous ceremonies and prayers. The desire is to honour cycles, patterns, and flows through ceremonial avowal of human affiliations with the land and significant places. Through prayer and ceremony, we participate in the natural patterns and renew intimate relationships with those entities that give us life.

There are rocks on the Prairies that are prominent sites of spiritual renewal and pilgrimage for Aboriginal peoples. There is a certain rock that I know that once sat on a prominent hill above a tributary of the Battle River named Iron Creek in the region we now call east central Alberta. This rock was a spiritual protector of the buffalo and a powerful reminder of all the generous gifts provided the people by *iihtsipáitapiyo'pa*—the Source of Life to the Blackfoot people. The rock fell from the sky, a gift from the Above Beings. It is known to the Cree as *papamihaw asiniy*—*flying rock*—because of the way it got to the earth. The story is that the people witnessed the rock's fiery fall from the sky. They watched the *flying rock* tumble down and then disappear from their view when it hit the earth. This was viewed as a very significant spiritual event.

When the people went to the place where *papamihaw asiniy* had landed, they must have approached it cautiously and with reverence. The life force, energy, and the heat that the *flying rock* brought to the earth must have scorched the grass in a wide circle extending far outside of the impact impression it made on the land. What could this rock mean?

The fact that the rock landed at a place where the traditional territories of the Blackfoot and Cree overlap was not overlooked. The area was contested as both tribes vied for access to the rich resources there. Anthony Henday, the first official European to visit the region, followed Cree guides into the area in the fall of 1754. He described the country this way: "Level land, with plenty of fruit trees; plenty of Moose, Waskesew, Swans, Cranes, White & Grey Geese, also a few Ducks ..." (MacGregor, 1976, p. 7). A few days later he scribbled these notes: "...traveled 7 miles W.S.W. Level land, no woods to be seen; passed by a lake; the Buffalo so numerous obliged to make them sheer out of the way. Also Wolves without number, lurking Indians killed a great many Buffalo" (p. 8-9) Then later Henday added: "I cannot describe the fineness of the Weather and the pleasant country that I am now in" (p. 10).

The Cree and Blackfoot certainly knew the value of this country. That is why they often found themselves at war over it. But perhaps *papamihaw*

*asiniy* brought a message from the Creator that the Cree and Blackfoot should change the way they regarded this land and the resources it gave them. Perhaps the *flying rock* was sent to this contested territory by the Sky Beings to remind the people that no one can own the land or the buffalo. These were meant to be held in common, openly and respectfully shared by all. Perhaps *papamihaw asiniy* was symbolic of the desire of the Sky Beings to create a neutral zone in this area.

*Papamihaw asiniy*, as Chambers (2003) has observed, became an important site of pilgrimage for the Cree, Blackfoot, and other Aboriginal groups living in the region. Visiting the place gave one an opportunity to thank the Creator for what the people had and to ask for continued blessings for the generations to come. In voicing such prayers was an acknowledgement that the people had to do their part by respecting the resources that they had been provided, not wasting, by remembering the ways in which their lives were deeply connected to the vitality of all other beings. People visiting *papamihaw asiniy* left offerings to show that they had remembered these things (Cuthand, 2007, pp. 15-16; Dempsey, 1984, p. 37). Thus, respecting the energy and the mystery of the rock and the place was considered an important ritual. It brought hope and renewal for the coming year.

Then, a newcomer visited the flying rock and, not comprehending its power and spiritual energy, he had it carried away in a horse cart. This was John McDougall, a Methodist missionary working in the area. McDougall (1971) viewed the spiritual reverence for *papamihaw asiniy* as a major obstacle to his Christianizing and civilizing efforts. From McDougall's perspective, in spite of the evidence of offerings around it, the stone was just a meteorite. Evidence of his civilizing motives can be found in one of his books recounting his missionary work with the Cree, Blackfoot and Stoney wherein McDougall described a thirst dance ceremony that he attended in the valley of Iron Creek within sight of *papamihaw asiniy*. He concludes the section with this grand statement: "To-day we have a wild nomadic heathen life, but doubtless in the near to-morrow this will give way to permanent settlement, and the church and school will bring in the clearer light of a larger and fuller revelation" (p. 89). It seems that McDougall misunderstood the significance of the rock and considered its removal a necessary part of his civilizing mission.

