

Using the Global to Support the Local: Community Development at Poplar River and the
Establishment of a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Northern Manitoba

by

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ABSTRACT

The community of Poplar River in Northern Manitoba is using a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation to assist with meeting local needs. Going beyond the expected, non-renewable resource development and poverty cycle, Asatisiwipi First Nation is taking control over its own developmental plans, and forging an ecologically sustainable vision of community-controlled economic and political development. This planning initiative is taking place before specific large scale development proposals, in effect, a preemptive strike against the non renewable resource development sector. This thesis explores issues surrounding the use of grand scale institutions for local purposes and researches the meaning of “development” of a remote Aboriginal community. Consisting of trips to the community to collect interviews and a thorough policy analysis, it can be concluded that despite Eurocentric planning/definitions, boundary construction, and *Parks Canada*/UNESCO interference, this is still the best solution for the community as it is an initiative that has been instigated by the First Nation itself.

Azaadiwiziibi giowedinong Manitoba odaabajitoonaawaa' iwe UNESCO World Heritage site gaa-ijjgaadeg ji-wiji'iwewaad gechiwaag. Awashime ji-izhichigeng ji-giitwaami-aabajichigaadegin ondaadiziwin zhigwa gaa-gidimaagizing. Asatiwisipi Ishkonigan wiinawaa odazhiikaanaawaa' ji-ondaadizing imaa nakeya'ii. Zhigwa miinawaa ji-anokaadamowaad ji-ondaadiziwaad ani-niigaan zhigwa ogimaawin ji-niigaanishkamowaad. Owe onashowewin damadanokaajigaade anokiiwinan ji-onachigaadeg gechiwaag onji. Giizhaach ji-gwayaanchigeng gechiwaag imaa onachigaadeg ji-ani-wiji'igowaad bemaadiziwaad. Owe mazina'igan wiindamaagemagan aaniin waa-izhi-onachigaadegin ono onashowewinan ji-wiji'igowaad gechiwaag imaa gaa-ayaawaad giowedinong ishkoniganan. Ji-izhaang ji-gaganoonindwaa Anishinaabeg ji-maamiinobii'igaadegin onashowewinan mazina'iganing. Daa-ikidom aaniish wemitigoozhiwi-izhichigewin, gechiwaag imaa gaa-onokaajigaadeg zhigwa gaye Parks Canada/UNESCO gaa-wiidookaagewaad, mii owe maawanj menoseg wiinawaa aaniish Anishinaabeg odazhiikaanaawaa' owe izhichigewin.

La communauté autochtone de Poplar River dans le Nord du Manitoba utilise le site du patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO pour appuyer les besoins locaux. La Première nation d'asatisiwipi aki devient gérante du développement écologique dans la forêt boréale où elle habite. Elle est responsable de l'économie et de la politique communautaire. Cette initiative a eu lieu avant les propositions du développement à grande échelle des ressources non renouvelables dans la région. Cette thèse explore la signification du terme «développement» ainsi que l'emploi des institutions internationales par une communauté autochtones isolée. Basé sur des entrevues et d'une analyse politique approfondie, nous pouvons conclure que, malgré les notions eurocentriques, malgré l'établissement des frontières et les désaccords avec Parcs Canada et l'UNESCO, nous croyons que ce projet est encore la meilleure solution pour cette communauté car il s'agit d'une initiative qui a été mise en place par la Première nation.

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INTRODUCTION

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past...
What might have been
Point to one end, which is always present.
- T.S. Eliot*

In this thesis, I explore one Aboriginal community's attempt to use an international tool, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Site, to protect their traditional territory from industrial development. More specifically, the community is using globally oriented structures, to support local aspirations. Essentially, Poplar River desires the establishment of protective boundaries around their traditional grounds so they can live, trap, fish and hunt as well as maintain their traditions. The goal is to protect the land for present and future generations so that resource use and access by community members can be managed according to local values and knowledge. Some of the questions that I explore in this project, deal with sustainable economic development, eco-tourism, the meaning of development for a remote First Nation in Manitoba and the notion of "environmental protection", all issues raised by their proposal.

