THE COLONIAL IMPACT OF THE ERASURE OF BLACKFOOT MIISTAKISTSI PLACE NAMES IN PAAHTOMAHKSIKIMI, WATERTON LAKES NATIONAL PARK

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ABSTRACT

The Miistakis (mountains) in Paahtomahksikimi (Waterton Lakes National Park) are sacred for Niitsitapi. The experience of fasting in the mountains is what brought us our healing wisdom from thousands of years ago. When we fast, we call the mountain by its name, for its spiritual presence to be connected to us. The colonial erasure of Blackfoot names and the imposition of European names by colonizers disrupted that relationship, and our access to practise Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) and fasting.

I bring a Blackfoot methodology based on lived experience and the transferring of oral history, of knowing from land, and of my language, Niitsipowahsin (Blackfoot). I bring this knowledge transferred from time immemorial, of the relationship between mountains and the Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest), into the learning space. My purpose is to record the impact of the mountains no longer being called by their Blackfoot names, and to begin decolonizing the process of obtaining a PhD.

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A NOTE TO THE READER

Oki, niitanikko Ninna Piiksii, Chief Bird. As the author, I want to give instructions to my paper. I want people to read my dissertation beginning with me instructing them how to read my material.

I am talking about Kainai or Apaitsitapi (Weasel People). I would like the reader to look at this from a Kainai perspective and read it from Kainai thought. I am not talking about other Western thought; I am talking about my perspective. I want you to read it this way, my way.

I am going to use Kainayssini, our Declaration. Under every Blackfoot sacred Society, we come up with our own metaphysics. Kainayssini is proof of that metaphysics:

> The Creator put on this earth all people with a unique culture and language to occupy a specific territory of land to fulfil his purpose for creation. Thus, WE, THE MEMBERS OF KAINAIWA, a member of the Blackfoot Confederacy; speak the Blackfoot language; among other things, hold Ninastako and Mookowanssini as sacred monuments; which among other beliefs, include the Sundance; socially and tribally organized into extended families, clans and tribes; govern ourselves according to customs given to our people by the Creator; presently occupying the Blood Indian Reserve, lying between the Belly and St. Mary's rivers; to maintain ourselves under guidance of our Creator; To initiate a sense of responsibility to our people and nation; To continue to seek better means of survival; To provide for an orderly and accepted way of carrying on our culture; To allow freedom of expression and diversity; and in general, to promote the rights, powers and welfare of our Nation; under the powers we hold as sovereign people, do ordain and establish the "TRIBAL SYSTEM."
>
> DECLARATION OF THE ELDERS OF THE BLOOD TRIBE NATION
>
> WHEREAS the Declaration of the First Nations, as adopted by the Chiefs of Canada to which of Chief, Roy Fox, is a signatory, express the philosophy of the Elders of the Blood Indian Nation;
>
> AND WHEREAS the Elders recognize that the Blood Indian Nation has always existed as a Nation from time immemorial;
>
> AND WHEREAS the Elders recognize the trust held by our Chief and Council to protect our inherent rights given to us by our Creator for our children and for generations to come;

AND WHEREAS the Elders are desirous of ensuring that the Chief and Council of our Nation are responsible for and accountable to the membership of the Blood Indian Nation as represented by a responsible Indian Government;

NOW THEREFORE, the Elders of the Blood Tribe Indian Nation hereby declare that the leaders of our Nation ensure to its membership the following:

1. To ensure that the spirit and intent of Treaty 7 be fulfilled and protected of which of ancestors were signatories.
2. The protection and assertion of our inherent right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination be maintained by codifying those traditional and customary values and beliefs as practised by our people, who recognize the principal of the Supremacy of the Creator.
3. To fulfil the obligations and responsibilities entrusted to the Chief and Council by the membership in working toward the best interests of the Blood Indian Nation.
4. To enhance the pursuit and retrieval of alienated rights and lands that rightfully belonged to our Nation and safeguard ALL rights and lands against present and future intrusion.
5. To protect and maintain our aboriginal rights, and especially those aboriginal rights to our lands.

THE ELDERS OF THE BLOOD INDIAN NATION HEREBY RATIFY AND CONFIRMS THIS DECLARATION.[1]

In this thesis, I have used Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work, a Maori educator who speaks about Indigenous values and methodology. Then I've used Margaret Kovach, who uses First Nations methodology, thoughts, and processes. Then I have made reference to Blackfoot thought, of the four tribes in general—the commonality of ceremonies, songs. Then further to that I have concentrated on Kainai, Apaitsitapi, the Weasel People: the thought that arises from our collective Kainai people. Then I have brought it home to myself, Ninna Piiksii. I want the reader to be able to read it from that aspect: that this work includes me. Throughout my writing,

[1] Kainai Studies Department (1985). "Kainaissini" Blood Tribe Constitution. Red Crow College. Blackfoot Digital Library, https://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/digital/collection/bdl/id/1410/rec/4.

especially on Itaksiistsimoo'pi, the Vision Quests, it's me. That's how I have approached this. Why I have expressed myself is that I'm going to present my personal thoughts and experiences, after the collective thinking of my people: my dream, my vision, my personal experience, that I am drawing on for this paper. I am coming from a wider spectrum rather than the narrow thinking of many scholars. That is why I am telling people: read this thesis the Kainai way, Weasel People way, my way—and not necessarily your way. If I was doing a Western paper, then they would be looking at it their way and my work would be their way. But this is not their way. So I am boldly asking the readers: read it my way. Read it the Blackfoot way.

It's all part of story, from a narrow process to a wider spectrum. There is nothing saying or telling me that the wider spectrum is wrong. There's no such thing. In fact, the wider Blackfoot, Kainai, Ninna Piiksii spectrum, is teaching everybody of many things. That is why I am doing this paper, to be allowed to present something from my lived experience, from my collection of storytelling from my Elders—that is what I am presenting. I am the author of this paper, which should be accepted. In the end, it may turn people off, even though residential schools, the reserve system of 1884, the colonial application of written education have attempted to make me into a Brown-White Blood Indian, which I will never be. I will never truly fit into the colonial academic system. I'm just sticking to my tribal roots and to my own spirit, my spiritual name, Ninna Piiksii.

PREAMBLE

It was in 1994 when an old man came to me and said I needed to go sleep at Ninastako, Chief Mountain. This dream came to me in April 1994, and it was on my mind. The dream was quite extensive, quite in-depth, but I will not totally share that here. And so it was the third week in July after the annual Kainai Indian Days, the following Wednesday, when I purified myself through a Stiskaan (sacred sweat lodge ceremony) conducted by other Elders, and I told them of my journey. I had a broken ankle and I was hobbling using one crutch, and so they drove me up as far as they could drive, on the Montana side of Ninastako. My journey had begun by July. I spent four days, four nights on something that I really didn't know what to expect. I didn't do it to be a super-Kainaikoan, a super Indian; I just followed the direction of this old man that came to me in my house, in my dream, and where I was to fast, where I was to sit.

I found the location; it was right underneath Ninastako (Chief Mountain), right at the edge. Every morning, even at night with the lights, I could see as far as Lethbridge; Duck Lake, Montana on this side; Pincher Creek; and as far as Claresholm and possibly Picture Butte—and the Blood Reserve, Cardston. It was a pretty high location, to fulfill that dream. I didn't want to wait another year; I didn't want anything to happen to me or my family. In a way, I had a choice, but in another way, I didn't have a choice; I had to fulfill it. It was almost like a vow. I spent four days, four nights. And every day, I would look to the other mountains and wonder, "what are the names of these mountains? How come I don't know them?" Here on the Montana side, we come to fast at Ninastako (Chief Mountain), which is ideal for fasting. But at the same time I thought, "I wonder how it would be to fast on the Canadian side?" Then I thought, "how can I fast there when I don't know the spiritual names of the mountains? Would

I be sleeping or sitting there for nothing?" That's when it dawned on me: with no literature written about Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests), but people talk about relationship to nature, to land, land-based learning; that all came to me as I sat there four days, four nights. It was the most powerful life experience that I have ever gone through. I was educated in the white world of schooling, but this was beyond that. However, in this dissertation, I am not going to share what happened to me and who came to me.

Since 1994, when I came back down from the mountains, one message from the Awahskataaks (spiritual Elders) I shared because everybody was asking me, "how was it? What did you do?" I only shared briefly with them. I have not told my full spiritual story, though I will share it in a few more years. I am too respectful of what happened. Those four days I heard and I saw a lot of things. But it also provided me absolute Blackfoot thought; very deep thought. I was able to analyze that the so-called 'white world' will never provide, and it will never understand. Never. Particularly the non-believers, the atheists, and other church groups. And I thought, I am only one person, probably from thousands of people, from thousands of years ago—eight, ten, twelve, maybe fifty thousand years—that have gone through this physical, spiritual exercise. It changed me. It changed me, and I valued my culture that much more, especially my language, Niitsipowahsin. To this day, the Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) experience is still in me: that's why I am coming from the Kainai, Apaitsitapi, Ninna Piiksii's thought. It is my own lived experience that I don't have to validate to anybody. I don't have to answer to anybody except to the spiritual world and Iihtsipaitpiiyo'pa (Creator). I don't have to justify anything, and nobody has to believe me. All the dollars in the world, they don't have to believe me. But all I am going to say is, it is true when the Elders and other Blackfoot people,

when they fast or go on Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest), I could connect with them. There are a few out there that have gone on Vision Quests. It changes you, for the better. Like I said earlier, I looked at the mountains to the west on the Canadian border, thinking, "what happened to their names? Who took them away? How come they all have white names?" You can't fast under a mountain that has a white name, because the white name has no spirit. No spiritual connection. Those people just came and gave themselves a mountain name and planted something or whatever, not even telling my people. Everybody climbs mountains, but they don't pray there, most of them. I put tobacco there, I had my pipe, and I toughed it out; even with a broken ankle I sat there four days, four nights.

I thought about sharing this story many times, but maybe this is the appropriate time. That's why I brought it into Iniskim, Sacred Buffalo Stone (a name given to the University of Lethbridge by Blackfoot Elder Bruce Wolf Child), this thought: "How come the mountains don't have Blackfoot names?" I don't have to do these doctoral studies; I don't even have to do it. However, family members told me, "Mike you need to write it, get a PhD out of it." I kind of didn't want to bring it into the white space, the European academic space. Then I thought, "how else will young Kainai students learn? Maybe I can educate all those atheists in the academic community." That's why I brought my story under the guise of a PhD. I had no fear of not being granted a PhD; I was just doing it to educate and share with the non-Blackfoot people our world. My world. Like I say, it changed me. I can think no other way. I am not a Naapikoan; I am not a white person. I am Ninna Piiksii, Chief Bird. Niitsikainaikoan, Kainai, Apaitsitapi: Weasel People. I'm giving the university an opportunity here to learn and understand Blackfoot cultural ways.

I have told my story about my experience at Ninastako (Chief Mountain) in bits and pieces orally to visitors, especially my children and grandchildren, and what happened to me there as a result. I only share those deep parts, and not even all of it, with my family and very special friends. Because it's unbelievable what happened to me, but I believe it. I have never gone through an experience like that. I am not going to spill my guts on the whole story. It's not the place and time. So imagine, since 1994 I have been on this journey looking for the names of the Miistakistsi, the Rocky Mountains—and I could go all the way to Banff and Japer, but it would be a lot of work—to express to the world, this is what happened. This is the effect of when you put your name, and the mountain doesn't even know you. This is what happened to us. I feel it is about time somebody makes those changes, and it goes back to the original thought. I am not trying to resolve the world's problems. I am only talking about one thing, and it's kind of combined: the impact of the mountains when they were no longer called by their Blackfoot names; and then the second, decolonizing this whole academic process, the process of obtaining a PhD, especially at the University of Lethbridge. Maybe I will not resolve the world's problems, but there has to be a beginning, to change academic thought.

That is my story of Ninastako (Chief Mountain). To this day when I go to Chief Mountain highway, or when I go past Carway, I pray to Ninastako, every time. The odd time, I have pulled over and put tobacco, thanking the spirit of Ninastako, the spirit of Chief Mountain, for showing me and guiding me. Ninastako is alive and well. I have gone back up there several times just to smoke my pipe. I've gone back up there with my mother, Linda Bruised Head (Natsikapoitsipiim), and I tell her, "This is what happened." She just listens, nods her head—nodding her head, accepting what happened to me, my story. I don't need any validation by the

academic community; my validation comes from my Kainai Elders. It's a lived experience, like how the Old People tell stories through their lived experiences. As Blackfoot people the validation comes from the community.

So that is why I am doing this whole dissertation: to share. To share just a glimpse of the importance of fasting in the Blackfoot culture. Hopefully, my story connects the thread through all the work in this paper, right to my final conclusion, which I've stated: We'll look for the mountain names, and we will fast there once again; and I will guarantee you there will be a lot of good medicine from there. Immense medicinal knowledge. That's what it is all about. That is why I am doing this dissertation.

It seems like yesterday; it was a tough climb on a broken ankle, but I was determined. I don't have crutches today, so something good came out of it.

That is my story, to open this whole conversation.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF DISSERTATION

This chapter is an introduction to my research purpose and why am I doing this work. I am actually challenging the dominant cultural model, which is the premise of post-secondary education, at Masters and PhD levels. That work today, in the academic setting, is based on a very universal and at times global model; and we might say dominant culture. I'm using those words in the context of the domination happening at the university institutions. I don't like that word "dominant" because that is why I am going against the grain of PhD education, being Kainai and Blackfoot, and being very fluent in my language and being a ceremonialist. I've gone across to the Western worldview, even to apply, to enter the world of the academic institution, or PhD program. I could have just stayed on the Blood Reserve and lived and practised my ceremonies. I could do that instantaneously. But I want to open the road and knock down the gatekeepers in the process of how a person attains, obtains a PhD. I am going against that, with all good intentions, for me as a Blackfoot person, Apaitsitapi, Kainaikoan, to teach the so-called "dominant society." With respect to the dominant cultural model:

> Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2005) suggest that power relationships (in fact) influence how research is collected and interpreted. That is, the sociocultural, political, and economic position of the researcher and the researched plays an acute role in how research is presented and therefore interpreted. In this instance, the researched is positioned or excluded from the mainstream or dominant culture. The researched is the object/other/subject whose existence is described/prescribed by members of the dominant culture model of knowing. They occupy a "liminal status/space" as people of colour (Wynter, 1992, as cited in Ladson-Billings and Donnor, 2005). That is, there exists one "centre" composed of those whose way of knowing determines how those outside the center are viewed. Therefore, what there is to know revolves around the center's interpretation of that which is perceived as outside the center. Thus, there are those who comprise the center and those who work their way around it, suggesting a dualistic position. The relationship between knower and the object is regulated by the rules established by those in the center; consequently, the dominant cultural model became the standard by which all research is assessed. This dominant model sets up prescriptive rules and cannons for regulating thought and action in society. Thus, the issue is about

> the "nature of human knowing of the social reality utilizing a model in which the knower is already a socialized subject" (Wynter, 1992 as cited by Ladson-Billings and Donnor, 2005).[2]

Reading that narrative, that is why I am doing this work. To take it out of the central position of those people that have regulated and, in my opinion, dictated how research should be done. The colonial effect, it is difficult for me, on what I'm proposing to do; it may seem simplistic, but it involves changing the European names of the mountains back to Blackfoot. The very point that I have not fully disclosed about why I am returning to university, is the relationship between the land, the earth, and Blackfoot people. I will only speak about my people. Because as Kainai, we are still doing our ceremonies, as we have since time immemorial. It is difficult for me and what I'm doing, to have the dissertation regulated by people who do not know Blackfoot culture. I'm actually bringing that knowledge to the academic setting, to educate all academics of their dominant cultural models. Again, not oppose, but to further develop the dominant cultural model to be acceptable to Indigenous research and methodologies. But every PhD-minted person probably has gone through the rigorous hoops of theory. I do not have a Blackfoot word for theory; all I can say is the European thought that came across the ocean, to these lands of Indigenous territory—Indigenous lands—imposed that thought, in telling us, "This is how you will think in the university, in curriculum, in pre-school." That is a forced subjugation. People don't like the word 'colonization,' 'suppression,' even academic colonial thinking. But that way of thinking is the basis of the educational institutions in this country, as the Anishinaabe called Kanata, now Canada. I'm not

[2] Christopher Dunbar Jr. (2008). Critical race theory and Indigenous methodologies. In N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, and L.T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies*, Sage, p. 86.

necessarily battling back, but rather injecting a cultural model within the academic cultural model—the dominant academic model. Speaking my language, it is hard for me to think as a purist, to think of English privileged thought. It is very difficult for me at this date and time to think like that when, just for instance, the past two months, three months, every day has been Blackfoot and almost no English, and then to enter the English spectrum, the English world. The research is being assessed on non-Blackfoot criteria; it's a non-Blackfoot assessment that may counteract the work I'm trying to do.

Now, to continue the relationship, why I am doing this dissertation, and I have not stated this openly yet, but I will do it for the sake of this defense, is, when we go fast in the mountains, we call that mountain by its name, for its spiritual presence to be connected to us. As I mentioned above, I've gone through that. It's a very tough ceremony. The dominant world may determine the ceremony as somewhat 'hocus-pocus." But that very experience of fasting for four days or more, especially in the mountains, is what brought the Blackfoot people our healing wisdom of which roots and plants to use, long before the arrival of Europeans. It taught how we doctor ourselves, through that experience, and gaining the wisdom to be so-called "medicine people"—Asookinakiiks. I do not like the word "Shaman"—again, that is an English word. I am not a Shaman; I am a ceremonialist right now. Again, Shaman is based on the dominant cultural interpretation of certain words to express, from an outside perspective, that is now the inside—the centre—that holds the regulatory processes of granting a PhD. My work is outside of the circle. I would like to begin that circle, and my hope is that in the future, along with me and Elders, we would be—and I'm not going to say gatekeepers; we would be the so-

called rites of passage to grant Native students their PhD research work, based on what the students are researching.

Going back to the mountains, that's why in modern times today, we all go back to Ninastako (Chief Mountain). We call on the mountain spirit, Ninastako, "help me make it through these tough four days." The fast is the toughest ceremony of all the ceremonies among the Blackfoot people. Not too many attempt the Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) experience; not too many understand it. That is the very point why I am sharing this work; but not to elaborate on what actually happens over the four days when a person goes to fast. We treat the experience with respect. It's similar to an Australian Walkabout. When I say Walkabout, academics will say, "oh, I get it." But I want to bring the Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) experience home, to Blackfoot Territory. There's a lot that don't get it and many more that will never get it. The above reading by Ladson and Billings kind of says what I am trying to interpret: the central composition of those people that regulate doctoral programs, they are speaking English. How can they regulate Blackfoot language that they don't understand? They have to understand the critical race of my people. Let me cite another one:

> Ladson-Billings and Donnor are careful to note that this liminal positioning is not necessarily a "place of degradation and disadvantage." On the contrary, Wynter (1992, as cited in Ladson-Billings and Donnor, 2005) suggests that this place of alterity provides a "wide angle advantage." The advantage is a result of the "dialectic nature of constructed otherness that prescribes the liminal status of people of color as beyond the normative boundary of the conception of Self/Other" (King, 1995, as cited in Ladson-Billings and Donnor, 2005). The advantage to scholars of color results from the opportunity/obligation to transcend the either/or way of knowing.[3]

[3] Dunbar Jr., Critical race theory, p. 86.