*Papamihaw asiniy* was clearly out of place at McDougall's Victoria Mis-

sion where it sat when it was described by a traveler who saw it there in 1866:

In the farmyard of the mission-house there lay a curious block of metal of immense weight; it was rugged, deeply indented, and polished on the outer edges of the indentations by the wear and friction of many years. Its history was a curious one. Longer than any man could say, it had laid on the summit of a hill far out in the southern prairies. It had been a medicine stone of surpassing virtue among the Indians over a vast territory... And it was no wonder that this metallic stone should be a Manito-stone and an object of intense veneration for the Indian; it had come down from heaven; it did not belong to the earth, but had descended out of the sky; it was, in fact, an aerolite. (Butler, 1968, p. 304)

Once the people of the area realized that the flying rock had been removed, they considered the act a very bad sign foretelling of terrible things to come. Elders prophesied that war, disease, and famine would result (Dempsey, 1984, pp. 37-38; Cuthand, 2007, p. 16). In the four years following McDougall's civilizing act, these prophesies came true. The buffalo became much harder to find. Warfare and killing increased as the hungry people competed for the scarce buffalo still to be found in the area. Smallpox killed approximately half of all Aboriginal peoples living on the Prairies in 1869-70 (Alberta Historical Review, 1963). The people were soon languishing on reserves.

Once McDougall realized that his possession of the flying rock did not bring him more converts to Christianity, he shipped *papamihaw asiniy* from his Victoria Mission to Ontario. It was placed on a pedestal between the two front doors of the chapel on the campus of Victoria College in Cobourg. Students could touch it as they entered the building for prayers. Eventually, it was donated to the Royal Museum of Ontario, and the flying rock sat in that place for almost a century.

While at the Museum, the rock attracted the attention of curious scientists from around the world. In 1886, a scientist working at Victoria College subjected *papamihaw asiniy* to its first scientific investigation. Some of the details of his report show how the story and significance of the *flying rock* were transformed (Spratt, 1989, p. 87):

In outline, this meteorite is irregularly triangular and much broader than it is thick. Its surface shows the usual rounded and pitted appearance. It consists of solid metal, with scarcely a trace of stony matter, and only a



slight oxidation of the surface...

The specific gravity of the metal is 7.784 ...An analysis gives the following results:

Iron .....	91.83%
Nickel .....	8.83%
Cobalt .....	0.49%

Samples of various sizes were eventually chipped off *papamihaw asiniy* by scientists who wanted to know more about the rock. These samples were sent to the Field Museum Natural History in Chicago, Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., Natural History Museum in Vienna, American Museum of Natural History in New York, British Museum Natural History in London, and the Geological Survey of Canada in Ottawa. In a strange twist of its story, offerings were being made *from the flying rock* instead of *to* it. Those offerings were sent away to strange places, further distanced from the Prairies where the *flying rock* had a place and a story that the people remembered. But that is what happens in a museum. The story of the artifact and the significance of the place that it comes from must be ignored. The artifact must be de-personalized and renamed, its original power and place must be removed and replaced so that it can be objectified, analyzed and shelved.

John Willinsky (1998) has written in detail on the role of the museum in the colonial project and makes this statement regarding the processes involved:

The educational qualities of Western imperialism began with the amateur naturalist gathering specimens and artifacts while recording the lay of the land...The themes of discovery, conquest, possession, and dominion are about ways of knowing the world, of surveying, mapping, and classifying it in an endless theorizing of identity and difference ....Over the last five centuries, the spectacles of empire were harnessed through what might be termed an exhibitionary pedagogy. The West came to see the world as a lesson in its own achievement. (p. 85)

By removing *papamihaw asiniy* from its place, McDougall began a process that became much more than simply civilizing and Christianizing the Indians in the area by removing a sacred rock. The removal of the rock allowed the place to be re-imagined and allowed the Prairies to be redefined in ways more conducive to EuroCanadian notions of land use and ownership. To rename *papamihaw asiniy* as Manitou Stone and place it in a museum is a

sovereign act. Canadian sovereignty over the area, at the expense of Aboriginal peoples, was achieved through the assertion that the significance of the land and places where rocks and stories dwell was superseded by the dream of open empty land so attractive to settlers. The creation story of the Canadian West depends on the transformation of the land to better serve the needs of market capitalism and the habits and priorities of Homo Oeconomicus<sup>4</sup> or "Economic Man". Anything Indigenous leftover from processes of progress and development was regarded as unfortunate detritus best located in a museum storeroom or summarized in the margins of scientific notes. In those days, papamihaw asiniy had no place in the future of Canada.