Due to the fact that colonialist history dismissed - and continues to perpetuate the dismissal of - pre-colonial or "traditional" history, at times, distorting it for others through Eurocentric, progressive historiography, the voice of the colonized becomes merely a whisper: "the more freely he breathes, the more the colonized are choked" (Memmi, 1965:8). Having been pushed to the margins of history, almost at risk of being erased, many Aboriginal people shout in a whisper.

In Travelling Knowledges (2005:39-45) Renate Eigenbrod discusses the ethics of outsider/insider approaches towards Indigenous literatures; the same concept, can be applied towards Indigenous research. As a non-Aboriginal individual, like Eigenbrod of first generation immigrant positionality, the ideas and opinions presented in this dissertation are from my own viewpoint, those of an outsider and an insider at the same time, that is to say, simultaneously colonized and colonizer. The views presented in this project are not from the Aboriginal perspective; they are however, non-anglosaxon, female views coming from a woman attempting to decolonize herself and perhaps even the colonial status quo. Through the process of dislocating myself from the colonial discourse and practices, I am undertaking an effort to challenge preconceived notions, the colonized presumed limitations as well as the existent experiences within the social structure of the colonized.

My interest in this project grew out of my personal intellectual fascination with forms of resistance of the colonized to the colonizer, and with their attempt to resist totalizing colonial practices that exist “within the logic of the modern state” (see Kulchyski & Tester 2007:48). My upbringing by my grandmothers consisted of bedtime stories about the violence of the war and the post-war struggles of a colonized communist Poland. The familial horror stories of death rows, inquisitorial and despotic threats on the basis of religion, culture and language, and the persistence of poverty and starvation, were oftentimes overshadowed by the assiduous stories of resistance against the oppressive imperial and military regimes spanning over 150 years. My transition from a young girl raised in a colonized country to, unexpectedly becoming a colonizer and colonized at the time in the province of Quebec, to relocating once more to become the privileged colonizer on recognizably dispossessed Native land, incited my interest in the issues surrounding colonialism, imperialism and moreover, the process of de-colonization. The strength

and the persistence that is often portrayed by the collective and some individuals against seemingly all odds, is admirable. That is also the reason why my interest to work with Asatisiwipe First Nation was strengthened over time: the vitality and the positivity found in the community proved to be an optimism I was eager to work in. This optimism continued to resonate through the interviews I took, through research at the university and through friendships made in the community of Asatisiwipe First Nation during the last two cycles of the changing seasons.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes in Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (1999) that Indigenous research can serve as a tool to reclaim control and self-determination in Indigenous communities. One of the most significant trends in research is the attention given in recent years to incorporating post-colonial theory into the methodologies of Indigenous research. De-colonization, is a process of minimizing the “Other-ness complex”, that is to say, of collapsing spatial and social differences between the “us” and “them” (cf. Blaut’s Inside/Outside concept). As Smith points out, de-colonization involves a constant reworking of our understandings; the acknowledgement of pre-contact cultures, stories and truths, as well as the intersection of pre- and post- colonial realities and tools incorporated into the “empire writes back” in order to change the epistemological “truths” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:21-23). Decolonizing research involves changing the methods and methodologies by peeling away at the “truth” and making voices heard.

Decolonizing methodologies include the concept of participatory research and community involvement, the incorporation of traditional knowledge along with Western knowledge; methodology goes even further than just consent forms and end results. Nowadays, in order to perform research, the usual ethical requirements apply *in addition to* the culturally-

appropriate protocol necessary in indigenous research. Throughout my studies at the undergraduate and graduate level, I learned that research methodology is based on the skill of matching the problem with an “appropriate” set of investigative strategies; it is concerned with ensuring that information is accessed in such a way as to guarantee accountability and reliability. Furthermore, Tuhiwai (1999:125) writes that research is performed by individuals who possess educational qualifications and have access to specialized language, skills and tools. I believe that I have acquired some of those qualifications through my courses at the University of Manitoba Native Studies Department as well as through the McGill School of Environment; the two backgrounds enabled me to explore the scientific as well as the socio-political aspects of this project – yet certain educational qualifications are only learned through collaboration with a community. In fact, in Decolonizing Methodologies (1999:119) referring to the collective rights of peoples to intellectual and cultural property rights, Tuhiwai Smith confirms that it is necessary that all investigations performed in indigenous territories be carried out with the consent and “under joint control and guidance” of the community.