Let me stop there. Because that is all I am trying to transcend: the way of knowing. Because if nobody does it, the scholars within/of this circle, will never understand that way of knowing. Maybe it's been done. I suspect it's been done by other Indigenous scholars who have obtained their PhD, but now maybe are reflecting and assessing, if they had to do it this other way, then they thought about it and now, completing their studies under some other academic regulations and rules, have come up and questioned, "how come I have to be a PhD scholar before I make that dent in the—." I'm trying to do it in the process of obtaining my PhD, but committee-wise, university membership-wise, only one if not—nobody else speaks my language. How can they truly understand me? Not just me but my people, my family, the Blackfoot Confederacy tribes, of where we are coming from. Because Elders and people of those four Confederacy tribes, that's why they have not engaged, as if to say, "We're not even going to attempt to educate them." It's going to be according to their rules and regulations. I come along, not necessarily to destroy regulations, but as the quote above suggests, to add more to that. That will be an advantage to scholars, to have Blackfoot thought and regulations, not entirely based on qualitative, quantitative research—which is okay. But how do they know the qualitative research when they have not lived in the Blackfoot community, in our shoes, for ten thousand years, fifty thousand years or whatever. Then I'll tell them, "ten thousand years, then yeah." But nobody has. It's always been, "you follow us, or else." Well, that is the part I'm challenging here, the "or else."

We have to understand the critical race:

> The construction of racism from the 'perpetrator perspective', according to Alan Freeman (1995), "restrictively conceived racism as an intentional, irrational deviation by a conscious wrongdoer from otherwise neutral rational and just ways of distributing jobs, power, prestige, and wealth. The adoption of this perspective allowed a broad

> cultural mainstream both explicitly to acknowledge the fact of racism and to simultaneously insist on its irregular occurrence and limited significance" (p.xiv). Freeman concludes that liberal race reform thus served to legitimize the basic myths of American meritocracy."[4]

Why I cited that was the word "liberal." Liberal education—a student, undergrad or graduate, could say, "okay I can just bring anything to the table." But that table consists of rules and regulations on which I keep expounding, which are according to the institution's criteria. Hopefully, I could add the Blackfoot thought to that criteria. That way even non-Natives can also truly study where Kainai are coming from, and not just do the current way of getting the grades—which is okay. I have nothing against that. I often think, well, maybe I should have just done a survey on diabetes, on current matters, or the opioid situation, and do a quantitative survey for my dissertation. My research methodology is archival. Even at that, it's minimal—Elder research; and even at that, it's getting minimal. Within four years of doing this research, I've lost about eight key Elders that I wanted to interview, and with COVID, it didn't happen. Those people passed away with knowledge that I wanted to gather, to collect.

This whole aspect of oral history, oral research, I could legitimize it if I needed to through the process of law; the anthropology professor Dr. Marc Pinkoski at the University of Victoria spoke on behalf, several years ago, on the Tslihqot'in case. The Supreme Court of Canada agreed to allow Elder testimony, oral testimony, in land claims in 2014.[5] I thought about that; how come I cannot present this dissertation orally? That I have to write it in very profound English with profound English vocabulary? The Blood Tribe, in 2017, also used the precedent

[4] Dunbar Jr., Critical race theory, p. 87.
[5] Tslihqot'in First Nation v. British Columbia. (Supreme Court of Canada, Jun. 26, 2014). https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do.

setting of the Tslihqot'in case, where the Blackfoot Elders testified openly, verbally, orally on the Big Land Claim case in 2019 from 134 years ago[6]—as I will discuss below. So, times have changed.

I am saying several things here. One is the regulations to accommodate Blackfoot thought and language, to accommodate Ninna Piiksii. I might be the only Elder in my generation of fluent Blackfoot speakers doing a PhD program; and Blackfoot speakers are becoming few. There may never be another person that is a ceremonialist and fluent in Blackfoot to come through the doctoral program doors. I'm offering this to all people, to learn from us, because of racism and the construction of racism. It may be not a good feeling, speaking of racism, but the subtleties of forcing me to think like a Naapikoan—a white man, a white person—that's racism. It's not supposed to be put that way, but I am.

Going back to theory, critical theory, it's very compartmentalized: theory, theory, theory. Every faculty, every world institution, there's theory; the world of theory. Well, my theoretical perspective is gained from my lived experience. I don't theorize about Natoosi, the sun; I just follow the Naapi stories, our Creation stories, and leave it at that. To start fragmenting and to say the sun this, the sun that—no. Mother Moon, Ko'komiki'somm, Two Suns, Morning Star Iipiso'waahstis and Mistaken Morning Star Pahtsiipiso'waahstis; and then the Earth, Kksaahkoomitapi. We just leave it at that. We are holistic thinkers. I was born into a world of that kind of thought, holistically, and that includes the deep connection of deep under the ground, top of the ground, everything that's on the ground—mountains—all the way to the

[6] Meghan Grant (June 12, 2019). Blood Tribe wins massive land claim battle in Federal Court. *CBC News*. Retrieved Dec. 19, 2021 from https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/blood-tribe-big-land-claim-federal-court-decision-1.5172198.

sun and past the sun, to the universe and the constellations. That is holistic. I'm going to use the Blackfoot tipi to get that point across. If people were to really study the Blackfoot tipi, they will know the Blackfoot consciousness, Kainai consciousness, and my consciousness. I was born into this. I didn't have to study my own culture; it was taught to me and I learned from it. Why I'm doing this work is that we need to decolonize research and include Indigenous story as a methodology. That's why I'm doing this work. That is my point, and I will elaborate on it a little bit more.

I would like to talk about diverse constructions of the world, indigeneity and epistemology:

> On one level, the critical multilogical analysis of indigenous knowledge is an examination of how different peoples construct the world. Of course, such an epistemological study cannot be conducted in isolation, for any analysis of indigenous knowledge brings up profound political, cultural, pedagogical, and ethical questions that interact with and help shape the epistemological domain. This is why the questions—what is indigenous knowledge, and why should we study it?—do not lend themselves to easy and concise answers.[7]

Let me stop there. That very thought, why should we study it? It's not me studying it; it's me teaching it. I think all professors and educators and academics and teachers and scholars need to study Indigenous knowledge. I'm doing this with a purpose; one of the goals of this dissertation is to cut the barriers of racism, and lack of knowledge of Blackfoot people, and the way they understand the so-called epistemological domain—my domain. Everything I've been taught in Western educational systems has been somebody else's domain. It has never been about my domain. Sure, we have Native Studies; but it has the undercurrent of the other

[7] Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg (2008). Indigenous knowledges in education: Complexities, dangers and profound benefits. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, and L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies*. Sage, p. 150.

domain and what one can/cannot teach. That makes it easier for non-Indigenous people to almost teach generic courses, courses that are very theory-modelled, based on non-Native theory. In a true sense, to have a real purpose of an Indigenous or Blackfoot institution, a Blackfoot department, we reap everybody else's: the collection of citations of those that are not deep enough and do not acknowledge particular Indigenous people; it's been generalized. So we even have non-Native people teaching the generalization. But imagine if those non-Natives were also to teach from a very deep Blackfoot domain, Kainai domain.

That is my goal, of bringing the relationship of the mountains and Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests) into the learning space—I won't call it the institution, because institution can have a negative connotation where, if you think about it, it is actually institutionalized thinking based on the premise of a whole bunch of rules and regulations. Mine is free; it's not an institutionalized thought. To say, 'oh, Blackfoot institution'—no, it's free-roaming. It's a darn good feeling to freely express our minds, our words, and our thoughts under teaching of Elders. To continue:

> […] why should we study it?—do not lend themselves to easy and concise answers. With our concern with essentialism in mind, we attempt to answer these complex questions. When we focus on the first question—what is indigenous knowledge?—several descriptors quickly come to mind. We explore such characterizations from a meta-analytical perspective, maintaining throughout a tentativeness and contingency that comes from our appreciation of diversity within the category of indigeneity.[8]

Here are people writing of the construction of the world. We need to include, and it is high time, indigeneity—and epistemology is included—from our perspective. I am, and I'm not the only one. We are tired of non-Native authors, writers, scholars, researchers, speaking on our

[8] Kincheloe and Steinberg, Indigenous knowledges in education, p. 150.

behalf. The purpose of this, and my goal, is to speak and tell my story, of how Blackfoot knowledge is told, how it's been passed on from thousands of years, rather than reading somebody who has learned from written narrative, research, libraries, those who have never come or talked to our people, never. There are a lot of misleading books.

One of my other purposes of this dissertation is to correct history, whether it's to the left, to the right. I will never have the exact correct history. But look at all the misleading curriculum, syllabi, outlines, that are misleading because they have not come to us. We have experts saying, "we will speak." The power of Indigenous knowledge to reshape Western science: rigour in multilogicality:

> The past 30 years have witnessed sharp criticisms of the Western scientific establishment by scholars engaged in cultural studies of science, sociologists of scientific knowledge, multiculturalists who uncover the gender and race inscriptions on the scientific method, and philosophers exposing science's bogus claims to objectivity. The purposes of such studies do not involve some effort to critique the truth-value of Western scientific knowledge, which is the correspondence of a scientific pronouncement to a reality existing in isolation to the knower. Rather, such critiques of science point out that Western science has created a self-validating frame of reference that provides authority to particular Western androcentric and culturally specific ways of seeing the world. Contemporary science studies apply the same forms of analysis to both physical and social sciences, asking in both domains how knowledge is produced and how do implicit worldviews shape the knowledge construction process.[9]

They are saying what I'm trying to say, in defending my goals and objectives—why I'm doing this, and the so-called PhD. This is how I'm trying to address these goals, is to overwrite the colonial Western ways of knowing imposed by English colonial names. Just using the mountains, there's the rivers, there's the land, there's geographical areas, all of Alberta, traditional Blackfoot territory from—actually on the other side of the Continental Divide, which

[9] Kincheloe and Steinberg, Indigenous knowledges in education, pp. 151-152.

I've ridden up there, to Sage Pass, on July 10th, 2020. My work for this paper did not just emerge from sitting in some little cubicle office; I actually rode up there. The connectivity, the lived experience; I follow that, I've been doing that all my life. I went up Sage Pass, an 8,000-year-old trail beyond, and rode up the Continental Divide where it passes through Paahtomahksikimi—otherwise Waterton Lakes as it has now become known. It's quite the experience, and this is what I'm trying to resonate. There were eleven of us; half were Native, the other half were non-Native, and they smoked my pipe. I felt something, "Iitapissko," as the Old People would say: the spiritual presence and connectivity.

As spiritual people, that is why I'm trying to address these goals. There is actually a spiritual reality, as discussed by Greg Cajete.[10] The metaphysical is interpreted differently by Indigenous people, Native people, than by Western science. Dr. Little Bear expresses this whole notion of flux and Native metaphysics.[11] Blackfoot metaphysics is a very different approach than the academic history of doing PhD, doctoral thesis, in the arena of Western, Euro-Western thought. Blackfoot knowledge entails how we do things and what it's based on. For example, it's almost the expression of everyday experience. This experience comes with language, and this instance of my work, Niitsipowahsin, Blackfoot language. Within that context, it also involves song and ceremony. This existence consists of energy waves, and we believe all is animate; that in the Blackfoot world, everything is interrelated. This interrelationship begins from our creation stories, and how we come about the knowledge from our creation stories and legends. Within that context of creation, and the renewal of those stories—not the story

[10] Gregory Cajete (2004). "Philosophy of Native Science," in A. Waters (Ed.), *American Indian Thought*. Blackwell Publishing, p. 45.
[11] Dr. Leroy Little Bear, personal communication, January 13, 2022.

itself, but the continuation, where they're renewed from story and the story continues; the story is brought up again, brought up again, through time immemorial.

Language is action. It is process-based. Language processes that thought of how we quantify, in a certain respect, or qualify especially. Quantify is a Western measurement of gauging things. It's always measured, units, dates, length, height, whatever measurement to qualify. In the Blackfoot knowledge it's very personal, as in the Blackfoot world, the collective relationships of how the Blackfoot people survived and what they followed, the protocols. There is a humongous protocol; it's all transferred orally, from the thousands if not millions of generations, the oral transfer of Blackfoot knowledge. In the Blackfoot Winter Counts, an Elder from Piikani, Strikes with a Gun, says that what the Elders say is law.[12] Because the Elders have framed and shared their thoughts that were transferred from somebody before them, and before them, and before them. It's almost like law, Blackfoot law—a most natural law. All this knowledge is transferred. That transfer of knowledge is the methodology in the Blackfoot thought, in the Blackfoot world, in the Blackfoot metaphysics. All unwritten. Then you further break it down. As Blackfoot, we do not try to disprove our legends or the stories, especially the transferring of ceremonies and the activities within those ceremonies through our Societies, such as Iitsskinnayiiks, the Sacred Horn Society; Maotokiiks, the Buffalo Women's Society; Kana'tsomitaiksi, the Brave Dogs Society; and the Kakoiks, the Pigeon Society; and then also through the sacred Bundle holders, the Ninamska Bundles, the pipe holders; Ksisskstakyomopisstaan, the Beaver Bundles; the water pipe, all these Societies and Bundles have the stories in them that have been passed on since the creation of these Bundles.

[12] Paul Raczka (2017). *A Blackfoot history: The Winter Counts: Sikaitapi Itsinniiki*. Blackfoot Books.

Everything has been created verbally or orally from time immemorial. Through this passage of all that, the transferring, all orally, and our protocols all come from story. Story. That is the collective of this process, with respect to Blackfoot thought. The relationship that we have with the whole environment, from underneath the ground to the cosmos and everything in between—the land, the birds, the animals, the mountains, the plants, everything—those are all alive to us. It has been that way since the creation stories. Blackfoot knowledge, as mentioned, is everyday experience, language, song, ceremony, relationship with all the people and everything that we consider animate, and the stories, the dreams, the metaphysical. It's a reality to us.

> The other work that I can quote, Tom King, in *The Truth About Stories*, says this:
>
> There is a story I know. It's about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of a turtle. I've heard this story many times, and each time someone tells the story, it changes. Sometimes the change is simply in the voice of the storyteller. Sometimes the change is in the details. Sometimes in the order of events. Other times it's the dialogue or the response of the audience. But in all the tellings of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back. And the turtle never swims away.
> One time, it was in Prince Rupert I think, a young girl in the audience asked about the turtle and the earth. If the earth was on the back of a turtle, what was below the turtle? Another turtle, the storyteller told her. And below that turtle? Another turtle. And below that? Another turtle. The girl began to laugh, enjoying the game, I imagine. So how many turtles are there? she wanted to know. The storyteller shrugged. No one knows for sure, he told her, but it's turtles all the way down.[13]

Citing Tom King, the important thing Tom King says is: "the truth about stories is that that's all we are."[14] For instance, as Ninna Piiksii, Chief Bird, the eagle, I am part of that story, that continues. That story is the validation, the proof, of what I am saying. Tom King relates,

> Okanagan storyteller Jeannette Armstrong tells us that "Through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I'm not the one speaking. The words are coming from

[13] Thomas King (2003). *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. House of Anansi Press, pp. 1-2.
[14] Ibid., p. 2.

> many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns."[15]

That's exactly what I am doing. I am only retelling the relationship of the mountains that we had during our sovereign time, prior to treaty. I am only retelling the same story that was disconnected by colonial application of law: their law. By colonial disengagement of our active knowledge from the mountains and occupying the space within the mountains, around the mountains. That is my validation. As a student of Blackfoot teachings and transfers of knowledge, I will never be directly questioned from my own Blackfoot people, even from Indigenous people, because we all think alike of our belonging; we're just telling the story.

So tsiniksini, storytelling, really "speaks to involvement in an action, in a happening, in an event. Dreams allow us to be 'involved' while we sleep."[16] We all have stories. One such thing is the buffalo stories; but I am talking about, sharing the mountain story. We all have stories. The flux may be pulled in this way, or this way, but in general, you collect all those stories of this flux, and it still arrives at a point: it's about the mountains, and the relationship. There might be a slight variation of the storyteller but at the end, overall, it's about miistakistsi, the stories of our Elders. That is all I am sharing in this written work.

Our source of knowledge, as mentioned again, derives from Niitsipowahsin, our language. Within that language, we have words for everything and anything about the mountains: the water, the plants, the animals, right into the cosmos. That's what formulates our language, because if there were no mountains, we would not have the name Miistakistsi.

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[15] Jeannette Armstrong, as cited in Thomas King, *The truth about stories*, p. 2.
[16] Amethyst First Rider (2021). A Note on the Buffalo Treaty. In D. Havrelock, *Buffalo Wild!* Annick Press.

All that is within the Blackfoot Territory, we have a name for it and a story, and that's what makes up our language. Everything is considered, relationship-wise. Everything is animate to us as the humans, Blackfoot. We're all interrelated: the animals, the ground, the grass, the waters—and the songs. The songs are the same for these different Bundles, mountains, animals. The song is the same; there's not even a variation. The song is a very powerful instrument to validate that I do not have to hear or say three different people; it's all the same. The stories, most of the time, they're all the same. Imagine, the same story that I'm trying to say in a general sense, is the same story from thousands of years, that I'm just trying to create. Then we have the Elders from the older generation. You'll hear people say, "Our Elders said this. Our Elders did the ceremony. The Elders sang the song." It's all true. How can a non-Native person disprove that when they are not part of our culture? So validation comes from everyday experience, from people long ago, how they survived, how they did ceremonies individually. Then we have the collective experience of ceremony, of clans, of movement, of camping, from way, way, way back. Some of those experiences, we can still see them in the Blackfoot world today. That is how we validate. The collective experience, as an example, is the Societies. They have members that take these Bundles as they're transferred; and these Bundles have been transferred for a long time. The group now, today, is a collective experience.

All this experience is versus Western thought. In the Western thought, it's multisource, like a triangular frame. They have to find three sources to back their work in the Western research methodologies, because they do not have that lived experience. Their research has no relations to the land, most of the time; in fact, PhD work is very different in the Western philosophy than in the Blackfoot thought. I could say, "okay, let me get three Elders on a certain

discussion/topic/subject." I will guarantee those three Elders will say the same thing, because that's just how it is. That's why we say, collectively, "the Elders said this." It is law, what they are saying, because that Blackfoot law, oral law, comes from way back. The renewal in the Western thought, of the Western experience, scholars quote each other—someone before them in their written processes, even though they're not related to that person. They possibly do not even know that person. That is their renewal of the Western experience in conducting research; it's very almost on an experimental basis. The person that quotes other people does not have a history, except takes whatever it's worth, the person that he or she is quoting in the Western thought. Again, repeating, the Blackfoot conduct the same ceremonies, the same songs—the four Blackfoot tribes. We're not talking outside the realm and saying, "well that's what this person said across the ocean." We never think like that, because the thoughts are home-grown in our territory.