The flying rock was returned to the Prairies in 1972. It was renamed the Manitou Stone and has sat on open display at the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton ever since. Some people think that papamihaw asiniy should be liberated from the museum and put back in its place, thus given back to the people that know its story. Repatriating papamihaw asiniy would bring much spiritual healing to the communities most affected by its removal. Such healing would mark a new era for Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

## CONCLUSION

I began this article with presentation of the argument that colonial frontier logics that stem from fort teachings have had a dramatic influence in educational contexts and the stories told to children about Aboriginal-Canadian relations. This influence can be seen in curricular and pedagogical approaches that teach that the cultural and knowledge system differences separating Aboriginal and Canadian are stark, vast, and must be overcome. The stories told to children in schools about Aboriginal peoples have been largely based on a Eurowestern theory of primitivism that unilaterally places Indigenousness outside comprehension and acknowledgment. Even though times have changed and public policy priorities have shifted, and Indigenous ways are gaining some prominence in Canada, these exclusionary colonial practices are still replicated and perpetuated.

So, in light of the divisiveness taught through colonial frontier logics, which curricular and pedagogical commitments offer the most hopeful possibilities for decolonization and renewed partnerships connecting Aboriginal peoples and Canadians? My response to this challenge is informed from my interactions with *kainai* (Blood) Elders who have repeatedly reminded

me that teaching is a responsibility and an act of kindness viewed as movement toward connectivity and relationality. Through the reciprocal process of teaching and learning, we move closer together. This movement towards holistic interreferentiality and recognition of difference has resonances with ecological understandings of the earth that are antithetical to the teleologies currently shaping the habits and priorities of *Homo Oeconomicus*. Universalized market logics that seemingly justify intensified resource exploitation and voracious consumerism are indeed deeply connected to the violence—epistemic, institutional, and otherwise—that has been committed in accordance with fort teachings. It is the denial of connectivity that allows such violence and exploitation to continue. I am convinced that we require a new or renewed ethical framework that clarifies the terms by which we can speak to each other about these pressing issues of shared concern. This is the visionary spirit and intent of Indigenous Métissage. The curricular and pedagogical enactment of ethical forms of relationality has become a matter of survival.

For various reasons, I emphasize land and place as key aspects of Indigenous Métissage and decolonization of curriculum and pedagogy. The most significant reason for this is a fascination with the connectivity between place and identity, and how my ancestors choose to map their territory as a way to express who they think they are. Indigenous place-stories and mapping conventions are expressions of sovereignty that are deeply influenced by wisdom traditions and provide specific examples of how to recognize the land as relative and citizen. I am interested in bringing these insights to bear as curricular and pedagogical considerations because they belie the assumed universality of conventional Eurowestern approaches. I think there is much to be learned about citizenship and the land from holding these two mapping traditions in tension.

Following Borrows (2000), an Anishinabék scholar, I view the story of *papamihaw asiniy* as an opportunity to teach about “landed citizenship.” Borrows argued that demographic realities will soon require that Aboriginal peoples play a larger role in the affairs of Canada. Aboriginal peoples will soon have a responsibility to teach others what it means to be a citizen living on this land. What this means is that Canadians begin to view their notions of citizenship as rooted in the land and the stories coming from particular places in Canada. Borrows believes that this notion of “Aboriginal citizenship

must be extended to encompass other people from around the world who have come to live on our land" (p. 329). Teaching about landed citizenship involves an acknowledgment that Aboriginal peoples still honour places made meaningful by earlier generations. It means that places are still inhabited by "muntou" (Ermine, 1995, p. 104) and still have a story. But, landed citizenship also requires an acknowledgement that such places have changed as a result of colonization and settlement. It means that such places are, paradoxically, simultaneously Aboriginal and Canadian.

## NOTES

- 1 Following the textual practices of McLeod (2007), I will not capitalize the Cree or Blackfoot words used in this article regardless of where they appear in a sentence. This is an aesthetic choice intended to emphasize difference and make the point that Indigenous language use not need conform to conventions of English language use.
- 2 I use this term purposefully. My intent is to draw attention to the tensions associated with the use of the term *Indian* today. These tensions are deeply rooted in the colonial takeover processes inflicted on Aboriginal peoples which were largely informed by the idea of the Imaginary *Indian* as a generic social and cultural icon, frozen in time, and incapable of adjusting to change (Francis, 1992). Although the concept of *Indian* has been revealed as a misnomer disrespectful of Aboriginal history, tradition, and subjectivity, it still has surprisingly powerful cultural connotations in Canada today. I use *Indian* in this article to acknowledge these ongoing tensions salient at places like forts that have been recreated as museums.
- 3 Colonial frontier logics are those epistemological assumptions and presuppositions, derived from the colonial project of dividing the world according to racial and cultural categorizations, which serve to naturalize assumed divides and thus contribute to their social and institutional perpetuation.
- 4 *Homo Oeconomicus* is most often translated as 'Economic Man.' However, the term *homo* actually refers to the human species as a whole and not just 'man.' See Persky (1995) for more on this.

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