I went to Poplar River in spring of 2007 with my supervisor, Dr. Peter Kulchyski where we spoke with the Chief and Band Council about my desire to do research in the community. Ernest C. Bruce, the political advisor informed me that it would be great to have someone to collect oral histories; this is how I became to be known as “Agnes, our Plan B” which is basically the community’s attempt to go to court to fight for Aboriginal title, if “Plan A”, the protection of their traditional territory as a park reserve does not work out (I discuss this more in-depth in Chapter 1). With permission granted from the community to conduct my research, I went up to Poplar River in the summer of 2008 where I collected nine interviews; each story was distinct and fascinating to listen to. Using the existing contacts in the community to get started, I

used snowball sampling to continue the interview process. Almost everyone I spoke to suggested someone else; at times, people even came up to ask me if they could participate, and share their voice with me. From this eclectic network of contacts, I had the chance to meet a varied range of interesting people who were willing to share their time and knowledge for the purpose of this research project – especially since I informed them that copies of the interviews will be given to the Band Council as well as a bound copy of the thesis itself. Overall, all my interviews were important and insightful; there are certain individuals however to whom I referred more than others in this thesis: Ernest C. Bruce, Noel Bruce, Sophia Rabliauskas and Byron Mitchell. Without their insight, I would not be able to create the dissertation.

In all community approaches, Tuhiwai Smith (1999:128) argues that *process* (methodology and method) is highly important as it is expected that the research will be respectful and it will enable people as well as heal and educate. Researchers who work with a community are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination. In order to achieve this however, it is essential to recognize the power dynamic that is embedded between the researcher and research participants. On a methodological note, taking the time to discuss my goals for each interview meant that many people came “prepared”. Everyone knew who I was by the third day of my first visit and what I was trying to accomplish through my interviews. As such, many interviews were used as platforms upon which people could express “for the record”, official, political points of view. As I think through the power relationships between research participants and myself, I need to acknowledge that I was, at times, being manipulated through these conversations because in these instances both of us had agendas and goals for conversations, illustrating the blurring lines of power and intentions between speaker and listener in this form of dialogic exchange. Although dialogism offers a framework that accounts for the

social interactions woven together to create the complex tapestry upon which people talk about and experience “development”, I accepted this power-relationship as one of non-dominance. Oftentimes, I heard people of Poplar “just needing to talk to someone”, therefore I accepted my role as a listener in an interview where people were merely voicing themselves.

The changing of seasons can be equated with the passing of life and lessons learned; the seasonal cycles in this dissertation can be used as a metaphor for life’s fleeting moments, moments of struggles to preserve and to sustain. Moments that surface in simplicity and the impermanence of life. Each season allows the savouring of at least a single moment of this metamorphosing aspect of nature where irretrievable memories, teachings, words and aspirations have been said and done.

The sun has a special quality of light as it sets in the spring in Poplar River. The days are longer, and one’s sense of meaning can be renewed with wonder and awe at the “newness” of life. Ideas begin; landscapes, spaces and places from [his]tories are remembered and uncovered with the melting snow. Recollecting history, revisiting places may lead towards a path that goes in a new direction.

Eventually the summer comes; with it, long warm days of sweet freedom from heavy clothing, from the cold wind, from staying inside. But yet, the summer months remind us that exposed skin will bring mosquitoes. Lots of them. There can be an allegorical relationship between the warmth of the summer and the mosquitoes in the community of Poplar River in 2008. Metaphorically, the ever annoying and persistent presence of these blood-drinkers can be analogous to the persistence of industrial developments, of Manitoba Hydro’s BiPole III project, which incited the rights-of-way conundrum. But, the threat of “the mosquito” will always be there and the members of this First Nation have adapted to it; one of the ways to deal with the

frustrating buzz about Hydro's prospective developments was to try to designate their traditional territory as a World Heritage Site. Only time will tell if the attempt is a success...