I am not using the Western thought, I'm using Blackfoot thought. Because until such a time I go study a European country and the people of that country—and they won't like it, as an Indigenous person, if I then claim to be 'expert' of that particular group of Europeans. They wouldn't like it, but it's easier for somebody to say, "I claim I'm an expert of this Indigenous group," especially the old Archaeological Society people. That's what I'm saying: my PhD is to address these goals. The goals have to be from my people, from my Ancestors, my whole being, our point of origin, all the way to me as Ninna Piiksii. It's not difficult work at all; the difficulty is that the people to whom I'm going to defend understand where I'm coming from. It involves the ceremony of the Sacred Horn Society, the Sacred Buffalo Women's Society, the Brave Dogs Society, the Pigeon Society, the Ookaan ceremony that takes place at Akookaatssin, and the

current piercing ceremonies, Aawahkaa'nitaa, incorporate our whole spiritual being. That's where I'm going to lose the European audience. Even if they've got other Native people that aren't Blackfoot, or other races, they're still not going to understand what I'm trying to bring forth. And I don't want to be pushed into this Western theory, Western mechanism of thought, to come up with connection and adaptation to Western theories. I'm not going to do that. Kincheloe and Steinberg comment:

> Once individuals come to believe that Western science is not the only legitimate knowledge producer, then maybe a conversation can be opened about how different forms of research and knowledge production take issues of locality, cultural values, and social justice seriously. Our goal as educators and researchers operating in Western academia is to conceptualize an indigenously informed science that is dedicated to the social needs of communities and is driven by humane concerns rather than the economic needs of corporate managers, government, and the military. Much too often, Western science is a key player in the continuation of Euro-expansion projects that reify the status quo and further the interests of those in power. In this context, we are not attempting to produce a grand synthesis that eventuates in one final epistemological/knowledge production system. Instead, we hope that we all can learn from difference, from the profound insights and the limitations of various ways of seeing the world and the humans who inhabit it.[17]

That kind of puts it into perspective. What theoretical lens do I bring to this work? Well, "from the profound insights and the limitations of various ways of seeing the world and the humans who inhabit it"[18]—we've been inhabiting it as part of politically-speaking "Canada." We know what we're doing. Vine Deloria Jr. discusses how people cut the connection to Old People, those Old People. Once they connect to the current people, they use that disconnection and they theorize and they call them the Ancient People, the Old People.[19] A lot of scientists,

[17] Kincheloe and Steinberg, Indigenous knowledges in education, p. 153.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Vine Deloria Jr. (2004). Why we respect our Elders burial grounds. In A. Waters (Ed.), *American Indian thought* (pp. 3-11.). Blackwell Publishing.

researchers do that. My argument to that is, I'm part of the Old People, the Ancient People. I just didn't start a thousand years ago. But archaeologists, historians, scientists, they like cutting, and they will put a label on those Ancient People and exclude us. That is so one-sided; that is so racist. Yet, when one gets their PhD licence, I guess one can say anything. Well, hopefully I get my PhD licence; that way I will be licensed to say anything back. And I will say anything back, even if I don't get my PhD licence. As I stated earlier, I'm not the only one. We are tired. I use the Blackfoot people because I know a lot of Elders and scholars there; we're tired of the Naapikoan and Naapiakiks, white men and women, telling us our story. We're tired of that. But on the other hand, we are gaining relationships of Naapikoaks now that are starting to understand us—that are breaking away from their regulations, how they were taught, and they're coming over. I have very good non-Native friends that are starting to—they probably won't totally see it my way, but they're starting to understand, "Ahh" (yes). They are coming out to ceremonies; they're coming out—they're even camping there. I say, "wow, we have come a long way," in relation to people that are coming out.

There is a new trend of thought there because non-Natives are also questioning Western science. They say, "well, you people have survived thousands of years; the way you're doing it must be okay, must be correct, must be alright." Yet the interpretation over here is either misleading or we're not even talking in university courses. A lot of it is based on Marxist thought or economy, and if we don't fit in that, then we're nobody; we're the invisible people. I won't say the theoretical lens. If I use that word, then I'm using my own Blackfoot, Niitsitapi theoretical lens. But theoretical lens, again, precipitates Western thought. But I'll use it—and again, this is beginning a process of changing and adding more to the Webster's definition of

certain words: theory. You've got theory, well let's add more theory. In Blackfoot theory is our ways of knowing, living off the land, knowledge of the land, and learned experiences from thousands of years ago.

I mentioned riding up Sage Pass; I don't think there's been a Native person who has ridden up there since we were kicked out of there in 1884. In 1856-58 when Thomas Blakiston put his stamp on the mountain, river, waterfalls, it upset the cultural knowledge, the cultural geography, the cultural names of this whole area. Again, I'm just focusing on the mountains; I could do a lot more, but that might take me the rest of my life—and maybe I will do it. Because we've been swamped with English words, I think it's high time non-Blackfoot speakers speak our language, like "oki." Kincheloe and Steinberg comment that:

> Thus, different ways of seeing can co-exist, many of them in what might be labeled confederations of solidarity, around a compact to encourage and engage in dialogue about the ethical, political, and pedagogical consequences of various forms of knowledge production.[20]

That is the whole thing, you know—coexist. That's all I'm saying. People can still defend their thoughts, but also coexist with my thought, the Blackfoot, Niitsitapi thought. Because I've been thinking your thought all these years; well then, come across and think my thought. The world will still turn, the sun will still come up. You won't lose your salary, you won't lose your tenure, you will only expand your mind. Then maybe, just maybe we will be respectful to all each other and coexist in harmony.

The last thing I'll talk about is how Indigenous knowledge has been viewed in academia. I mentioned that earlier; and we need to think critically about pedagogy.

[20] Kincheloe and Steinberg, Indigenous knowledges in education, p. 153.

> It is difficult to imagine a more ominous time to be addressing the importance of indigenous knowledges and the struggle against imperialism, neoliberal capitalism, and what Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano (1998) describes as the 'coloniality of power.' We are challenged into believing that we live in anything but a racist state when anti-immigration zealots are sporting 'Kill a Mexican Today?' shirts; when talk show hosts are calling for citizens to arm themselves in a defense of the border with Mexico (one Arizona talk show host, Brian James, even urged listeners to commit murder when he advocated that they converge on the border one day a week with high-powered weapons [he described what ammunition to use so that the shots were sure to be fatal] and shoot to kill those who dared cross the line) […].[21]

I guess why I'm citing this is to illustrate the opposition of Indigenous people. This is the Mexican, probably Rio Grande, coming across the border and the American people saying to shoot them. Well, they're probably using bullets. I don't want to be too strong on it, but nobody's going to say it; I will. The academics have been using silent bullets to change us, to follow A.J. MacDonald, get the savages out of the mountains, turn them into Brown-White men. Thus in 1884, when Waterton was claimed under the Dominion Lands Protection Act to keep us out of there; and in 1884 the Indian Act, we Indigenous peoples couldn't leave the Reserve without a permit; and 1884 the insurrection of boarding schools—Dunbow for Catholics along Highwood River and Bow River, and Anglican school—Calgary Industrial School at Nose Hill.

All this Indigenous knowledge, in my thoughts according to all this, I think it's pick and choose of the academia. Because I can attest to a lot of scholars, except for a few, they haven't bothered reading Indigenous books at all. The faculties and programs in departments, that is what they're teaching; and it starts from kindergarten to Grade 12. How many schools teach about treaties' points of origin? Residential Schools? When Alberta became a province in 1905,

[21] N. Jaramillo and P. McLaren (2008). Rethinking critical pedagogy: Socialismo Nepantla and *the Specter of Che,* in N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln and L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. Sage, p. 191.

at the little red schoolhouses out in the middle of nowhere, there was no Blackfoot curriculum, no Indigenous curriculum. I can only express that in my experience, in this course of study, very little about Indigenous issues, readings, material—and yet it's called Doctor of Philosophy, majoring in 'Cultural,' Social, Political Thought. The Cultural is very European, and I feel pushed to do a Western philosophy paper, narrative. But I've refused.

Again, with Vine Deloria, the view of Indigenous cultures as "primitive" negated possibility that they were capable of scientific thought:

> The primitive is further conceived as having a prescientific perspective; that is to say, the early peoples are believed to have separately wanted to use the methods of science to explain their world but were unable to from the abstract concepts that – when universally applied – allowed Western people to gain their insights. Thus, the circle logically closed and the possibilities of exchanging ideas is nearly eliminated.[22]

I would reverse that, and back up that when it comes to Indigenous thought by non-Native academics; they're coming from a primitive thought, not my thought. I will switch that, because they don't know anything about me. Their doctorate is just a doctorate. As much as they'll throw it—and yes, they probably write it—because I'm not truly absorbed in all Western thought. But are they coming from the same premise, when they don't know anything about Indigenous knowledge, they have primitive thought with respect to Blackfoot ontology. So the shoe is on the other foot. Again, they almost always have to cut off something, the words, 'oh we were found. An explorer found us. A scholar found us.' You know, that whole line. We were never lost, from North America, South America, other Indigenous societies in the world. You know, 'found', as if we were lost. Yet we've been here for a long time.

[22] Vine Deloria Jr. (2004). Why we respect our Elders burial grounds. In A. Waters (Ed.), In *American Indian thought* (pp. 3-4). Blackwell Publishing.

I just wanted to recite this. The whole thing is, it has its connection there, Christianizing us, changing me into a Brown-White person. I see to a certain degree—and people aren't going to like it, but I'll say it because nobody has said it. If there are those who are trying to do so, I'd like to have the other people say it again: I feel Western academia is trying to change the way I think, rather than listening to me. We need to coexist because that's not happening. The generic studies of Indigenous Studies, most of it, it's not cutting it, in my opinion. Maybe it's good for people that don't know—and again, I respect that, students that don't know their cultural values, background, even their language. I think that might be coming from a very critical perspective, because I speak my language. Last generation to be—we're the last stronghold, to speak our language, in the midst of being a residential school survivor. I actually survived; I didn't die. Maybe the younger generation, they've got to start someplace. I'm at the other end of the spectrum, doing ceremonies. I don't like the word being called Elder, but doing ceremonies as an older person, that I should be allowed to express this and defend what I'm trying to do, from my point of view, and not from a quasi-Western point of view. I'm not Western, I'm Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot People), I'm Niitsitapi (Real People), I'm Kainaikoan (a Kainai man). I'm just following our lifestyle—my life, the ways of my grandparents, their parents, from the time immemorial. That's why I'm trying to conceptualize my Blackfoot ways of knowing from a very true starting point.

My target audience for my work here is the general public. I put all First Nations in there, scholars and non-scholars, Elders, young people, and the non-Native world. I don't want my work just to be isolated to the academic world, because what I'm doing, in all practical terms, the public will eventually hear when this project is completed, if I do—but at the least

the beginning. Because it is very difficult work in the sense that I have very few leads on the Blackfoot names of the mountains that were impacted by European names. I don't want to target my work only to the national park, because colonization is all of Canada. At least I'm attempting to decolonize natural formations, and in this case—and you could expand from there—only the Miistakistsi, the mountains in Paahtomahksikimi, what is now known as Waterton Lakes National Park.

I don't want to target just the youths, because then that information will not flow to the older people, to the other Elders and up-and-coming Elders. The very traditional Elders are pretty much all gone—just a handful left. The reason I target the general public is that I want the general public to realize the impact of colonization, not only on Native people but to the non-Native people on the distortion of history. Because that is what it's all about. It may be oversimplifying; people might say, critics might say, "what's in a name? Why now, why are we talking about finding and putting Blackfoot names to the mountains in Waterton?" Well, that is the very point. I want to transfer knowledge and educate the general public in southern Alberta, the whole province, and all of Canada for that matter, and even the United States. There's almost no work that I know of, of this sort, of this magnitude, of researching names, sovereign Blackfoot names. I use the word sovereign because we were sovereign until Treaty 7, in 1877, then came the process of being put on reserves in 1884. We were pre-governed without realizing it, prior to even signing the treaty: the federal government, already establishing this federal governance through this tool called Indian Act, to absolutely totally govern us and control us. That is why I use the word sovereign. That way, my target audience will begin to appreciate and understand what sovereignty means, from our—and I keep

repeating—our Blackfoot lens, Kainai lens and Apaitsitapi lens. The audience will see how we were excluded from continuing, I would say occupying, using, living in the mountains, and being pushed out.

That is why I am not only writing this material just to satisfy the universities, the academic institutions and in this case the University of Lethbridge, Iniskim (Sacred Buffalo Stone). My audience goes beyond the universities, the national parks and the youth; it's for everybody. That way non-Indigenous scholars in the future can make reference to my attempt to bring back that association and relationship we have with the mountains. That is why I am choosing the general public as my audience for years to come. My thinking is that more young scholars will then also investigate maybe all of the Rocky Mountains within Canada, right up to Yukon, of those mountain place names. Nothing against academia; I don't want to be disrespectful to absolutely, totally academic thought. But as a Niitsitapi, I am a very active person mentally and physically, even spiritually. I have come to realize that I don't totally fit in the academic circle because of the theoretical concepts, precepts that float within academic institutions. My work is not a theory at all; it is lived experience, the knowledge transferred from time immemorial. My scope of work includes everybody—all the learning institutions and even those people that do not attend learning institutions, academic institutions. I am coming from, as much as possible, a very real, a very pure, a very autonomous and a very sovereign thought, even though I'm still in control with the colonial aspects of the Indian Act in my lifestyle today. My thoughts go back, and it's a mental health satisfaction, and it will be for other people, especially young Indigenous scholars, that we were sovereign once. There is no such thing as neo-colonialism or post-colonialism; we're still right in the middle of colonialism,

because of all the systems and structures and legislation and laws that continue to govern First Nations people in this country—and in this instance, Blackfoot people and even further, Kainai and Apaitsitapi people.

That is why I choose my target audience: my work is for the whole public. I want the public to be given the true and hopefully almost totally accurate history of us, rather than curriculum and syllabus and research that has not gone in depth or has involved Blackfoot people or Kainai. Experts on the outside realm of the Blackfoot world have spoken on our behalf, and my work will also change in that we will speak on our own behalf from now on. I hear a disconnect, why scholars use "ancient people" and disconnect that continuity of culture. When they say "ancient people" they come in and put labels on those ancient people, where in reality, I am part of those ancient people. It's a common thread, and Vine Deloria Jr. makes reference to that, as mentioned earlier.[23] I am part of that chain, from time immemorial, of my people. So the settler privileged thinking is what I am also contesting. I want the general audience to be given at least two different viewpoints about us rather than somebody else dictating, that is not Native, their viewpoints and the imposition that they have in the whole learning institutions of school and university. That is my rationale for my target audience.

[23] Deloria Jr., Why we respect our Elders burial grounds.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

For my research methodology, I'm going to be quoting and using Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her book *Decolonizing Methodology: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, and other citations. I want to explain the interview of Elders as the first process of my research methodology, the framework. And framework doesn't adequately establish that. I am leaning, in my readings of the qualitative word, to be used in my collection of stories from Elders, from the past, from my tribe and current living Elders. In the Western frame of methodology, everything has to be proven. In sort of a simplistic notion, you have to prove it; like how do you know, and where did you get it from? Was it from a scientist, media, tv? Any sort of communiqué as proof. That is what I am trying to steer away from, why my work draws from Indigenous scholars and mainly Blackfoot methodology. The Western academics push for validation and proof. In the Blackfoot, if I can say Blackfoot Indian thought, First Nation or tribal thought, the validation and proof is somewhat different. In Blackfoot, it's how we think, how we come about knowledge.

I want to frame my methodology outside of the Western normal process of research. I want to make reference, and I will give detail below, to the BC case of Delgamuukw vs British Columbia, of the courts allowing verbal testimony.[24] I am using that legally and to defend my oral research of interviewing living Elders, and then the collecting in terms of archival—in the Western thought, we think that we'll go to some institution and we'll scroll and read the old print there of archives. Well, the oral history of the past that I grew up on, and the stories

[24] Assembly of First Nations. "Delgamuukw v British Columbia." August 28, 2019. Retrieved Dec. 19, 2021 from https://www.afn.ca/timeline/delgamuukw-v-british-columbia/.

passed on to me, I also term that as archival, and not necessarily just in the print form that you will find in other institutions.

> Linda Tuhiwai Smith says:
>
> > Research is also an integral part of political structures: governments fund research directly and indirectly through tertiary education, national science organizations, development programmes and policies. Rich nations spend vast amounts of money on research across every imaginable dimension. Poor nations do their best to keep up. Corporations and industries fund their own research and sometimes gather data for governments. These programmes are often global in scope. Non-government organizations and local community groups also carry out research and involve themselves in the resulting analysis and critique. All of these research activities are carried out by people who in some form or another have been trained and socialized into ways of thinking, of defining, and of making sense of the known and unknown. It seems rather difficult to conceive of an articulation of an indigenous research agenda on such a scale. To imagine self-determination, however, is also to imagine a world in which indigenous peoples become active participants, and to prepare for the possibilities and challenges that lie ahead.
> >
> > [Tuhiwai Smith is referring to] reports on the development of indigenous initiatives and research and discusses some of the ways in which an indigenous research agenda is currently being articulated. It is striking that for indigenous peoples there are distinctly different ways of thinking about and naming research. Often projects are not referred to as research although this is a central core of the project activity. In addition to reservations about research outlined in earlier chapters, there is another reason for this reticence. Research is also regarded as the domain of experts who have advanced educational qualification and access to a specialized language and skills.[25]

I want to expand on that: the researcher becomes the expert. The Elders are the experts in the Blackfoot world—in our world. It's outside the domain of the researchers who attain the status of the Western process of research, and they attain that as the experts. The time has come where Elders are considered, I consider them, Blackfoot people consider them in their own community, they are the experts. They are not funded by corporate structures; they are not

[25] Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012). *Decolonizing methodology: Research and Indigenous Peoples, second edition.* Zed Books, p. 127.

funded by a group of scholars. And 'scholars' is a term of educated people. Well, we have our own definition of 'scholarly'—but I will use the word 'transfer of knowledge.' The whole thing of verbal; it's the central core of the communication, of all the stories of the archival knowledge or the stories from the past. The Elders will not be considered educationally qualified in Western learning institution centres, but knowledge that is passed down from other Elders and knowing from the land. The land has shaped and continues to shape our culture; and our language, Blackfoot, has continued to shape our psychological domain. Duran and Duran talk about that, two psychologists on Indigenous psychology, that is different from the Western psychology.[26]

The core of my archival research is oral history. It's sort of a Western thought that I am almost feeling that I have to question my grandfathers' and all those Elders' stories. Having one, two, three say the same thing; well, they already have. Most of my storytelling, the oral and verbal presentation, has been passed on to Elders from previous Elders and down to those younger than me. I don't question that transformation of knowledge from the Elders; they support those stories with stories. To me, to validate, how can a non-Native or a pure academic scholar, tell me "your stories are invalid," when they have never heard the stories? Our stories are lived experiences, and the Blackfoot communities abide by those customs and laws that have been transferred from, again, time immemorial. We still have those deep cultural ways of living and governing ourselves, without a written text or law book until recently, but governing ourselves through oral customs passed on to us from families, to clans, to bands, to the tribes.

[26] Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran (1995). *Native American postcolonial psychology*. State University of New York Press.

We have lost a lot of those customs, but they're still there. The residential schools that began in 1884 in southern Alberta tried to assimilate us. Maybe they succeeded to a certain degree, but not totally. To me, to be asked, how do I validate? The Elders from the past were told stories from their Elders, because they would say, "the Old People told me a story and now I will tell you a story." Their oral citation and reference, they will make reference to Old People; or they knew the people that passed the story, their grandparents or relatives or Elders, men and women from the past. It's ongoing; that circle of knowledge is never broken.

For Blackfoot, things are in flux. The telling may change how the story is processed, but it is still the same story, so it is still true. To a certain extent, that flux, as Dr. Little Bear says, "some of it may be true today and may not be true tomorrow."[27] What he's saying as I understand, is that the overall content of the story is still the same; small elements may change but it still comes to the same conclusion. Western thought is all about certainty, and in Blackfoot it's all about change—not change, but we always are speaking from a societal, collective group and from Indigenous values, honesty, respect for the people and the land, sharing, and the strength that we come from our land. And it's about the story. As Thomas King, if I could take this quote, says all we are is stories.[28] Tsiniksini is in Blackfoot: "how are you involved in the story?" We are involved in those stories; that's what and how we lived. Native stories or Blackfoot stories, repeating again, that's the truth. How can somebody disprove our stories that does not speak the Blackfoot language, or is not Blackfoot?

[27] Dr. Leroy Little Bear, personal communication, January 13, 2022.
[28] King, *The Truth About Stories*, p. 2.

The other difficulty is the Elders; they don't want to be, and will not be, consumed by signing documents from universities. That's another interesting point on the transferring of oral history: they're giving it to me, and not giving it to the University of Lethbridge. They are not signing anything to release that information. That's another interesting aspect to this methodology: it's almost like the stories are being transferred to me; I am part of that methodology. The processes and procedures of Indigenous doctorate degrees, Blackfoot doctorate degrees to bring it home, is going to change how methodology is done. I could see students in the future coming to me when I am older, and then I recite stories and I will say, "the Elders, the Old People, told me this story." My stories, that is their validation.

To further expand on Linda Tuhiwai Smith:

> There are two key pathways through which an Indigenous research agenda is being advanced. The first one is through community action projects, local initiatives and national or tribal research based on land claims. The second pathway is through the spaces gained within institutions by indigenous research centres and studies programmes. Although the community-based approach is often said to have greater community control and ownership than it is possible to achieve through the academy, that is not always or necessarily the case. Community-based projects are often conceptualized, funded and directed by researchers who have been trained within a discipline or paradigm, and are often employed by a research organization. Also, university researchers who work within the protection of such notions as academic freedom and academic research can legitimate innovative, cutting-edge approaches that can privilege community-based projects. In other words, the two pathways are not at odds with each other but simply reflect two distinct developments. They intersect and inform each other at a number of different levels.[29]

This intersection, there are very few intersections on land. This whole research is the erasure—the erasing of the names, of Blackfoot names, that disrupted the continual relationship of Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests). It's the Elders that tell of the actual experience of that. Even

[29] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodolgy*, p. 128.

though there's two distinct pathways, the second pathway is gained through the community. I agree with that, but this is a little deeper. It's almost a third pathway, in a sense, that I am bringing: the historical, spiritual, ceremonial thinking of the Blackfoot community, within an academic institution, but not following the academic gatekeepers' protocols. On community research, Linda Tuhiwai Smith continues:

> The idea of community is defined or imagined in multiple ways: as physical, political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic, cultural, and spiritual spaces. For colonized peoples many local communities have been made through deliberate policies aimed at putting people on reserves that are often out of sight, on the margins. Legislation and other coercive state practices have ensured that people stay within their own community boundaries.[30]

You take this quote in a 'passing-of-knowledge' sense. My work represents my community—the Blood Reserve and the Blackfoot community, Blackfoot reserves. I do not want to have my work only confined to the reserve; it should be, but I am not allowing that. But at the same time, it is not going to be confined to the University of Lethbridge. It is much more than that. Defining community research, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith continues:

> …is as complex as defining community. For example, 'the community' is regarded as being a rather different space, in a research sense, to 'the field.' 'Community' conveys a much more intimate, human and self-defined space, whereas 'field' assumes a space 'out there' where people may or may not be present. What community research relies upon and validates is that the community itself makes its own definitions. There are many examples of research projects carried out at local community level. Some projects have been initiated by local people working in local settings, generating local solutions to local problems.[31]

Mine is sort of a local problem, but it's a Blackfoot problem, of disruption of our access to practise Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) and fasting. As mentioned earlier, the Elders conveyed

[30] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodolgy*, p. 128.
[31] Ibid., p. 129.

this knowledge. It's a space; and other people say ethical space. Well, ethical, I guess is a word, but regaining this and undoing the disruption is more than just ethical space. It is actually a bigger ethical space; and so I'm not worried about the ethical space, but its beyond. Indigenous nations, in their research:

> *Iwi* is sometimes loosely translated as 'tribe' but is used by Maori people to describe their geopolitical, inter-generational indigenous institutions and relationships that are connected to place, history and shared cultural protocols.[32]

That is a very key word, *iwi*. Blackfoot, we are also connected to place, history and cultural protocols. There is a whole process and protocols of people, individual Blackfoot members that practise and have gone to these Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests); and the spiritual connections that Blair Stonechild refers to, which I discuss below.[33] When people go on Itaksiistsimoo'pi, through the fasting process, the individual that has gone through this process, after so many days, comes back and says to relatives, to whomever, "this is what I was told from the dream world, from the spirit world." Nobody questions that. That is such a deep, significant, and powerful experience. We don't need to find proof of that, to say to the individual that has completed Itaksiistsimoo'pi, "prove it." That is Western thought. The ceremonies have been transferred from time immemorial, and the Elders, through this process, don't lie. The individual is not lying. That's where it may seem very complex to the Western thinker; but we as Blackfoot people, and even Indigenous people worldwide, we understand that. That is the commonality that we have as Indigenous people.

[32] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodolgy*, p. 131.
[33] Blair Stonechild (2016). *The knowledge seeker: Embracing Indigenous spirituality*. University of Regina Press.

That is what I'm trying to share with the academic setting, is how we know it in modern terms. My methodology is to interview living Elders. One of the key Elders, as I write this, is having a state funeral. Because of COVID I was unable to adequately interview the Browning chief there, Earl Old Person—92 years old—and his past knowledge. I've lost one of the biggest connections to Amskapi Piikani, on the history of mountains. My archival interview process has become very difficult. I have lost very key Elders in the past three years since I've started this journey of trying to have people understand what I mean by the upsetting of our names. It's more than just a disconnection; it's our culture. Linda Tuhiwai Smith points those out, but I will continue to use that relationship that we have with place. In the academic setting, I feel that I would not have connection to my place, if I was to do an entirely Western scholarly research framework. A lot of the verbal history has not been written. It is still very verbal, and it's not in the books of the library.

One area of validation is through our ceremonies. I really don't want to expound too much on ceremonies that are very old, the songs, because with Blackfoot spirituality, it is not understood. The universities are not receptive totally to that, because it does not fit the world of "theory." That is why I am saying institutions are very theoretical; and here it is a lived experience from thousands of years, especially in ceremony. The transfer of knowledge in those ceremonies, that is my validation. The doctorate is secondary to me. It may seem very important to the outside world, outside of Blackfoot culture, Blackfoot life. To me, it's secondary if not third. What is most important to me is my family, and my ceremonies, as previously mentioned, are what have shaped me and my ontological responsibilities. My ceremonies are far superior to academia, to a PhD. I am only doing this PhD so that maybe

institutions will start accommodating that First Nations thought—in this instance Kainai thought, Blackfoot thought. Going back to personal experience, the fasting, the dreams, any of that we tell only limited story because some of it is not really for the public. Yet we respect that part of the person's journey, and again, collectively, the Societies, the harvesting practices, the customs of hunting, the customs of harvesting medicinal plants. With our ceremonies, that's why we keep it close to our chest, in the event Western experience might abuse it and distort it, because they do not know anything about it.

Blair Stonechild writes about "once powerful healing,"[34] and that's what we had from the mountains. The mountains, through the spiritual connection of the spirits there, giving us those once powerful healings from thousands of years ago that we practised and we're losing: herbalism, healing, different ways of healing our people. It has caught up to us, and now we're becoming dependent on Western pharmaceutical science and drugs and medicine. So from Blair Stonechild:

> One of the major features of Aboriginal spirituality is belief in the spirit world and that conscience resides there. First Peoples believe that spirit beings are not only real, but that it is possible to develop relations with them. The quest for spirit knowledge and interaction is a central feature of Indigenous life. Ceremonies, prayer, meditation, visions, and dreams are all part of spiritual endeavour. Practical results of this relationship can be demonstrated to reassure the Indigenous public that the transcendent world cares and will provide healing and other assistance when necessary.[35]

If I could add to that, the biggest challenge of my methodology is the word 'spirits.' People either do not understand, refuse to understand, or just don't want to hear that word. It's outside the paradigm of Western academia and institutional thinking and research. My work is

[34] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker*, p. 91.
[35] Ibid.

outside of the typical qualitative/quantitative research methods. It is a unique method. But reading Blair Stonechild's work, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith and the other citations, I know I'm not the only one. It seems that for the people that understand and live the Indigenous ways, it's like just an everyday discussion. On the other hand, to talk spiritual vision and connections, and the connection to spirit world and the consciousness that comes with it, that is very difficult. That is why I'm interviewing Elders. Elders are the central focal point. They are the archivists, in a way, to the knowledge of before, of long ago, that has been passed on to them, and in the continuum, has been passed on to me.

Blair Stonechild continues:

> Medicine persons are healers who acquire abilities through dreams, visions, ceremonies, sacrifice, and prayer, and through mentorship by more advanced healers. In a society with a strong emphasis on spirituality and engagement in ceremonies, practitioners are able to obtain visions and dreams connecting them to spirit powers, hoping they will deign to assist in healing, hunting, or, traditionally, in war. Medicine powers are considered special gifts, and great care is taken to ensure that these powers are used for the good of the community and not for selfish purposes.[36]

It may sound very ordinary; well if it is very ordinary, then it should be easy to be understood. But it's not understood. I'm coming from a Blackfoot person's view, speaking the language, doing ceremonies. One who is not Blackfoot has to join us for several years, just to begin to understand the spiritual connection process. The majority of Blackfoot people lived this every day; even within the context of a very modern society, it's with us. That's the biggest thing to bring across as a knowledge piece, that the mountains are our spiritual connections. But the only thing to attain the mountains is that we have to know their names; they're animate.

[36] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker*, p. 91.

This research methodology and framework I'm proposing is quite different from any other framework. Blair Stonechild continues; he talks about Dr. Mills, and he was talking about interviewing the Old Ones in the division of perceptual studies at the University of Virginia:

> …a brilliant Canadian psychiatrist, began the research. Dr. Ian Stevenson had graduated at the top of his class at McGill University in 1943 and was appointed at of the department of psychiatry at the prestigious University of Virginia Medical School in 1957.
>
> During his training as a psychiatrist, Stevenson was intrigued as to why some very young children experienced phobias or possessed unusual talents not readily explainable through heredity. He wondered if memory transference from previous life could be the cause and if claims of reincarnation could be investigated in systematic and empirical manner. Is it possible that information somehow survives death to be revived in the person reborn?[37]

That's a very interesting part: children that have special gifts that are not learned in school, which just come with the child at a very young age. Even before the Elders teach the child, the child has these skills or unusual talents. I'm just using that as an example, this word in modern psychiatry. They are probably quite the people to study. There's no data collection on Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests); there's none. Yet it's everyday language to ceremonialists, Paapoh'kaan, "dream world." Iitaaksiistsimoopah, "when the spirit comes to you in your journey when you are fasting." As Indigenous people, or as Blackfoot people, we talk about it just so normally; and yet that normal conversation is not understood in the academic setting. It's very difficult for them.

[37] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker,* p. 162.

I also want to make reference to Margaret Kovach's book: "in traversing cultural knowledge paradigms, the first level of complexity arises with language."[38] That's why I'm saying, language is very important to this framework of collecting oral history.

> In considering indigenous philosopher Anne Waters' analysis of the 'dualist binary ontology' of English language compared with the 'nonbinary complementary dualist construct' (2004:97, 98) that serves the thought and language of many Indigenous cultures […].[39]

That is a very key point, the nonbinary of Indigenous people versus the binary. When it comes to language and the ontology of Blackfoot people, as long as we follow ceremonial protocols, we have the freedom of speech and thought. On its very natural space. There are no parameters for that thought of the children, all the way to the Elders. The only thing that dictates the thought is just following ceremonial protocol. But there's nothing dictating how a child should think, how Elders should think. It has its own norms built into an Indigenous community, to an Indigenous society. Further to reading that, Kovach continues:

> …I am left contemplating how difficult it must have been for Indigenous people and the first visitors to understand one another given each group's distinctive language and culture. With colonization, Indigenous people were forced to forfeit their languages, and so a majority of Indigenous people in Canada now have English as their first language. Having a common language, however, has not served to increase cultural understandings. Rather, it has put Indigenous cultures at risk. This suggests that a common language is not the panacea for common understanding. Instead, understanding is a layered endeavour.[40]

I understand this passage from Kovach; even though Blackfoot people speak English, using the language has not brought us any closer to the colonizers, to academic thought. My

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[38] Margaret Kovach (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. University of Toronto Press, p. 24.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

generation being the last very fluent Blackfoot speakers, I lose people when I speak my language. There are some words in English that are not transferable to Blackfoot, and there are a lot of Blackfoot words that the English language falls short in true, direct cross-connection. Even though English is a common language I believe it doesn't get to the actual point of what the Indigenous people are trying to say—especially in their own language, in this instance Blackfoot. To me, if a Western scholar was to say things in English and I replied in Blackfoot, there is no meeting of the minds. It reminds me of Treaty 7. I am a direct descendant of Mikaistoo, Chief Redcrow; that's my grandfather's grandfather, my mother's great-grandfather, my great-great grandfather. In those stories from 1877, September 1877, the total non-meeting of the minds. The treaty, we say iinaihstsi, was a peace treaty: no more wars. But it was misconstrued as a land treaty and interpreted by the Federal government and the Indian Agent, and the North-West Mounted Police and the missionaries and other political, legal groups, to put us on the reserve. Being placed on the Blood Reserve, number 148 A and B, it took us out of the mountains.

It's no different, 1877, with Blackfoot people and government officials, their interpretation of the treaty; there was absolutely no meeting of the minds, as they say in European law. To me, I am using that event that actually happened. I don't have to validate that, the treaty. It's no different than today: there will be no absolute understanding of my research, of giving back the mountains their proper Blackfoot names and the effects, spiritually and culturally, of those Blackfoot names within—and it could go beyond—the Park's boundary. Going back to the methodology, that is why I wanted to interview orally, verbally, the Elders. And I have lost a few in these past few years, and to record their knowledge, they're gone. I am

digging around, 'researching' as it's called, other stories of the mountains, collecting those and archival research that I'm not finding in any library—mostly in private collections of both Blackfoot and non-Blackfoot people.

Kovach continues:

> Qualitative research offers space for Indigenous ways of researching, yet any understanding of Indigenous methodologies alongside Western-constructed research processes (qualitative or otherwise) triggers recollection of the miserable history of Western research and Indigenous communities. The oft-quoted statement by Linda Tuhiwai Smith says it all: "the word itself, 'research,' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (1999:1). In response, Indigenous scholars have been unified in their call for methodological approaches to research that respect Indigenous cultural knowings. From this starting place, it is not whether we need to consider Indigenous inquiry, but what approaches to it would look like and how and or if they might fit into the qualitative landscape. Indeed, these researchers are finding ways to apply their own tribal epistemologies in their own research work.[41]

That is all that I am doing. I am not necessarily defining, but collecting our Blackfoot epistemology. I am forcing the hand that this is my Blackfoot qualitative research landscape, outside of a regular framework, as Tuhiwai Smith says. Research is also a dirty word for me. All I'm doing is trying to find and reconnect this disruption of the mountain name so we could continue to practise what we always did.

Kovach continues:

> From an Indigenous perspective, the reproduction of colonial relationships persists inside institutional centres. It manifests itself in a variety of ways, most noticeably through Western-based policies and practices that govern research, and less explicitly through the cultural capital necessary to survive there.[42]

My governance is from the Elders and my clan. How can one, or an institution that does not understand our culture, our language, and—just for this paper, say vision and fasting—how can

[41] Kovach, *Indigenous methodologies*, pp. 24-25.
[42] Ibid., p. 28.

they understand and set policies? I'm being very polite about Western policies. But at the same time, I am not necessarily sharing the actual process of fasting, but putting it into perspective where the general knowledge can be understood that we believe in spirits, the connectivity of that. Western research, to go back to Kovach, "The result has been, and continues to be, that Indigenous communities are being examined by non-Indigenous academics who pursue Western research on Western terms."[43]

I am collecting—not researching—collecting stories from my Elders. It's Blackfoot research on Blackfoot terms; not necessarily my terms, but the protocols of the Elders. There's no political connection to it in our culture. As Kovach says, "Indigenous researchers have acknowledged the colonial history of Indigenous oppression and the political nature of indigenous research."[44] I want to do this methodology, if I can use the word, from a "pure" Blackfoot perspective. That way, the Western culture society can learn from me and learn of the damage of the colonial impact and imprint of their values and customs on our traditional lands. That's basically what I am trying to do. Kovach writes a lot that is relevant to what I am researching. I would like to further note:

> In the past several years, I have watched while Indigenous research frameworks have become an increasingly present part of the research vernacular, and to me this is *miyo* (a good thing). I think that we create space by not letting the subject fade into the sunset. I am reminded of a quote by Blackfoot scholar Betty Bastien: 'to continue practicing research outside of one's culture, and attempting to develop research questions from experiences based on the western paradigm, continues to create dependency among tribal peoples.' (1999:62). I am equally reminded of Susan Boyd, a critical researcher, who points out that 'knowledge is power' and the choosing of a methodology is a political act.[45]

[43] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 28.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., p. 53.

Not that this knowledge is giving me any power. I'm just sharing to a certain degree the knowledge, and I am only talking about mountains that other societies will see as not living. They are living beings to us. I'm not really setting a framework. It's a natural process of telling and correcting history; and this one is physical history because the mountains are there. There's not really any place that has really gone in depth on the impact: colonizers, literally, taking the mountains away from us. Only recently we were allowed to go back in there. The mountains are our friends, and the spirits of those mountains are the spirits that provide and give us the gift of knowledge, of healing, of songs, of ceremonies, of everything in Blackfoot culture.