But then the summer warmth slowly diminishes and the coats and sweaters come on. The sweetness of the warm air we felt during the summer eludes us. It seems like the harder we try to recapture it, the more persistently it eludes us, like the notion of "wilderness" and "sustainable development" whose cultural meanings can be dichotomously different and rarely understood. As the time passes with the falling leaves, the fatigue of expectations based on the past can diminish; State mechanisms may not only be reconfigured but reconceptualised, thus giving form to new meanings of self-determination. Attachments to certain experiences and knowledges allow strength to persist. Just as the sun descends behind the horizon, the light of to-day slowly fades. It is winter. People try to stay warm in their homes; they talk. They spend more time together, planning, developing, learning, laughing and crying. The dark and cold of a winter's night descends, but eventually a faint light does emerge - but in the opposite direction from where it left. The persistence of memory, of stories understood, enables resistance, thus allowing the people to assert their place and space amid the snow-covered bush. The spring sun is not actually gone, but merely out of sight.

SPRING :

Places of Memory, Spaces of Memory



SPRING

One only gets one first shot at a remote northern community; and rarely does anyone ever venture out into the heart and soul of the community – most people just stay around the “safe” areas of the reserve, including confining themselves into the school, the northern store and the band office.

But you are still standing on the airstrip right now. Next to the plane. Just in case; making mental checkmarks.

You know that, first thing, you will be heading to the band office; that is the reason you are there, to deal with business. Rarely do visitors come to enjoy the life and to stay there for long. Kids are running around, talking to you, taking you away from your thoughts, from your wishful thinking. They want to know if they can help you with your luggage, to help you fit through the narrow fence out of the airport. As you walk down a dusty mud-packed road, you begin to discern the spring environment of northern Manitoba, although geographically, it is central Manitoba: the fresh smell of mud, the cool breeze in the warm sun, the freshness of it all. The reservation road still has remnants of snow lying on the sides – apparently winter is merely a faint memory as everyone is sporting t-shirts and shorts with their rubber boots; the kids are wearing sandals.

Next day, as you walk along the road from the rapids, your usual destination, you realize that, if nothing else, you know whatever you thought you knew about this place is wrong. And you know that when politicians talk about northern communities, they are totally wrong – inarticulately or destructively so. On top of that, international and national media coverage (if any) has framed First Nations communities discussion incorrectly, at times even stupidly and destructively. They usually begin with a premise – and there usually seems to be a shrewd,

knowing glee with which they say the story – that the Indians ought to be ashamed of their community, of the violence and social problems that occur. But it is not the communities that are drifting around like zombies on the reserves; it is the people from every city and town in Canada that usually have no place for them when the need for energy, development, and resource exploitation comes into play.

And if an Aboriginal community should disappear – and some wrongly claim that it will, it will not be because of “modernity”. It would be by sheer virtue of resource exploitation where there will no longer be spaces or places or lands for an indigenous person to call his/her own. But Poplar River First Nation will not allow this to happen.

Want to know why you are here, in Poplar River, or reading this paper? You are here to see a First Nations community in Canada that won’t go down without a fight. That won’t go down at all. Welcome to *Asatisiwipi Aki*.

1.1 LANDSCAPE OF SPACES AND PLACES: *ASATISIWIPE ANISHNAABE*

What is the attachment of identity, of the necessity, to a land base? Ernest C. Bruce, the political advisor to Poplar River First Nation states that “no people can exist without a land base” (Ernest C. Bruce 2008). Existence of a people, of a culture, necessitates land. The presumed certainties of cultural identity are firmly located in particular places which house stable, cohesive communities of shared traditions and perspectives... but are “places” the clear supports of identity? Can they provide a future, or are they just relics of the past?

Many peoples, especially those Aboriginal peoples still living on the reserves, feel that their homelands still provide a straight-forward support to their identity. And even “homes” which ground identities elsewhere, still continue to resonate throughout the imaginations of displaced individuals and communities. The ways in which “home” and “places” impact our identities are significant in Aboriginal communities in Canada – especially since the construction of a Native “space” as an identity has involved not only a celebration of geographical landscape of the First Nations community, but also serves as an assertion of its *a priori* opposition to other non-Native, re-settler communities and identities in Canada, through narratives of colonial politics, narratives of identity, spaces and history. Aboriginal narratives and cultural artefacts deconstruct not only the colonizer’s perception of the colonized in the Fanonian sense, but also challenge the mainstream perception of “sense of place”.