That is why my methodology is more or less based on Elder interviews. I cannot find any archival research in print that tells me about the impact of visions. A lot of Western writers just say visions, and that's it, because they don't know really. I was taking a little step but will not fully disclose those protocols; my Elders will not really allow me to go in depth, but to a certain point. As mentioned above, the Delgamuukw case allowed Elders and oral testimony to be presented in court.[46] The Tslihqot'in case further accepted oral testimony from the Elders in the First Nations.[47] Most recently for me was between 2014 and 2016, and it continued in 2017 when I was elected to Blood Tribe Council. In our Council, but mainly the committee I was on, the tribal government committee, we brought the federal court out of Calgary to the Blood Reserve. The case was with respect to our 134-year-old "Big Claim" land case at the southern

[46] Assembly of First Nations. "Delgamuukw v British Columbia." August 28, 2019. Retrieved Dec. 21, 2021 from https://www.afn.ca/timeline/delgamuukw-v-british-columbia/.
[47] Tslihqot'in First Nation v. British Columbia. (Supreme Court of Canada, Jun. 26, 2014). https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do.

edge of the present Blood Reserve to the border, from the St. Mary River to the Belly River. It was supposed to be wider than that, but that was the context of the land claim that the Land Claims Commission allowed. Through the process, Judge Zinn, who presided over our claim, allowed Blood Elders to testify in court.[48] Nobody questioned their validation, from the stories that they heard from their Elders.

I want to reference John Ralston Saul, in his book *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* to add to this point:

> Our Supreme Court has now given serious weight to oral culture through a series of judgments focused on indigenous questions. In fact, it has ruled that it is willing to believe oral evidence over written. Our universities, which ought to be in the same philosophical and cultural universe as our highest levels of justice, are instead entirely designed to deny the importance of the oral. At the core of higher learning in Canada lies an obsession with the written and a concept in which learning means written. The higher your studies go, the more they are built around narrow, exclusionary ideas of truth, tightly tied to a world of people footnoting one another. And so our intellectual class, whether lawyers or social scientists or those who teach literature, is constituted to deny the centrality of the Aboriginal cultures. The intellectual class exists to deny any particular Canadian approach toward culture. They write it out, marginalize it, even when ways are found to give the oral written form. Many would say there is no alternative. Yet the historic basis for most of what is taught in the humanities was oral or largely oral for thousands of years.[49]

Here is what I understand from John Ralston Saul's reading: This is 2022 and I am going to—I am not going to say attempting—I am *going to* break the narrow focus of academic thought, not just locally; nationally, globally. It's already mentioned, the three cases: the Tslihqot'in, Delgamuukw and Blood Tribe. There are probably some other current cases for the law of Canada, at its highest level, as Ralston Saul wrote. Towards time, they're allowing oral

[48] Meghan Grant (June 12, 2019). Blood Tribe wins massive land claim battle in Federal Court. *CBC News*. Retrieved Dec. 21, 2021 from https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/blood-tribe-big-land-claim-federal-court-decision-1.5172198.
[49] John Ralston Saul (2008). *A fair country: Telling truths about Canada*. Viking Canada, p. 36.

language. Yet our post-secondary institutions are not. This is a crossroads for Indigenous students, for my sake Blackfoot, Kainai, or Apaitsitapi, the Weasel People, to change that. The receivers of the Western doctoral degrees that are in the capacity of supposedly advancing knowledge, how I read John Ralston Saul, have narrowed the scope of thought to their liking, rather than the broader scope of my liking as a Blackfoot person. I want to share of what I like, versus what they like for themselves. I totally agree with John Ralston Saul. I'm not making assumptions. I don't think any Blackfoot person that is very embedded in their cultural ways and language, customs, will ever make assumptions of our own world. I will never make assumption of our Creation stories, of our Naapi stories, of our songs, our ceremonies. It's too powerful, and too gigantic, and there are too many years, thousands upon thousands, if not maybe a million.

I am in the middle of this whole validation process that is part of attaining a doctoral degree, PhD. To me, it is not necessarily throwing a monkey wrench into the process of how methodology is acceptable in academic institutions in order to obtain a PhD. There are other legal cases; but I am bringing it home on the validation point. If federal law, Supreme Court law allows the testimony of Elders, that testimony that I heard, that was passed on to me from many Elders on the Blood Reserve—even the other Blackfoot reserves and Amskapi Piikani, the Blackfeet reserve; that is my validation to this work I am doing. If anybody was to question: "validate your history," I would say my validation is from oral testimony and me here, speaking my language: Niitsipowahsin, Blackfoot. That is my validation, in accordance to methodology. Again, I will repeat: as a Blackfoot person from Blood Reserve, from Kainai, that is where I am coming from. We talk about indigenizing universities, and lately Truth and Reconciliation and its

94 calls to action; I am only expressing the truth of my Elders and their stories, from way back—again, time immemorial. I am creating that opportunity to open the somewhat closed gates that are supervised by gatekeepers. I am pushing those doors open, those gates, to allow Blackfoot methodology, based on the transference of oral history. Based on transferring of ecological knowledge, based on transferring of knowing from land, and the most important thing, based on transferring of language: my language, Niitsipowahsin, Blackfoot. In the Blackfoot world itself, there is the most solid proof of validation: we live it. We speak it. We do ceremonies with it. We follow it. That is the validation.

The second part to my methodology is the visual. I think I can put the visual and the Elder connection together. Again, I wanted to go to the mountains; two I have gone with, where we actually got as close to the mountains with the Elders, with them pointing out the detail of those mountains and why. So the oral history comes together with a visual presentation. That way most of my research with the Elders is not all abstract but visual. The person not familiar with my traditional territory will then begin to see and understand what I'm talking about and what the Elders are showing me, and what they're talking about. I would like to do both.

It may take me my lifetime to adequately find all the names. I think I've found six or eight names. The difficulty in my research—I don't like that word now; my collecting information—is I'm losing Elders. But I'm not giving up. I don't know how to end this whole study because it may take me at least another 25 years to find the names. If this is acceptable, that's what I'm doing, and leaving at that, because this research is going to be ongoing for many years. I don't know how and when I will complete this, but I think I have done enough

theoretical research in writing the written narratives to present my case. I would like to be judged by my own peers, which should be fluent Blackfoot speakers. I'd like to, ultimately, use my language rights as a Blackfoot person to present my findings through this Blackfoot methodology.

All of the Elders who knew probably all of the mountains from here to Banff or Jasper, and the songs that came with these mountains, have passed away. My research is archival, if I can find anything. The other is communication citation research, oral testimonies, oral stories from the few Elders that are alive today in the Blackfoot world, and people from the Blackfoot communities that are very knowledgeable about history and culture but are not members of a particular Society. I am running out of time. Hopefully I can find these names to reconnect spiritually about most of these mountains, and to be able to call them their rightful Blackfoot names. English mountain names will never give us that spiritual medicine; they never will because the mountains do not hear, do not understand English names given to them by Creator, by the spirits. It has to be in our language, Niitsipowahsin, Blackfoot language.

CHAPTER 3: BLACKFOOT WORLDVIEW AS THEORY

I am going to recite some of the words of Eldon Yellowhorn from the book *The Scriver Blackfoot Collection: Repatriation of Canada's Heritage*. To continue expanding on why I am doing this work, it is because I really want to highlight the Blackfoot thought, the Blackfoot philosophy; and as little to none as possible of the Western philosophy, the Western thought.

There was a period of despondency for the Blackfoot people, as Yellowhorn states.[50] With the arrival of the Europeans, of the Spanish Hernando de Soto on the Mississippi River, the Spanish influence came from the south. Then the British and European influence came from the east in terms of Blackfoot territory. Those started changing, those influences, and today we still have the influence that's preoccupying our Blackfoot livelihoods. We weren't immune from the diseases, and some of the diseases that were brought over came from domestic animals. Here, we never really domesticated anything, except the wolf, wolf-dogs, and then the arrival of horses. We didn't domesticate the iinni, the buffalo, or the elk, the moose, the split-hoof animals. We never did, and so there was no transfer of parasites. Look at smallpox—we weren't immune from that because it was a foreign disease; smallpox didn't start here. That decimated the numbers of a lot of Plains tribes and Southwest tribes. When de Soto and these people settled on the Mississippi River, there were 60-70,000 people just in those towns along the Mississippi; and 125,000,000 was the estimation in North America. And they brought in 300 pigs, de Soto, these people, and that transferred the swine flu. We didn't have pigs here, domesticated ones; we depended on the iinni. Why I am describing these is to give the thought,

[50] Eldon Yellowhorn (1990). Wintercounts, in P. H. R. Stepney and D. J. Goa (Eds.), *The Scriver Blackfoot collection: Repatriation of Canada's heritage*. Provincial Museum of Alberta.

when the iinni passed, or were almost totally rid of by colonizers, we continued losing that knowledge from the mountains.

Terra nullius was what was practised. That continued even into the mid-1800s, why the Prime Minister of the day said, "let's take all this land." *Terra nullius*: their idea that the land was empty. It wasn't; we were here. But the privileged thinking, they didn't think we were here. We were here. That *terra nullius* thinking was still very much alive when A. J. Macdonald granted Thomas Blakiston to find a railroad connection to the Pacific Ocean, and the contest began between the Great Northern Railroad of the States, and Canada having a railroad. Those encroachments further took us away from the mountains. That is what I'm trying to bring to the forefront, why I am making reference to—and it's just a starting point—the mountains in Paahtomahksikimi, Waterton National Park and Glacier National Park. To close the gap or link in our relationship, our active participation being in the mountains, that we are now quasi-removed from because of government and colonial bureaucracy.

I want to quote this passage from Eldon Yellowhorn, who begins by saying:

> Change, when it occurred for the Blackfoot through contact with the European culture, inundated the social structure in such a way that not everyone or everything could withstand the onslaught. There was a period of despondency and culture-shock for members of this society as they watched their world dissolve.[51]

This dissolving of our Blackfoot world came from all different fronts. Why I'm highlighting it, is I want to go back to the Earth that we once lived on, roamed freely prior to settlement, prior to 1492, of our social structure: the families, into clans, into bands, and then into tribes. Those are the four tribes: Kainai (Apaitsitapi sometimes), Pinaapii Piikani, Siksikai, and Amskapi Piikani.

[51] Yellowhorn, Wintercounts, p. 23.

The cultural shock is still alive and well. We have not fully adapted, and I don't think we will. This despondency is in the academic world, and nothing prepared us for this. The fact, as Yellowhorn states:

> By 1900 their days [meaning the Blackfoot] on the earth looked as dark as those of the buffalo, which had virtually disappeared from the Plains.[52]

If I could use that analogy, our psychology, our thinking, virtually disappeared from the structure of colonial school curriculum structures. Our minds disappeared because we were forced to accommodate a different educational academic thought. I want to reverse that by recreating and getting back to the relationship of the land, the mountains. Yellowhorn continues: "they [meaning Blackfoot] adopted civilization, reluctantly at first, but later with eagerness that no one had anticipated. In doing so they created a hybrid society […]."[53]

I find that quote very interesting. Not that I fully agree with the eagerness; I would call it the forced eagerness to adopt "civilization"—European civilization. I question that. We have Blackfoot civilization. But then the hybrid society is very interesting, because I think we're all hybrid societies, First Nations, Indigenous people. Not that I really accept that wording, but if you look at it in that context, we're sub-European cultures; we're not truly European culture—and never will be. But we've made this hybrid type thing because we've been forced to. Well, I want to go beyond the hybrid and go back to the original, where the Blackfoot way of knowing is primary and not necessarily the European hybrid society. As Yellowhorn continues,

> The catalyst for change may have come from the European sources, but it was the Blackfoot imagination that shaped the changes. From this turmoil emerged the present

[52] Yellowhorn, Wintercounts, p.23.
[53] Ibid.

> Blackfoot culture, no longer constrained by adherence to a tradition that for centuries had given them a sense of continuity.[54]

Again, I want to go back to that continuity of the Blackfoot names, the plants, the cultural, the spiritual significance of the mountains rather than having them named by people we don't know. There are Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) sites there and that's the very point—the ultimate relationship is Itaksiistsimoo'pi. I want to change that thinking, why I'm doing this; and it's a complete thinking. Yellowhorn captures what he calls the European view of Indian culture:

> The study of history characteristic of the Europeans up to the late 19th century reflected a mindset that saw a dichotomy between the civilized world and the primitive world. This mindset produced a hierarchical, ethnocentric classification that ranked human cultures by their ideologies and technological achievements. This model of cultural evolution began with a rigid assumption of the superiority of European civilization, and continued with the conviction that this civilization was the ultimate goal of all humanity.[55]

That is very interesting, the mindset. That mindset still is breathing in academic institutions, and the 'civilization' as they define it from their perspective, and the primitive. Another reading, by Vine Deloria Jr., uses that: that the scholars, the theorists, they're civilized and everything else is primitive.[56] They use that portion, where they begin thinking it's primitive, to inject and personify their own thoughts, their own research, in accordance with their own thinking—and no consultation with Blackfoot.

Some of the Indigenous scholars talk about this primitiveness, and it cuts off the modern-day bands—let's say Blackfoot. This comment that says, "oh the old people, the old timers, this is how they lived." This is the Europeans saying that. Being alive today, I'm thinking

[54] Yellowhorn, Wintercounts, p. 23.
[55] Ibid., p. 25.
[56] Deloria Jr., Why we respect our Elders burial grounds, p. 3.

and saying, “that culture that you’re talking about as primitive, I am standing here. The continuity of that culture.” To stop that, “you guys came from someplace else.” Well, we didn’t. I’m still part of what you determine primitive, and we’re not primitive at all. At all. Because if we’re so primitive, why is it so difficult to understand Blackfoot ideology, Blackfoot language, Blackfoot ceremonies, Blackfoot Vision Quests? Why is it so difficult for universities to understand that—meaning Europeans—if it’s so primitive? And yet you get boggled on these Blackfoot thoughts, especially the spirituality and the Naapi stories that you’re having a hard time comprehending because it’s outside of your theoretical perceptions of other theories that you use to form your type of thinking, your way of thinking. We’re outside of those theories that don’t make sense to us. So therefore, your theory doesn’t belong in a Blackfoot worldview; but through superiority mentality—privileged mentality—you apply those theories to us. Today we’re reacting; those theories do not fit into the Blackfoot thought at all. None whatsoever. We don’t classify theories. With this work that I’m doing I’m just wanting to bring out and solidify that our theory—our lens, our way of seeing—is the lived experience from our Ancestors from thousands of years. We have nothing to theorize. We have not removed ourselves from our culture; we’re within. If you are within, I am not a tourist to my own people. I am not a researcher to my own people, because I am a part of that central core. Contrary to centralization that I have to follow this, in the earlier readings. So I understand as much as possible where Yellowhorn is coming from.

When it comes to the purpose of this dissertation, Margaret Kovach, in her book *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*, at some point in time

she talks about, if I could read this quote, and she's talking about her experience. I want to read this and then put it within the context of how I am going to use it. She is almost telling a story:

> On an early Wednesday morning, I go to the library with Keith Basso's book, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, in hand. I have not looked at the book since my flight to Saskatchewan in September… Flying over the prairies near Regina, on a crisp autumn day, I can see the golden fields quilted together and feel that customary sense of familiarity with this place. On an intuitive level, I understand Apache Elder Charles Henry's point that, in the grand scheme, the meaning which places have in our lives transcends our own momentary existence. I think of the name-place stories of Pasqua, my First Nation community—mostly that I do not know them. Yet even with this deficit of the cultural stories, I maintain a powerful connection to this part of the country that has shaped who I am…[57]

Reading Kovach's narrative, you know, the powerful connection. My purpose and goal of this dissertation is to familiarize people that do not understand the connection. People live and move maybe five, ten, 20, 50 times; and yet as a Blackfoot person, I keep coming back to my reservation, to my homeland, to my traditional territory—Blackfoot Traditional Territory. That powerful connection that Kovach refers to, even though you are not always there, you just feel this energy—that metaphysical energy that is described by Cajete.[58] When he talks about metaphysical, that is how we as Native People feel for the Earth and the ground, in a real sense, not in a philosophical sense. Not in a secular, third-party sense, but the real thing that we feel when we are close to our settlement, our homes.

That is the part that I'm trying to bring out. I have feelings for the Rocky Mountains, the foothills, Southern Alberta, Blackfoot Territory, that I will never feel elsewhere in the whole world. People that are somewhat transient, even professionals, I wonder if they really feel for

[57] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies,* pp. 6-7.
[58] Cajete, A philosophy of Native science, p. 45.

that particular land; or if it's just a momentary settlement until they go to the next place, and the next place. As Blackfoot people we dream about our homes, our horses, our dogs, our animals, our rivers, our trees, and mountains. Yet, in the European world, I have heard it so many times, from Europeans, "I don't dream." "I don't know what I dreamt." They are 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, even 90 years old, and they say, "I have never had a dream." Here I am thinking about the dream world; all of these scholars write about the dream world, how it is just part of our Blackfoot psyche. Yet in reverse thought, I cannot comprehend when people say, "I don't dream." The dream is so close to us; it provides us our direction in life. So one of the goals of this thesis is to bring out those things that otherwise nobody has really mapped out—or very few scholars. Locally as Blackfoot, and Lethbridge being the traditional Blackfoot Territory as they announce every meeting, every morning, almost. Because this thought I cannot find in the library. I cannot. Kovach is talking about libraries. My library is outside. Imagine how many books can be laid on top of a mountain; that's a lot of readings. Using those readings, on the other hand, our amount of thought—the thought process that we have in describing water, mountains, animals, four-leggeds, the sun, the universe, all in our thought.

A little bit further reading from Kovach:

> I get home from Saskatchewan and put the Basso book in my 'in pile' for a few weeks. The notion of name-places keeps simmering in my mind and I consider how the sky, water, and earth, among other things, contextualize our life. On a rainy Wednesday afternoon, I decide it is time to return to the book, and I head up to the University of Victoria library. To me, it is intriguing the way the Western Apache stories intermingle knowing with communicating. Basso's analysis of the association between language and ethnography in understanding a culture makes sense, though I question if other variables need consideration. And I wonder how this translates to contemporary urban Indigenous life of Foucault readers, Starbucks, and SUVs versus oral storytelling, black tea, and pickup trucks.[59]

[59] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 7.

What I am trying to contextualize is pure Blackfoot thought. I am at difficulty trying to use Western philosophy, even if I was not doing Blackfoot work. It would make me feel like a cheapened writer—a cheap European writer, because I cannot contextualize how Europeans think, even if I tried. Maybe I should have done my PhD when I was younger when I kind of got sold on the European contextualization; but even at that, I think it still would have been difficult. But now with age and ceremonial experience and being fluent in Blackfoot, I have very minimal or no contextualization to English language. I am using words here that I really wonder sometimes, "do I know what they mean?" Do I know what they are talking about? I don't know; time will tell. As Kovach continues:

> Had this occurred at another time in my life, the interpretation might have been different. We know what we know from where we stand. We need to be honest about that. I situate myself not as a knowledge-keeper—this has not been my path—rather my role is facilitator. I have a responsibility to help create entry points for Indigenous knowledges to come through.[60]

That is the very thing I am trying to do: the entry point for Indigenous knowledge to come through—Blackfoot thought to come through, rather than being pushed back, rather than those gatekeepers closing the doors on me. I am not necessarily testing their regulatory thoughts but testing if the European institutions are ready for this deep Blackfoot thought. For going to try to see things through my eyes, as I have seen things in my undergraduate degree—things and readings, and conversations through their eyes; but I don't think it came across clear. It was somewhat a blurred vision. By doing this, especially oral storytelling, it's time oral storytelling is given its full credit on the impact and the direction, and the information and the

[60] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 7.

connection to our way of life that creates this Blackfoot Indigenous Knowledge. That is my goal, to create that entry point for Blackfoot to be immersed in the academic world, in reading resources, assignments, and for those instructors to come to terms that there is another way of thinking. I am making myself available. I am actually opening myself to this thought. There are a lot of scholars out there, but there is a big difference. I am very proud of them. I will speak for myself: I am fluent in my language, and I am an active participant in Kainai and Apaitsitapi culture and ceremonies. Many scholars—a few have, but I don't know how many actually have the will to understand those ceremonies.

A little bit further, and of all the things they talk about Cree. But the thought that I'm getting at, reading the introduction by Margaret Kovach:

> A significant part of the presentation was devoted to the methodology of the study, a tribal-based approach with Cree knowledge as the guiding epistemology. Respecting protocol, before starting the presentation I acknowledged the territory and introduced myself. I shared aspects of my background with the audience—tribal and community affiliations, personal background, professional experience—to offer enough identity markers to situate me.[61]

Reading that, I have enough identity markers, because the academics cannot and probably will never accept me as a European scholar. As Yellowhorn writes, I don't want to be part of a hybrid Indigenous/quasi-European culture. I want to continue to be immersed in Blackfoot culture. Just because I am trying to get a higher education, that is my theoretical lens is to see it from Blackfoot and using my own Indigenous or Blackfoot methodology and epistemology. Mine, how I interpret it; not necessarily somebody else that's not Blackfoot interpreting for me. I want to use my own eyes in my interpretation.

[61] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 9.

Methodology and epistemology keep coming up. Well, I am going to transform the definition to how I understand it as a Niitsitapi, as a Kainaikoan, as Apaitsitapi and as Ninna Piiksii. Because I think I have that sovereign right to think like that, rather than control with a centralized system of how people go through the process and protocol of European standards to obtain a higher degree called a PhD. Picking up on Kovach's narrative:

> As I was packing up and gathering my effects to accompany my host for dinner and to debrief, a young Indigenous student cautiously came up to me. She said that she enjoyed the presentation, but she was wondering about something. She said that she was of Indigenous ancestry but had grown up in the city and did not have any connections with community. She said that she was drawn to using an Indigenous methodology but did not think she could go this route because she did not have the necessary cultural connections. We talked about her aspirations and hesitations, and as she was speaking my stomach was churning, for she was not seeking guidance on a relatively straightforward question about Indigenous methodologies. Rather, her query was more complex. It got to the heart of why Indigenous approaches mattered in the first place. I had to choose my words carefully, for standing before me was the future.[62]

I could understand that. People today, Indigenous students, are probably asking the same questions. Is culture necessary? My answer to that is yes, it is necessary to understand your culture, wherever you are from; or you will be part of that hybrid model culture and not necessarily your own. Kovach continues:

> It did not seem that her reasons were stemming from a lack of desire, but more about belonging. I did not ask for specific reasons, but I suspected that some of them were ours collectively born of a colonial history that shadows our being.[63]

Colonial. Colonization. And all about the displacement.

To address these goals of the thesis, we need to have a sense of belonging. I have that. As much as we've been removed from Paahtomahksikimi, Waterton Lakes, and Miistakistsi, the

[62] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 10.
[63] Ibid.

mountains, I have made that connection since I was young. It wasn't regulated by any government. There were no regulations outlining how my relationship should be with the mountains; it was my very own. No tribal council, no band council resolution was required. So my inner spirit as a sovereign person, that's what I am using. Within that sovereign thought, I am cutting loose the strings attached—the conditions of how and what and when I should adhere to the university structure, systems, protocols, how to obtain my PhD. My work is my own protocols from my Ancestors; but front and foremost is my identity. I like to think I'm 90-95-99% Kainaikoan, and still a bit of that European thought. Continuing from Kovach:

> Having experiences as both an Indigenous graduate researcher and university research instructor, I knew that a contribution on Indigenous research frameworks would be useful to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers seeking to honour Indigenous knowledge systems. I attempted to share my research through presentations and e-mailing digital copies of my findings to those who requested them. However, such efforts cannot reach the same audiences as a publication.[64]

That is why I am writing this thesis, since publication goes further than even the current email or facebook. But the framework of the paper is going to be Blackfoot, and not necessarily frameworks that I have seen being a high school teacher. From Kovach:

> Simultaneously, I struggled with the appropriateness of bringing an oral-based knowledge system into an academic one that has only recently become open to it.[65]

I don't know how much that opening has happened. I really don't know. Time will tell, on my oral-based knowledge. All of my mind is my songs, my stories, my grandparents, other Elders, both male and female—their stories. How can I validate that in an academic institution? How can I validate when the other side does not even fully understand what I am trying to say and

[64] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 11.
[65] Ibid., p. 12.

work and write about and verbally express? I hope that whoever reads this, hopefully they understand where I am coming from. If not, then it is a pretty lonely world. Hopefully I don't have to resort to talking to a wall, because literally that is a wall, even if there is a hundred people of the academic sort; if they don't understand me, then I am just talking to a wall. And wall meaning not that they are a wall, but there's a wall, and they are on the other side.

Kovach continues:

> Indigenous contributors to this book cite the risks of bringing cultural knowledges into Western research spaces, and I, too, found myself anxious about the misinterpretations, appropriations, and dismissals that often accompany Indigenous ways of knowing within the academy. The transformative potential for academia in welcoming diverse knowledges is significant, but at what cost to Indigenous peoples? I knew that I was not the first to have such apprehensions and knowing this heightened my responsibility to be clear on the reasons why I chose to persist.[66]

That is where I am at. How much do I give the Western world? Will they take it and then reinterpret, and in the mix of all that, is my work going to be totally the other direction than what I am trying to do? This will be the interesting point. But something tells me deep inside that Indigenous students, Blackfoot students, those who have taken the time to understand my Indigenous paradigm, will understand my work. I can produce all my work and readings in Blackfoot, to all the Elders of the four Blackfoot tribes. I could actually cite all my readings in Blackfoot and my work. From Kovach again:

> Cultural longevity depends on the ability to sustain cultural knowledges. At the heart of a cultural renaissance, Indigenous or otherwise, is a restoration and respectful *use* of that culture's knowledge systems. Colonial history has disrupted the ability of Indigenous peoples to uphold knowledges by cultural methodologies.[67]

[66] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 12.
[67] Ibid.

Kovach says a lot here. And the disruption. If I was choosing to be an engineer or a different type of scholar, yes, I would submit mentally to all that. But again, it's interesting finding the word "hybrid." I could be a hybrid Native person. I just can't be a hybrid. I just can't. I will use the research powers that I have to address these goals. To me, I am not necessarily looking at acceptance. I am actually going to already prepare myself for the opposition—for the reluctance to understand where I am coming from and using all of these quotes from these scholars to support and back me up. Hopefully, I will write a Blackfoot book when I am done to express it. I don't mind referring to all of these other tribal people, from different tribes, on their Indigenous perspectives, because it connects to what I am trying to do. I don't know how many are involved in ceremony, but I am involved in ceremony, which gives me a unique Apaitsitapi view. As Kovach states,

> As the academic landscape shifts with an increasing Indigenous presence, there is a desire among a growing community of non-Indigenous academics to move beyond the binaries found within Indigenous-settler relations to construct new, mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action.[68]

I want to continue that if there are scholars that are moving beyond their own binaries. Vine Deloria Jr. stated that people were interested in Asian, or Chinese culture.[69] They jumped all over it, and once they finished analyzing it, there was no Chinese presence in their research, in their continued work. It was fascinating, but nobody adopted it. I don't know how many will adopt mine, but I suspect with the new thinking of emerging young scholars, non-Native

[68] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 12.
[69] Vine Deloria Jr. (1997). *Red earth, white lies: Native Americans and the myth of scientific fact*. Fulcrum Publishing.

scholars, I feel there is some acceptance and they are receptive to this thought. That's interesting to me, and it's a wonderful feeling.

> The infusion of Indigenous knowledge systems and research frameworks informed by the distinctiveness of cultural epistemologies transforms homogeneity. It not only provides another environment where Indigenous knowledges can live, but changes the nature of the academy itself. Indigenous methodologies disrupt methodological homogeneity in research.[70]

That is what's going to happen. That is the outcome.

Having described the lens, this other reading, the background to the research, this is how academia will start; it will disrupt the present status-quo methodologies. It will cause a disruption to those people that do not want to accept, that have no acceptance of Ninna Piiksii's Blackfoot thinking and methodologies, and my way of thinking transferred from the Elders of long ago, and through ceremony. Academics don't talk about Indigenous ceremony. Here I am talking about ceremony and how it informs how my mind works: is ceremony, the dreams, the actual experience, knowing from land, actually touching a mountain, actually sitting with the legs in the water and not necessarily in the library. That is my assumption of how it is going to be viewed by academia.

> To counteract the heinous reputation of Western research in Indigenous communities, one response has been to apply Western methodologies (such as community-based approaches) that are in alliance with the ethical and community dynamics of research with Indigenous peoples. However, there is a need for methodologies that are inherently and wholly Indigenous.

That's what I am doing: wholly Indigenous. There is no fragmentation of the white thought.

> The past several years have been marked by a growth in literature on tribal-based methodologies (Wilson, 2001; Weber-Pillwax, 1999), which is built upon the first wave of Indigenous scholarship (Little Bear, Hampton, Deloria), and argues the epistemological basis for this form of inquiry. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) book,

[70] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 12.

> *Decolonizing Methodologies*, has provoked analysis of how methodologies per se impact Indigenous peoples, and we are now at a point where it is not only Indigenous knowledges themselves that require attention, but the processes by which Indigenous knowledges are generated. Thus, Indigenous methodologies are the next step.[71]

That is exactly what I am doing. Indigenous—I will say Blackfoot methodologies, are the next step.

[71] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, p. 13.

CHAPTER 4: BLACKFOOT SPIRITUALITY

This aspect that I'll call a journey started many years ago for me, in 1994, when I was sitting underneath Chief Mountain and I asked Ninastako, "Kiksookoaks, your relatives here, what happened to their names?" I was speaking to Ninastako as a person, an animate being, because that's how we were raised. Especially the Blackfoot worldview. Since then, sitting there many years ago, I thought, "when I grow a little older, I will get the names back, since we've been here for thousands of years, to retrieve those names." The colonial impact and the colonizers, the early map-makers, land surveyors, so-called explorers, putting their names or other people's names broke that very true and deep connection that we had with the mountains. This may be difficult to understand for atheist people, Christian people, whatever faith, to understand where we're coming from and where I'm coming from as a Niitsitapi, as a Blackfoot person, and a Kainaikoan or Apaitsitapi. I'm from the Mamoyiksi, Fish Eater clan and the history behind that, hearing from my grandfather and other Elders, it was one of the largest bands with its members, and way before the boundary of the 49th parallel, that roamed all over and camped and settled in seasonally different places, especially along Yellowstone River, the mountains. A very aggressive, courageous band.

Going back to finding the names, when a person is praying and fasting—or as people call Vision Quest—they call out to the name of that mountain spirit. But people don't understand it because they consider the mountains to be inanimate, not alive. Well throughout all our existence, from time immemorial, from the Creation stories, from Naapi stories, we've been here for a long time. Whatever the people, individuals, that went to fast in the mountains, that's where they received their teachings, their wisdom, their power, metaphysical energy, of

whatever was given to them. A lot of them were healers because we had no hospitals as how we define healthcare and hospitals today. That was a place that, if you want to put it, almost like the fasting of medicine, the school of medicine through Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) on all these mountains. Lately it seems as though Niitsitapi only fast where there's names of mountains. So you can see that this connection, when Blackfoot names were taken away and English or other European countries' human names were given. In Blackfoot thought, these European names do not give that spiritual energy, do not provide a good Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) for people who are going to fast, whether it's one, four, ten days or whatever. That's why Ninastako is bombarded every summer, even this past summer, of people going to fast. I was there too, but I will save my story for another time, of what I was taught there.

Going back to the mountains, the erosion, it's like taking away our medicine people, taking away our medical knowledge. Now you take that and in 1884 Park Superintendents were hired on both sides, Glacier National Park and Waterton, Paahtomahksikimi. Being removed from the mountains—the names are taken, now we're removed. A lot of the plants that we used for medicinal purposes that only grow in the mountains, those we lost too. Because it's almost like you combine the vision and the gifts of healing—not that everybody was a healer. But now what you're taught in the vision, which roots, petals, stems to use, are all prohibited because now it was a park. The park concept has somewhat of a contradiction. It's preserving supposedly for the next generation, or generations upon generations of the land; and yet the very thing they're preserving for themselves is prohibiting us, the herbalists, the grandfathers, the grandmothers, the medicine people, from harvesting those medicines. A domino effect happened.

The other aspect is kind of the third thing, or cultural, and it's also with respect to harvesting animals that are a hooved source. It was an abundant of game—buffalo, elk. We as Blackfoot believe the split-foot animals are the healthiest diet; not rodents or whatever. Being prohibited from hunting in the mountains our diet—our physiological anatomy—our body also changed, because then we were put on the reserve in 1884, the starvation period which James Daschuk writes about in *Clearing the Plains*.[72] I don't think we've ever fully recovered, health-speaking, because we could no longer just have healthy food.

The last part—and I'm just summarizing this; there is more to it. The last part is ceremony. Bundles being opened in the Paahtomahksikimi: Medicine Pipe Bundles, the Beaver Bundle, Water Pipe Bundle, a lot of Bundles that were transferred to a lot of our people—Blackfoot, Niitsitapi: Amskapi Piikani, Kainai, Pinaapii Piikani, Siksikai. Thousands of years ago, the Beaver Bundle ceremonies, that's where they took place: Paahtomahksikimi, Waterton. Today we still have the Beaver Bundle ceremony. That's what I am saying, our spirituality left. In 1926 was the last Bundle opening, when the Prince of Wales Hotel was being built, just straight north of the bottom there in Waterton, by Weasel Tail, an Amskapi Piikani Blackfoot person. Since then, there has probably been the odd one, but there's hardly any ceremonies. The iinni 'disappeared' too. You take all those cultural things, and just by the beginning of erasing Blackfoot names, everything else was erased: ceremonies, and the buffalo. Those ceremonies that strengthen that spiritual connection of the land, of the mountains, of the plants, of the animals, the spirituality of that. It's like a knife cutting all those deep ways of life.

[72] James Daschuk (2019). *Clearing the plains*. University of Regina Press.

Blair Stonechild writes his book, *The Knowledge Seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality*; this book is also foreworded by Noel Starblanket. Stonechild writes to some of the points I'm making in my way, which is the difficulty of having academic personnel, instructors, theorists, understand Indigenous thought. Taking a couple excerpts from Stonechild's book, he writes:

> Intellectuals who are rationalists are quick to dismiss Aboriginal spirituality, visions, or healing as being the result of imagination or hallucination and therefore not worthy of serious consideration. However, the belief that humanity evolved from some sort of 'biological soup,' or a belief that rules out any consciousness apart from human senses, is absurd and close-minded. In traditional Aboriginal culture there is no question that spirituality forms a greater overarching reality. It is from this source that wisdom and guidance are sought. To restrict our thought process to the physical world and what can only be seen or touched with the senses limits much greater possibilities.[73]

I use this reading from the physical knowledge that possibly intellectuals are stuck in that mind and do not understand, or even refuse, the spiritual process. Our ceremonies are thousands of years old. Our spirituality has brought us this far in our creation. Obviously, our spirituality, through ceremony, has worked, for us to be able to exist even today in our own Niitsitapi world. Stonechild continues:

> Some think Indigenous knowledge systems are irrational because they include consultation with a spirit component—something considered unknowable and unreliable. This book argues that spirit is tangible and that it is possible to interact and have a meaningful relationship with the supernatural. In fact, the way Indigenous peoples interrelated with the world was rational. It has highly organized and predictable patterns of interacting with the environment in a holistic way that included spiritual as well as intellectual approaches. Elders view the failure to take the spiritual aspect of life seriously and cultivate a relationship with the sacred as a serious deficit. Spiritual poverty inevitably leads to deterioration in all other aspects of our existence.[74]

[73] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker,* p. 184.
[74] Ibid.

That spiritual poverty began by the colonizers, to change our physical environment. This is only one part; I'm just talking about Miistakistsi and the mountains in Paahtomahksikimi, so-called Waterton Lakes. That has caused spiritual poverty. Even though we practise a lot of ceremonies on the Plains, imagine how much more powerful we would have been if we had continued to visit, utilize the mountains and all that they have to offer, including the medicines. How much more powerful we would be today.

Blair Stonechild talks about current academic settings, and he writes:

> Native Studies as a discipline within the Western university model tended to evolve along the lines of Western secular epistemology, with the exception of having Elders present. Ethnologists viewed Aboriginal cultures as dying and overlooked their religious vitality. As First Nations demanded greater control over content, approach, and hiring in education, they pressured for change. For example, languages are increasingly integral to programs, and traditional Knowledge Keepers are an essential element for cultural authenticity.[75]

The cultural knowledge, from this one particular study, on just the names and removing the names from Miistakistsi, the mountains, it has deteriorated some of the cultural authenticity. Ninastako (Chief Mountain) is on the Montana side. Many people, even people outside the Blackfeet/Blackfoot Confederation, still go to fast there. Yet on the Canadian side, so-called Waterton Lakes, there's not too much. It may come back eventually but you don't hear of too many people fasting in the mountains or mountain ranges in Waterton; it's somewhat still off-limits. With recent archaeological findings, after the Kenow fire, a lot of sites were uncovered that are Blackfoot, contrary to previous archaeological studies. The continuation to dismiss Blackfoot life, thought, spirituality from the mountains, it still continues. But young Blackfoot archaeologists have found several Vision Quest sites within the mountain ranges: physical

[75] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker,* pp. 184-185.

evidence. The finding of these Vision Quest sites just very recently supports what I am saying: that we used the mountains to fast. But the spiritual, the fasting, it is not within the context of the intellectual minds.

That is why I am defending my work, that the intellectuals who are the rationalists not be so quick to dismiss Aboriginal spirituality and visions or healing. Because what they're doing is they're short-changing their openness of their expression of liberal education. From my perspective as a Blackfoot person, until such a time, what Blair Stonechild is saying about our spirituality to be recognized and respected, then that will be true liberal education. It is not today. Not to me, not to the past generation. Hopefully future generations will be allowed to express in their written narratives, their content, and that they will be—it will be acceptable.