“Sense of place” is an ambiguous little phrase. Sense of places are notions that are expressed and articulated in a number of ways but are not often thought about consciously. Sense of place is more complex than simply an affiliation to physical landscapes; it is a hybrid merging of history, experience, memory, social relations and imagination; a tie to the past, the present and a link to the future. *Anishnaabe* personal and cultural identity is bound up in place

and hence, the sense of place grows dense with social imagination. Place narratives thus act as personal expressions of collective ideals and imaginations. Throughout this project I explore these personal place narratives of members of Asatisiwipe First Nation.

The concern with questions of identity and place may at first sight seem surprising. Who doesn't know who they are and where they come from? However, the consistent logic of mainstream modern social and cultural thought is to undermine the notion of communal identity and hence the notion of space. Canadian policy-makers often portray the disbelief of Indigenous communal property; the reserves, although recognized as essential to Aboriginal communal identity, are often considered constructed, regressive and unreal in contemporary times and political "realism". Sociologists and Marxists place identity on social and class determinations; Freud's accounts place it in the unconscious. Saussurean and Barthean linguists position the self as product rather than author of symbolic codes and systems; Foucaultians point to the processes of subjectification to an oppressive power operated by cultural apparatuses and dominating-yet-subjugating technologies. Why the need then, to discuss space, place and the ensuing identity as a theoretical topic and a political project in a remote Anishnaabe community of northern Manitoba?

For me, stories that form the core of this project are all situated in the landscapes that form a "sense of place". They are situated in space, place, time, and history. They are also situated in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, which serve as mediating factors in the ways in which places are made, perceived and experienced. They are situated in *asatisiwipe aki* (Poplar River earth).

Asatisiwipe Anishnaabe (the people of Poplar River) - Asatisiwipe First Nation, also known as Poplar River First Nation, is located on the east side of Lake Winnipeg at the mouth of

the Poplar River; geographically, it is located at 52°59'46 North and 97°16'59 West. The community can be accessed by plane or by winter roads during the months of January to March and by boat in summer; the closest large city is Winnipeg, located approximately 400 km to the south. As of 2006, the on-reserve population was 1093 and off-reserve, 270. The community is part of Treaty 5 adhesion signed on September 20, 1875. The current Chief of Poplar River First Nation is Russell Lambert and the community's Tribal Council is affiliated with South East Resource Development Council.

The Elders of Poplar River First Nation have stated that “the Creator has given us life, he has given us land to live from. Without that land our people will die” (Lands Management, 2007). The surrounding rivers, the old-growth boreal forest, the poplar trees lining the reserve roads, and the beaches, all continue to remain relatively free of pollution and any industrial activity; global warming however has begun to be felt. Noel Bruce, a middle aged man who works for the Post-Secondary Education Service and who introduced me to different Elders in the community stated:

Noel Bruce: Right now I am concerned about global warming; I have seen a lot of changes lately. ...A lot of changes. For example, the rivers are really low. A few years ago, they used to be really high. ...The rapids...The late migration of geese in the spring or in the fall. One thing you notice too is there should be more mosquitoes. It is true though; last year there were lots of mosquitoes, not now, not now. In the 90s, there were lots of mosquitoes...

In fact, the landscape can be described as one of the most beautiful biospheres of the world. In 1998, Poplar River nominated 800 000 hectares of this physical delicacy for protection; the area corresponds to the trapline district of this First Nations community and is presently classified as a “wilderness park reserve” under the *Manitoba Parks Act* where “the main purpose of the categorization is to protect representative or unique natural landscapes in an undisturbed

state and provide recreational opportunities that depend on a pristine environment” (MB Parks Act Sec 7(3)(a) 2008). What began as a community’s concern for infringement on their territory, led to the idea of preservation. This aspiration became Poplar River First Nation’s pre-emptive approach to protecting and managing their land - the community’s “Plan A”. Although the people were always “stewards of the land” as Ernest C. Bruce states, the dominant discourse of “protection” was nonetheless needed for *asatisiwipe aki* to be recognized by the government.

When a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 1998 between the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak and the Manitoba Department of Natural Resources, Poplar River’s interim protection to their traditional territory signified that any change in the classification of this land must be based on the consent from this First Nation; this interim protection will expire on September 30th, 2009. As a result, the community has been working hard to obtain permanent protection: oral histories were collected, maps of clan-based trap lines were created, data concerning local resources and environments as well as land use was compiled; archeologists to prove occupancy in the area for over 6000 years were hired. All this community-initiated research led to the eventual development of the *Asatisiwipe Aki Lands Management Plan* that, once approved by the government, will grant them stewardship-like ownership of their lands. “It started with ideas and then slowly became what it is now” states Ken Douglas.

The plan is an outcome of several years’ efforts to “act on the community vision for protection of Poplar River Anishnaabek traditional territory” (PRFN 2008). Understanding their need for survival as a people, the plan outlines the objectives early in the document:

The traditional lands that will be managed according to this plan are a fundamental and inseparable part of who we the Poplar River Anishnaabek are and who we always want to be. The land must be protected to sustain the culture and very life of

the community [...] Protection of the land is the key to our very future. Therefore to suggest that our traditional lands need not be protected, or that only a part of our traditional territory needs to be protected, is to suggest to us that our lives can be threatened; that our children's future can be compromised or forfeited for some other purpose (Lands Management 2005:3).

The plan is based on traditional methods and knowledge, along with scientific techniques and data; “the best knowledge currently available in terms of forests, land, water, wildlife, plants and fish management has and will continue to be applied” as well (Lands Management 2005). Due to the fact that resource use and access by community members will be managed according to traditional values and knowledge, the land management plan is therefore intended to inform and guide different “audiences”: it can serve as a frame of reference for the future generations of community members, for governments in respect to planning and management of natural resources, as well as for the general public because environmental education and visitor facilities are all available. Overall, the lands management plan “sets out the vision, policy directions and management approaches” for the protected area understanding that required framework for action needs to be identified for conservation.

This need for conservation has grown more essential with time; especially since interest in the development of the Ease Side can actually be traced back to treaty days. Treaties occurred where the government's specific territorial and resource interests lay; they also defined how Poplar River's negotiations occurred and how the 1875 Treaty Five boundaries have foreshadowed interesting problems with this First Nation's contemporary territorial borders. This long history of interest in resources of the boreal forest needs to be discussed briefly as it sets up the course of events for Poplar River First Nations where inaccurate geography and spatial unevenness of the Treaty boundaries would later produce a severing of community affiliations and lead to political disputes over boundaries.

In order to avoid paying arrears of Treaty Five, the government decided to make an adhesion to Treaty Five for all bands in the northeastern regions of Manitoba, resulting in mixed communities – a reason why Poplar River First Nation is composed of Anishnaabe, Cree, Ojibwe, Saulteaux and Metis. Ken Douglas, an Elder residing in the Elder's lodge elaborated on the history of Poplar River:

Ken: *There used to be reserve there in Big Black River; people used to live there.*

AP: *Before Poplar River?*

Ken: *No, same as Poplar. There used to be families here, but when the kids grew up, they went to school and there were about four or five of them and that wasn't enough to get the teacher there in school. So the family came here, to Poplar River and the others moved the other way, like, to Grand Rapids. And there is nobody there now, just the houses. There is nobody there at Black River, there used to be a Station there...we used to take our fish from our camp there, and after, I don't know what happened...now we have a new one [here].*

Due to the fact that the timing of the adhesions and the scope of the talks were controlled by the government, an authoritative one-sidedness challenges the conviction of well-meaning and just treaty negotiations which generated territorial ambiguity (Tough 2000:99-100). Although the country in which the Natives were living was considered “totally unfit for cultivation” (Tough 2000:101), Treaty Five adhesions were nonetheless carried out in 1908, 1909, and 1910. Indeed, there was as early as late 1870s, a resource-based interest in the land on the east side of Lake Winnipeg already:

[t]he east coast is much inferior of the west coast, as far as I could learn, but appeared to be thickly wooded, and it is understood that indications of minerals have been found in several places (Morris 1991:150).