It is interesting, on who are, as I call them, the gatekeepers, the markers, the committees. If they have no knowledge, or refuse the acceptance of Aboriginal spirituality, they're not in the position to grade, to assess or evaluate when Blackfoot people or when I talk about spirituality when either they don't know it or refuse to know it. How can they mark a paper or work that is within total acceptability in the Blackfoot world and our people understand spirituality? On the opposite, if I was to speak of Catholicism, Anglican, Protestant, any other church or institutionalized religion I would be marked. But on the other hand, if I was to talk about ceremony in a general sense, I may not be graded. That's the impasse that I want to break so that other people will be allowed to speak their minds about their world, their worldview, in the spiritual context and not only in a physical sense.

Another comment from Stonechild:

> Some First Nations schools include a voluntary sweat lodge as an educational experience. Students feel it a worthwhile opportunity to connect with their inner selves

> and reflect about their life goals. This experience is valuable when so many distractions such as computers and video games exist. The transition to high school is a critical time when vulnerable students run the greatest risk of dropping out of school. A voluntary unit where students can undertake a supervised Vision Quest is recommended. Student effort can be evaluated on a pass/fail basis where the main objective is to undertake the experience.[76]

How can a non-Indigenous scholar that has no inkling to understand the Stiskaan (sweat lodge) or Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest)—how can they even begin to mark a pass/fail mark? This is where the dilemma is; we're at the crossroads of Indigenous education within a Western-Euro institutional setting. We're at a crossroads now. As Native Studies say, well, as Stonechild writes, it has tended to evolve along the lines of Western epistemology. He is making a statement on Native Studies. It goes back to Eldon Yellowhorn's comment, are we making hybrid Indigenous scholars, somewhat removed over here to complete the criteria to get their degrees? Hybrid. Very interesting thought. Rather than dismantling that hybrid thought and people being allowed Indigenous thought. Red Crow Community College on the Blood Reserve acknowledges its Elders as Eminent Scholars. However, Elders aren't generally considered scholars within the Western concept, they're only advisors to universities. If they teach, they have to sit with a person who has gone through the trenches of a PhD or Master's program based on Western thought. They can co-teach but somebody else has to supervise them.

Just a little bit more on Stonechild's work. He talks about the difference between spirituality and religion. Why I'm going on this is to bring out the challenge I have of the relationship Blackfoot people have with mountains and everything—the whole environment

[76] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker,* p. 183.

from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the river valleys—what it means to us.

Stonechild writes:

> An important distinction is to be made between *spirituality* and *religion*. *Spirituality* involves direct engagement and connection with the mysteries of the transcendent. It is the responsibility of each individual to pursue this enterprise. More experienced mentors can guide and give advice, but will not dictate what and how the spiritual quest unfolds. *Religion* is characterized by a belief system defined in rigid written texts such as the Torah, Bible or Koran. The ordinary person's relationship with the sacred is mitigated by interpreters, be they priest or rabbi. Individuals are discouraged from straying from scripture and can be persecuted for unsanctioned spiritual revelation. It is heretical to deny the Pope's infallibility or to impose one's own interpretation of scripture. One inhibition is that humans cannot reach out to God without mortal effort alone. Mystical aspects are considered "hidden" from ordinary knowledge, and adherents are to defer to church authorities. Such restrictions discourage exploration by the congregant.[77]

When somebody goes to fast, there's no mediator. There is no human mediator in the spiritual experience. Nobody comes to fasting. When Societies or ceremonies are practised, then you have the Elder; but the Elder is not really considered closest to Creator, closest to God. But an Elder is considered a person of very deep knowledge. The prayers of the individual Society members of any Society are still directly to the Creator. There is actually no mediator, except guidance through the ceremony, and that's why Elders are used in different ceremonies.

Stonechild states,

> This distinction between spirituality and religion is not intended to be a condemnation of religion, which legitimately attempts to codify divine laws. A problem arises when spiritual laws become inflexible, discourage individuals from seeking ecstatic experience and are unable to respond to intractable questions. For example, the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," in some cases, becomes ignored out of necessity by those in desperate straits.[78]

[77] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker,* pp. 3-4.
[78] Ibid, p. 4.

It is interesting. It seems as though the written texts of religion are very interesting. The written. The only point I'm going to make on this is that Blackfoot spirituality is not written. Maybe that is the difficulty Western universities and educational institutions have.

> Aboriginal people spend an inordinate amount of life undergoing sacrifice, seeking visions and dreams, and learning prayers, songs, and rituals in order to access the ethereal. Knowledge earned only at a "human level" is considered inferior. If a person does not have dreams, visions, and connections to spirit power, he or she is viewed as somehow deficient.[79]

It continues. It continues, boarding schools across Canada, that now that we're into this other phase that we're viewed as no longer deficient that we belong to a Church organization. Out here we're considered deficient; that thought is still alive and well. As mentioned, we're at a crossroads in this thought. Spirituality has helped us to get to this point, from thousands of years ago. Speaking of residential school, Stonechild further states:

> Survivors of Indian residential schools have struggled, with varying degrees of success, to recover their lost spiritual heritage. Attempts to restore spiritual understanding in today's world is challenging in the face of exceedingly powerful and entrenched forces. These include exploitative economic systems that aid and abet slavish adherence to materialism. The purpose of humans in this system is to be useful cogs in the economic machine. They are schooled largely to obtain the skills necessary to work, and once they are adults their primary identification becomes their occupation.[80]

Again, there's no spirituality; it's like machinery, the boarding schools. He goes on to say:

> Spiritual practice evolves according to changing circumstances and needs of humanity. For example, ceremonies Indigenous people undertook in pre-contact times are modified by the necessity to suit modern times. Language is used differently and new techniques come into play. But whilst surface practices may change according to circumstances, the underlying purpose, the necessity to develop a meaningful relationship with spirits with dedicated and direct efforts does not change.[81]

[79] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker,* p. 4.
[80] Ibid., p. 5
[81] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

Language—I call it the Blackfoot or Niitsitapi mountain talk, the mountain communication, the mountain language. By being put on reserve systems on the Prairies here, there is also the language lost, of the mountain names themselves, and even the interpretation of that Blackfoot name of the mountain. The songs that go with the mountains, and the ceremonies that go with the mountains; all that includes language. All gone. It may never come back. It's a sad reality. There's a lot of plants that grow up there that don't necessarily grow here in the foothills or Prairies. But the plants, the animals, and even some of the mountain birds and the stories about the mountains and everything associated with the mountain geography, mountain culture, we kind of lost that. In a sense, we just have a Prairie mentality, a Prairie psychology. That, surviving, living in the mountains, the mountain way of thinking, was also at an end, and all of those words. That's why I say Niistitapi mountain language, culture; mountain talk, mountain words. Hopefully some magical spiritual thing happens to me, or anybody else, to bring it back to how it was before Thomas Blakiston—to go back before 1492. To go all the way back and how we co-existed with the mountains. That is why I am doing this paper. The colonial impact—and it might not even be the right title—on the removal of the Blackfoot names of Miistakistsi. As I have stated in many different ways, there was a whole impact on our way of life; and our way of life includes everything. That is why I am doing it.

Jumping to the end, how am I going to do this? It's going to go beyond just this written portion or submission. It will take many years to bring back the names. It will take many years to identify all the plants that grow in the mountains that don't grow in the foothills or Plains. To find the names, if we can, and form our own Blackfoot pharmaceutical chart. Then people being allowed to hunt; there are many people that have never tasted the deer, elk, buffalo, all the

split-hoof, four-legged—they've never tasted that in their diet. You take the ceremony; there's no ceremonies in Paahtomahksikimi to embrace the spirituality of the Beaver Bundles. These will have to be negotiated to co-manage Paahtomahksikimi, Waterton Lakes, for these to come back to reality, because prior to 1877, the mountains were our territory, our traditional territory, our land. We became, and were forced to be, visitors on our land. The Rotary Club seems to have more say in this, from the 1920s, to designate that as a park. Special interest groups have, as I see it, forced us to stay away; they claimed it and we're still on the outside of this door, knocking on the door to get in. Well that door has to go away, because then the park concept defeats itself; it may satisfy other nationalities, tourists, commerce, environmental people. But it does not do anything for the Blackfoot thought or spirituality, of our existence.

Hopefully I've been able to answer why I am doing this work, and the next question is when. It already started for me many years ago, but other people have to pick it up, because I cannot do all the work; it's too massive. At the end, maybe then in written texts, we could write down all the uses of Blackfoot medicines, but not necessarily write down the spiritual aspect—the spiritual aspect will always be non-written, unless somebody actually experiences different ceremonies. Everybody that fasts, and even in most recent times, we are told not to really say the gifts we get from fasting and vision. The reason I know that, in the end, is that I have fasted in the mountains. I know what I'm talking about. But hopefully I can open the door for scholars to quit shutting out the deep spiritual Blackfoot knowledge of our existence, because I cannot see Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests) and deep ceremonies following the secular thought of Euro-Western academia or education. It has to be allowed.

CHAPTER 5: MIISTAKISTSI AND BLACKFOOT NAMING

The idea behind my research project, and why I truly want to reconnect the Blackfoot names and knowledge of the Miistakistsi in Paahtomahksikimi, in Waterton: I've thought about this and I've been holding back, but now I guess I have to make it clear. Now I've got some writing to support what I'm saying as an oral communicator, an orator, of what my thoughts were from many years ago—even prior to 1994, but specifically 1994. Why there were still a lot of Blackfeet names in Glacier National Park, and even outside of Glacier National Park. Even in the Prairies, the Foothills, there's some Blackfoot names. Then you come across to Waterton, just specifically Waterton, and there's no more Blackfoot names. I want to talk about Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests) and fasting that Blair Stonechild refers to; and Reggie Crop Eared Wolf and the Elders that worked with Glenbow Museum several years ago.

Most recently, the reason why I wanted to give the names back: all these people, including today, Elders, they have a very strong emphasis on the spiritual power of Ninastako (Chief Mountain), and other places that have also lost their names in the Prairies—certain power points, vortex points as you might call them—of where people, through a dream or through a spiritual direction, would go fast. To go on Itaksiistsimoo'pi, a Vision Quest journey, is similar to medical doctors who go to school and become a doctor. In Blackfoot we call our doctors the medicine men, the medicine people, the herbalists, the grandmothers, the women, the males. These mountains, in the European word, were our "institutions." The mountains are animate. That is where the spiritual vision, powers were given to heal. You had to call the name of that mountain to guide you in this process. It is still happening today where people are going for Vision Quests, fasting, and predominantly on the Montana side, especially at Ninastako. A

lot of people in modern times have obtained a vision, some for healing, some for other strengths to our culture. In modern times, if somebody was to go visit and fast at Vimy Ridge in Waterton, Mount Blakiston, the spirits will not answer them because they don't know these English people. Such as when people call on Ninastako to help them through this fast, to pity them, to get the mystical spiritual experiences. In Western science, these mystical experiences and processes are not understandable and not even recognized. Through Christianity and other religions, it's not allowed. Through the world of atheists, it's not allowed. But we as the First Nations people, as Siksikaitsitapi, Blackfoot people, we've been doing this possibly beyond ten thousand years.

The medicine people all received their gifts through the spiritual world, either from Ancestors that have gone by, or from animals that have come to them and spoken our language. This is all happening when one is fasting, whether it's one, four, ten days, whatever, in the mountains at these Vision Quest sites. Even today if I was to go to a Vision Quest site, I probably would go to Ninastako because it has a name. When I say the colonial impact of changing or removing the names of our mountains, it removed the connection for our spiritual wellbeing. It removed the process of how one attains, in the Blackfoot culture, being a medicine man. Without Blackfoot names, these mountains, they needn't necessarily be getting empty; but the colonial impact created a distance—physical, spiritual, sacred distance among Siksikaitsitapi, among Kainai, Weasel People. That slowly, almost entirely, killed our ways, our protocols and process, that our ways, only Indigenous people around the world truly understand and a very, very few European people—maybe a handful. Without the names, there

is no connectivity to these mountains, spiritually. Each mountain peak was given a name, and the rivers and the valleys.

In communication in 2021, working with Paahtomahksikimi, Waterton Parks-appointed archaeologists, two young Blackfoot men, they uncovered what I've been saying for years. Seventeen Vision Quest sites, and they're still intact—and possibly 30 just within Paahtomahksikimi. I am observing the 17 sites and would like to visit them. As our Elders would say, "Iitapissko," there's spirits there. Imagine, these are Blackfoot vision sites that I've seen through pictures; and now the archaeologist groups—five or six of them, two being the Blackfoot men from Kainai, and how they describe these sites. The other three or four are non-Native. But they have, through communication, and citing that communication, when they have found these sites they put tobacco down out of respect; and these are non-Blackfoot people, because they felt something at each individual site that they have never felt before. The two Blackfoot, they are learning and they are saying, "our Ancestors are still here." That is the point I am making. There is no open literature, except a few, but as Indigenous people, as Siksikaitsitapi, we are not going to—this research is not to expound on the process of what actually happens in Itaksiistsimoo'pi (the Vision Quest); but I will speak to it in general terms. That is where you get a spiritual gift to heal people, to doctor people and whatever, to be a good hunter, warrior—any other special gift. Through those visions, it's connected to all the plants; all the plants and fauna in Paahtomahksikimi, how we use those medicines. The word 'medicines' is over-used; a lot of people use medicines, but they don't know how to prepare, when to harvest, and how to preserve those medicines. From the early Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision

Quest) secrets of thousands of years ago, this is how the process of herbalism was passed—either through a vision, either through fasting, or coming through a dream.

You can see, and I don't want to necessarily compare the Western knowledge of medical science of how one attains their doctorship, their medical doctor. We have had this process that is unwritten, and the true spiritual guidance and connections. Everything had a starting point. Our starting point was from nature: the hills, the mountains, certain areas of Blackfoot country, where those magical or spiritual gifts came from. These spiritual gifts we deem as real. There may be modern medicine men from Siksikaitsitapi; but now that everything is settled, plowed, disturbed, only a few hills left and only the mountains, to achieve this spiritual knowledge and power from spirits. Then also the animals in the spirit world, showing us how to do ceremonies, how to heal. All our ceremonies are all related to the water, land and the flying beings; even today we still practise them. Again, scholars that have been taught in Western philosophy either don't understand this or they refuse to understand this—or just don't know what to think. That's where we lose people, and that's where we lose Western academia. Because this process of fasting, there's no book to tell you how to go about it. There's nothing. I'm not going to put it in written text. All I'm saying is when the names of these mountains were removed, replaced by European names, it broke our spiritual connection to those places, and the medicine men, medicine women's way of curing ourselves, our health. Imagine if fasting started ten or fifteen thousand years ago, it had a starting point. It didn't have us being put on reservations.

Speaking of Paahtomahksikimi and being put on reserves in 1884, physically, that's the whole process of spirituality, spiritual genocide, and the whole world of Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision

Quests). Everything that has been taken away, oppressed, forcefully through other religious methods, government methods and other methods to change us to be Brown-White people. That whole genocidal process also affected why we do not have medicine men, medicine women, medicine people today—far and few. If the mountains were left alone, and were given their rightful Blackfoot names today, we would have people going to fast. But at the same time, we have been treated as foreigners to our own Miistakistsi, our own mountains. There's a protocol today if somebody in modern time wants to have a vision—and I'm sure the park would ask you, "what did you receive?" By that, our health, our diet, our longevity of life has been shortened. If we had our own medicine people, if we had our own mountain names and we went to Vision Quest, we would not be in the state we are today, health-wise. The death rate for Indigenous men is lower than Indigenous women. Many years ago, the Elders talked about before Europeans, how we lived to be past 100 years old. It's unheard of now in many cases.

That is the reason why I am researching the mountains; but also, to establish the colonial impact of what they did to us, with the white settler mentality. They've harmed our connection, knowing from land, knowing from mountains, the spiritual knowledge and connectivity to the spirits. They disjointed that, the Europeans, the colonizers. That's why I call it colonial impact.

I want to follow up with a thought that comes from *The Story of the Blackfoot People: Niitsitapiisinni.* This was put together by the Blackfoot Gallery Committee people. There is a part about why I am referring to plants:

> Plants were a key part of our diet. Berries and roots supplied us with the vitamins and minerals that kept us healthy. Some plants provided important enzymes to help our

> people digest meat and make optimal use of fats and vitamins and nutrients. Different berries ripen at different times, and we often moved camp to be near a berry as it was ready for harvesting.
>
> We also make medicine from plants. Some of these medicines are common knowledge. Others are gifts from the Spirit Beings, and we need special rights transferred to us before we can use them. We do not use as many native plants today. Our environment has changed greatly; many plants are now more rare or have completely disappeared. Our knowledge of medicines may be disappearing as the old people depart without teaching the young people. Our health is suffering as a result.[82]

That is the point I am making, where our environment has changed and the relationship to Miistakistsi, the mountains, has changed. As the passage reads, others are gifts from Spiritual Beings; we're still saying this in modern times. Further, our sacred places:

> …are places where significant things happened to our ancestors. This is where the ancient stories took place. These sites are uniquely important to us. They tell us that our ancient stories are true. They tell us that we belong to this place in a way that no other human being can. Our sacred geography shows us our path through life. By following this path, our people will live long and productive lives.[83]

That has been distorted. A lot of references are made to Ninastako, also known as Chief Mountain; it is the home of Thunder and the event between Thunder and the crow—the Raven, and the story is a long one. Yet other mountains also have significance, but there is no name. It highlights and focuses on what I am talking about: the spiritual gifts from the spiritual beings through visions. This happened in the Prairies all over. Traditional Blackfoot Territory is very powerful, but the environment has changed. We probably cannot find those spiritual points.

The late Reggie Black Plume, a friend of mine, talks about it in his book, *Black Plume's Weasel People: The Last Bastion of Native Ways*, in Chapter 3, "Dreams and Visions":

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[82] The Blackfoot Gallery Committee (2013). *The story of the Blackfoot People: Niitsitapiisinni*. Firefly Books Ltd., p. 62.
[83] Ibid., p. 63.

> The individuals called medicine people practiced many means of curing the ill, including spiritual healings. They were gifted with unique powers from the spirits, nature, flora and fauna. Through their dreams and visions they found their supernatural techniques of medicine. Some, although, were born with this gift of healing. Acupuncture was not uncommon, (using porcupine needles, thorns or cactus needles). Hard brushes made of porcupine hair were used to apply pressure in swollen areas, joints, etc., to bring down the swelling and ease the pain.
>
> The first song these medicine people would sing would be their personal song. When they began to apply the medicine, a song with a faster beat would be performed. The personal song was generally the more powerful yet the faster beat song created a powerful healing vibration.[84]

On that note, each mountain has its spiritual name; it is animate and also had its own songs, its own healing songs. One would begin to see the impact of no more names for the mountains and not being allowed in the mountains: what we lost. We are dying and having shorter lives today. Black Plume continues:

> Burning of incense, songs and prayers were used to communicate with the spirit people in the Big Sands to gain information for healing practices by the medicine people. Individuals on the other side of the veil of earth life were beckoned to come forth and inspire them through dreams, visions and external signs.[85]

This beckoning was also in the mountains—to beckon the spirits to come forth, whether through dreams, visions or external signs. If that beckoning happened to an individual, then that individual, as Reggie Black Plume would say, was gifted with unique powers. These unique powers from these gifts are still not understood today; and yet it's there in the real world. I am attempting to describe—to have this connectivity of the Western medical science, thought, to Niitsitapi thought of medicines. A further example that Reggie Black Plume gives is:

> An example of an external sign would be a small bird getting into one's house being an indicator that a major occurrence is about to come into one's life, a warning. Also, if an

[84] Sharon "Spirit Dancer" Oakley and Reginald John Black Plume (2004). *Black Plume's Weasel People: The last bastion of Native ways*. Black Plume's Cultural Studies, p. 21.
[85] Ibid.

> owl approaches a person, swoops or rests in a tree near them, it is there to indicate something of great importance. The medicine people would interpret the precise communication or sign determining what these indicators were to the individual's personal experience.[86]

Again, the medicine people were given this gift through sleep, through fasting, through vision, and even animal behaviours that were often giving us a signal that something would be occurring.

> Those wishing to gain the position of medicine people or had already become such and wishing to renew or gain additional power would go to sacred places.[87]

The mountains are one of these—if not the majority—of these sacred places.

> They would journey to the hills to fast and cry for a vision in such places they deemed powerful. Some went on vision quests in ancient burial grounds, for there the spirits danced and might be accessed easily. Many went to Chief Mountain, a glacier mountain, to quest. Others went to the Sweetgrass Hills, or to buttes considered powerful places to gain wisdom.
>
> Many young men prepared for their vision quests for several years before the actual events took place. When they were deemed ready, they would go to the aforementioned locations for four nights. All they carried was a pipe, first offering tobacco to the night spirits. They prayed all night long and fasted, (even excluding water) for the entire time. After the fourth night they were free to return and break the fast.
>
> Some of these seekers did get a vision from a dream or spirit entity during this time, others did not. Some obtained the ability to communicate with the various earth spirits and that of nature while others were given the gift of speaking to disembodied souls. Many were allowed to know the secrets of the earth roots, and the herbs for healing. Often ancestors returned to their embodied kin to endow them with the medicines they possessed while in their earth forms. Some of those crying for vision felt they had to endure self torture techniques to put them in a certain state of consciousness and courage so they could readily hear the voices and see the visions.
>
> The medicine people administered their skills in various ways. A common cure for a variety of ailments was to use a glowing rock put in a bowl of water, creating steam. An eagle bone was used to suction the steaming water out of the hole to apply to the ill

[86] Oakley and Black Plume, *Black Plume's Weasel People*, p. 21.
[87] Ibid., p. 22.

> patient. Communicating with nature spirits was evident when others deemed deceased animals come to life.[88]

All this is what we have lost, now that I am fully describing it. We lost a lot. And:

> The religious practices of the medicine people and the patients that had been faithfully performed throughout their lives gave them a focus of faith that created unison to bring about these healings quickly.[89]

Other gifts may come from the bear, weasel, dog, beaver, fish, birds and various other spirit tokens. Black Plume describes the medicine people from the past, though the description is still relevant today:

> [They] were highly respected by the people as the continuation of the race depended on them. Lineage was often part of the power and elders of each clan taught the young ones to trust and seek medicine kinsmen when they felt the call to learn the medicine ways.
>
> Warriors were given certain aspects of medicine to take into battle with them as well. The spirits would endow them with these gifts so that they might protect their way of life.[90]

Black Plume is probably the best writer, being Kainaikoan, Apaitsitapi, Siksikai, Niitsitapi, to describe a part of the process of Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Questing) and how each medicine man started. Once the medicine men were given the spiritual gifts, then they in turn were the teachers of these medicines to younger people. Everything had a starting point. The medicine men's starting point was fasting in sacred areas—mountains, hills, Katoyistis (Sweetgrass Hills), Ninastako (Chief Mountain). It all goes back to that.

The common reader would think that it's not significant, but it is, as the Blackfoot Elders talked about it, and how Reggie Black Plume talks about it. That is the point I'm trying to

[88] Oakley and Black Plume, *Black Plume's Weasel People*, pp. 22-23.
[89] Ibid., p. 23.
[90] Ibid., p. 25.

establish, to bring up, why I am studying this. I would like to have our mountains given back their rightful names so that we can perhaps help the modern world, modern medicines, medicine doctors, to show them another way of healing, another way of doctoring. But many political, religious, science, academics, the whole group, they frown upon traditional medicines. That frown is what I am trying to take away—for them to understand that this Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) process is true to us, is real. Blair Stonechild talks about it too. He writes:

> Indigenous Elders maintain a strong belief in the existence of spirit, that although spirit beings are not perceivable by our normal senses, they nonetheless exist. And when societies take spiritual existence seriously and pay attention to it, those societies gain real benefits from a tangible relationship.[91]

That tangible relationship is also why I am doing this.

> In terms of the actual nature of this spirit world, the Old Ones say that how we experience that world is sacred in the sense that it is unique according to our spiritual development. However, in the spirit realm, there are groupings of identity, much as on Earth. For example, First Nations souls will consort with others of their group in the afterlife. At the same time, because the spirit universe does not have the strictures of time and space of the physical world, existence is far easier and more pleasant. It is while on Earth in human form that we face our most difficult challenges. Spiritual practice was at the core of life of early Indigenous peoples of the Americas.[92]

I have to add, that's what Niitsitapi always had.

> This is something that is difficult for contemporary secular society to appreciate. In pre-contact times, how did they live without modern institutions such as high school or university? How could they live without having a job and a paycheque? The fact is that there were comparable institutions that met their needs. However, they were more attuned to spiritual, as opposed to just physical, needs.
>
> In terms of the relationship with the natural world, the need to access the bounty of the land was fundamental.[93]

[91] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker*, pp. 58-59.
[92] Ibid., p. 59.
[93] Ibid.

This is what I am referring to, the bounty of the land. The relationship of the land was fundamental. It was our whole being. We use the words "knowing from land"; in Niitsitapi that is the truest form of knowing from land, when a gift or an experience was attained.

> In pre-contact America, resources were more abundant even without modern "resource conservation and distribution" practices. Indigenous inhabitants understood that all life was worthy of respect and entitled to its place in Creation. If there was a shortage, it was not perceived as being due to overhunting or overuse, but rather as a repercussion for abuse of the spiritual relationship. Any imbalances were seen to be due to some sort of spiritual punishment and would quickly lead to change of behaviour by the community.[94]

Blair Stonechild describes now of how I've been trying to describe the challenge of transferring of this thought to, as he called it, the secular society. Stonechild goes a little bit deeper:

> As we wend our way through life, we become more aware of our spiritual nature. It was said that in traditional life, children were made aware that they were spiritual beings first from the time they could begin to walk and understand the spoken word.[95]

This spiritual connection, we don't have it today except at Ninastako, located on the United States side, until such a time that we have the Blackfoot names of those mountains on the Canadian side, and more specifically at Paahtomahksikimi. They will be considered spiritual and almost human for Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quest) experiences. That is how we're going to regain this tangible connection to the Miistakistsi in Paahtomahksikimi. Continuing:

> As [children] matured, they increasingly explored the spirit realm through dreams and visions, and worked to cultivate strong relationships with the Grandfathers and spirit helpers. As they became more involved, they sought guidance from Elders who were further along the spiritual path. Those aspiring to learn approached these mentors using proper protocol such as offering tobacco.
>
> When we follow heart, experience goes beyond mere feelings to deeper truths that come from spirit. The mind entertains all our desires and beliefs. Ceremonies allow for

[94] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker*, p. 59.
[95] Ibid., p. 61.

> meditation with the transcendent and enlisting spiritual advice. When we embark on this path, we begin the process of discovering spirit.[96]

Today we cannot discover the spirit, until through names, we will reconnect with those mountains, and we will bring back the discovering of the spirits of those mountains. That is why and what I am doing. The colonial impact really disrupted that. As Blair Stonechild continues:

> The most important relationship of all is with the spirit world, something that is traditionally emphasized from childhood. As I have listened to many distinguished Elders for over thirty-five years, I have come to understand how in pre-contact life spirituality played a central role in people's lives. This was confirmed in my research on the history of the culture that demonstrated that First Nations views were motivated not so much by political manoeuvring or economic consideration, but instead by a sense of spiritual appropriateness. Matters of the spirit were taken seriously and dominated the affairs of life.[97]

As the researcher, Ninna Piiksii, I have committed to this work, and it has dominated my daily life. Practising and doing ceremonies, really that's all I know, is my spirituality. I am not the only one. Native spirituality is only beginning to be accepted in academic institutions. Hopefully I am not a "hybrid" educated Niitsitapi, that I am bringing to light true knowledge, to be shared and understood at the academic level.

This work has taken and dominated my life—not only the past few years but all my life. But with other institutionalized religions, they steamrolled our spirituality, and now we're fighting back, young people and those who have been disconnected from their Indigenous ways. Because we have not found ourselves, a lot of us, in other European religious institutions. It is lacking that connectivity to the land. A lot of these institutions of prayer do not even mention land. They don't even mention water, animals, birds. As Blair Stonechild continues:

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[96] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker*, p. 61.
[97] Ibid., p. 70.

> Wanting to understand the mysteries of the world, medicine persons, ancient explorers of the spirit world, undergo rigorous preparations for ceremony—cleansing, fasting, and praying. They supplicate the Grandfathers and Grandmothers, spiritual overlords of Creation, to grace them with answers during ceremonies. They discern that the Creator's perfect love gives birth to perpetual life-giving and life-sustaining forces found in all aspects of Creation. They receive responses in powerful dreams and visions in which spirit speaks directly to them. They understand that part of that spiritual gift is the transmission of complete laws and institutions to humans.[98]

The vision, the fasting, the ceremony, to Niisitapi, is our complete law. That complete law has been disturbed by not allowing Niitsitapi to do ceremonies in the mountains, to do their Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests) in Miistakistsi (mountains), to harvest plants that grow only in the mountains, and some that don't grow in the Prairies. We've always asked for prayer, even today, guidance from the spirit world; for the Ancestors to guide us every day in life. That is still happening, even in modern times. Stonechild talks about Vision Quests, and he also adds that:

> One way to contact the inner realm is by seeking a vision. The proper place to conduct a Vision Quest Ceremony is an isolated natural environment, which is considered to be more spiritually "clean" than a human habitation. Questers paint their face black, as black is symbolic of the inner world [and maybe that's the Cree or other First Nations] and separation from ordinary life. Fasting is intended to invoke pity from the spirit world. Powerful questers are reputedly able to survive seemingly impossible conditions, such as immersion in water for extended periods of time. A person would meditate underwater in order to connect with water beings.[99]

Another example: by taking us as Niitsitapi out, away from the mountains, we couldn't even do the water practice ourselves. To close off on why I am doing this is that, as Stonechild later states:

> One of the major features of Aboriginal spirituality is belief in the spirit world and that consciousness reside there. First Peoples believe that spirit beings are not only real, but that is possible to develop relationships with them. The quest for spirit knowledge and interaction is a central feature of Indigenous life. Ceremonies, prayer, meditation, visions, and dreams are all part of spiritual endeavour. Practical results of this

[98] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker*, p. 70.
[99] Ibid., p. 73.

> relationship can be demonstrated to reassure the Indigenous public that the transcendent world cares and will provide healing and other assistance when necessary.
>
> Medicine persons are healers who acquire abilities through dreams, visions, ceremonies, sacrifice, and prayer, and through mentorship by more advanced healers.[100]

All of this was disrupted, disconnected by colonial impact. I'm only using just the name, but further to that, being physically removed from our sacred mountains. Being removed, we lost that connectivity to the spiritual world, to show us, teach us, transfer us those rights to be medicine people. It is like all the doctors are told there's no more medical schools; there would be less doctors, or people would die in the European communities. That's the same thing. We lost people because we were no longer able to doctor and heal ourselves.

That is why I am writing, studying this. The references that I have used speak specifically to what I am trying to tell Europeans, academics, institutions—everything and everybody that is not Indigenous. That is why I am doing this and why the names of the mountains are so important, not only to me but to Niitsitapi and the generations to come. I want to bring back more medicine people, and by doing that we have to have the rightful names to our mountains and access to our mountains.

[100] Stonechild, *The knowledge seeker*, p. 91.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The title of this work, and what I really want to transfer in knowledge, is "The Impact of the Erasure of the Blackfoot Names in Paahtomahksikimi, Waterton," as a start. Some of the impact is throughout the chapters of my work. I have written about the erasure process of putting European names to the mountains, which excluded Blackfoot names. Upon that exclusion, especially in the 1850s onward, the names of those mountains were almost totally forgotten. One of the biggest things of those mountains—and I've written about Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests), which Blair Stonechild in *The Knowledge Seeker* has written about. When the names were removed, that relationship, it's like when a mother or parent(s) name a child, that name creates that relationship. It's almost unthinkable of having a child and that child is not given a name. That child would feel somewhat alienated, excluded, distant, whatever. When you give a child a name, the child answers to that name, of whatever it's going to be, Blackfoot or English. That child is given that name also for spiritual connection, emotional relationship, physical relationship, the whole bonding. The same goes with the mountains. The mountains, having no name, creates that alienation, that distant feeling. The energy to pull a person and the mountain together no longer exists. That metaphysical energy that Greg Cajete talks about, we as Blackfoot have always been doing that.

I have used the example of Ninastako (Chief Mountain). Many people, even today, go fast or have Itaksiistsimoo'pi (a Vision Quest), on Ninastako. During that process of fasting, whether it's one or seven days, they will call and pray to the name of Ninastako. They will treat Ninastako as a spiritual person. That goes with all the mountains, that spiritual connection. In the 1970s when I was a young man, and my relatives of the day were all young, my grandfather

and my great-uncles told us the story about the mountains in Waterton, Paahtomahksikimi, how the Old People used to climb up certain peaks and fast for days, long, long ago. It is a validation point with my relationship and correspondence with the latest archaeological exercise after the Kenow fire: there's possibly 30 Vision Quest sites in Waterton and they actually found 17, and they're going to continue their field work, their field exercise.

My whole point, and I did not want to get into it because I felt the university does not understand Blackfoot spirituality or Vision Quest sites; that spirituality is not a theory. I am bringing that to the forefront, not the total story about Itaksiistsimoo'pi (Vision Quests) but the fact that those are thousands of years old. The mountains were called by their names by those people from the past that went to sleep on top of the mountains. Those were our most sacred form of spiritually, physically, humanly connected transfer of knowledge from those visions, that in turn taught us those medicines—which medicines to harvest, which time, for which sicknesses and illnesses. In the modern context, to make this understandable for those people that are non-believers, that are non-spiritual, those were our medical institutions, teaching us the knowledge of survival.

That's why the names are extremely important, because today, if everybody had no names we would just be empty zombies, no spirituality. There seems to be sort of an atheist presence when people attain higher learning; and as a Niitsitapi, I come along and express to a certain degree my spirituality. That is why I am talking about getting the names of the mountains back so that the younger generation will have that experience, that pure absolute experience of fasting in the mountains with those mountains that have a name. In the process of being gifted, at some point in time, of that knowledge, through spiritual transfer of

knowledge, on survival, on health, on medicine, on songs. Because right now, Waterton does not recognize that. To me I feel it's a sabotage on our Blackfoot spirituality, and I want to erase the feeling of being foreigners to our own sacred mountains. They are sacred. From those Vision Quest sites, of thousands of years, way before Europeans even landed here, before the early explorers, map surveyors and what have you even saw mountains, we were already doing that. And all that changed in the 1850s, 1884 when the Dominion Lands Protection Act was established—which is now the National Parks Act—and it disconnected that relationship with the mountains. Most recently, in my research, Elders that passed have a few names of the mountains; and I know I have to finish this research at some time, or I will be working on it for the next 50 years. I might put a partial closure to it.

Imagine the spiritual knowledge that is transferred; it in turn provided our so-called customs, our Blackfoot unwritten laws of how to uphold the sacred mountains and from there the settlement, the camping, the living in the mountains; we had that special relationship; we continue to have that special relationship. Just like how today, people that do fast at Ninastako (Chief Mountain), as well as other mountains in Glacier National Park on traditional Blackfoot territory, they walk away with a special relationship. Only very recently people are starting to fast on a few mountains in Paahtomahksikimi; one such mountain is Piinakoyim. There are some non-Natives that have gone through this process, which is okay to me. They're not Blackfeet/Blackfoot people that have fasted there, and something happened to them; and that's the whole point. By not having a name, not being able to have Itaksiistsimoo'pi (a Vision Quest), we've lost our medicinal plants, that knowledge. Prior to what we call hospitals, medical centres, that was our whole medicinal component of our lifestyle, from as far back as

you can go. These are the impacts and the knowledge of herbalism and herbalists, and now we just have a few and not all the plants have been fully understood. Imagine if the names were given back, Blackfoot people would regain that relationship with the Miistakistsi as a collective group, not just individually but as a collective tribal group. They will feel part of the mountains and the land, which we don't feel now because of colonial privilege, settler interference. This interference was systemically planned: a planned interference.

My list of remaining challenges, to work in collaboration in some areas with the Paahtomahksikimi park staff and federal governance, is as follows:

1. I am working on and possibly have eight names that I have researched from other Elders that are still alive. So first, the mountain names be restored.

2. I want "Paahtomahksikimi" on all Waterton signage; at all the entrance points to Paahtomahksikimi or Waterton, to say, "Oki, annooma Paahtomahksikimi": "Hello, here is Waterton," in Blackfoot, or it could be bilingual.

3. Have more Blackfoot signage all over the park. Those names would possibly, and we would add more each year, have the English name and the Blackfoot name.

4. On those mountains that we have found the names for, that Blackfoot people be allowed to fast and exercise, or practice, Itaksiistsimoo'pi (their Vision Quests).

5. That Blackfoot herbalists be allowed to harvest certain plants (and we're always conservationists) with sustainable harvest practises. Because there are some medicines that don't grow on the Prairies.

6. That we be allowed to practise our ceremonies in the mountains.

7. I want co-management, of the Parks administration, to consist of Blackfoot. Based on the third official language, of Aboriginal languages, that was passed by Commons and the Senate, that more Blackfoot People be hired to tell our stories.

8. That, eventually, maybe three-quarters of the working crew of Paahtomahksikimi, Waterton will be Blackfoot. Why I say that, I want equal opportunity of employment participation, because since 1884 look who has been working: it sure isn't us. If it is, it's

> short-term casual jobs, and I think we just have one Kainai person full-time. Yet those were our sovereign lands prior to 1877.

These recommendations should be reflected in the Parks map, literature, guide, booklets, what have you. When all that has been implemented, especially being freely allowed to fast and pray in our mountains, then I will rest easy. Then I've done my job. Those recommendations are why I am doing this paper—because nobody else is doing it. There are no academics doing it. There are Blackfoot people supporting me, helping me, assisting me, but overall, Ninna Piiksii, Chief Bird, is doing this. Those recommendations are the ongoing project. That is the real thing, after all this written work. That is what I am centering on, the real project—not the theoretical thought, but the concrete, realistic, true-life project. My ultimate goal, if ever possible, is getting back our mountains. We never signed them away; we were illegally pushed out of there. I know there will be federal and provincial, regional and local, church and business groups, and even the police, that will react to these actions; but **that is the ultimate goal: to be allowed our sovereign rights to our sovereign territory**.

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