Even in early twentieth century, Aboriginal people living in these areas pointed to the troubling issue of strangers coming into the area – timber hunters, mineral prospectors, and railroad surveyors – individuals that made community members claim that they “do not want to see any

more surveyors, explorers or white men going into their country before a Treaty is first made with them” (Tough 2000:102). Indeed, as Tough continues:

When outsiders encroached on their territory, Indians raised the issue of their property rights. In other words, they were aware of the pending economic changes and the wealth of the land. Some were willing to consider new economic activities and they saw a treaty as compensation for interim disruptions. Sovereignty, integration, and economic security were all interconnected as a treaty issue (2000:104).

This encroachment can be paralleled with the incessant threat of exploiting Aboriginal traditional territories in recent times, as stated by Ernest C. Bruce, a middle aged man and political advisor to the community; by Sophia Rabliauskas, who is the spokesperson for Pimachiowin Aki Corp., and; Russell Lambert, chief of the community. Since the beginning, these individuals continue to be highly involved in the proposal:

Ernest C. Bruce: *It started off with people coming on our lands from the south...*

Sophia Rabliauskas: *We became worried because of logging that was moving further and further north*

Russell Lambert: *We wanted to protect ourselves from development that was coming into our lands...*

* * *

Places are carved out of space; but space can be understood as an objective, or mind independent reality. The concept of place embraces the idea that specific localities can only be understood in terms of people’s perceptions and experience of them. As such, emotional, aesthetic and symbolic appeals of spaces are oftentimes transformed into historical and social discourses that people have of places. Simply put, places are those localities carved into space through cultural processes of meaning (Casey 1996:17). Places are symbolic representations of

personal and political, historical and economic, relationships and meanings all carved into space. Places are not merely the localities of culture; therefore they are also mirrored reflections of history, cultural values and meanings. Places are produced by human activity, thus, although historically created, are bound not only to the present but are also manifestations to the past. The *anishnaabe* of *asatisiwibe aki* have been stewards of their land for about 6000 years; their “sense of place” is the connection to their traditional territory – where their roots are, and in the notion of “knowing the land”. A place is a socially meaningful and identifiable space to which a historical dimension is attributed. The politics of place-making are highlighted further when the discourses of environmentalism/conservation and Native resource-exploitation for economic development are folded into the discussion, and I will examine this topic in the second half of this project.

The logic of neo-liberal individualism and universalism found in contemporary Canadian politics – and more recently modernization and globalization at nano-speeds – have sought to represent localized identities as historical and “traditional” with regressive characteristics to undermine old adherences to places and communities. Examples include the White Paper (1969), the displacement of Native peoples from reserves to cities, and industrial development and resource exploitation to assimilate resource-dependent communities into the capitalist lifestyle. Yet, Aboriginal communities are persistent in “protecting” their communities for the next seven generations (Ernest C. Bruce interview, 2008). These identities are shaped by embodied narratives of memory – who they are and where they come from; “honouring the ancestors”, and location of their familial roots are the prevailing reasons why many Native people attempt to sustain their indigeneity. Thus, to assert this “Aboriginal identity” in this relational form as a basis for politics is a way to challenge the universalist model of Canadian multiculturalism and

hence, group-differentiated minority rights based on an institutionally-embodied societal culture (Kymlicka 1995; Kymlicka 1989b in Turner 2006: 60-66). To challenge this universalist ideal is to display “difference” to be more precise, a *sui generis difference* forcibly in the public political sphere and to challenge the claims of neutrality or “invisibility” of the procedural mechanisms of politics. Basic civil political, individual and/or minority rights “in no way limit Aboriginal people’s rights as Canadian citizens; they are additional rights that derive from prior occupancy [...] The fact of prior occupancy implies or embodies the fact of territorial cultural centres or homelands” (Kulchyski 1994:12&14)

In *The Politics of Recognition* (1994), Charles Taylor speaks of recognition as one of the driving forces behind nationalist movements in politics. Although Taylor is speaking about multiculturalism in the mainstream Canadian politics, his examination of the principle of recognition can be analogous to Poplar River and other Aboriginal communities in Canada. Within these perspectives, “misrecognition shows not only a lack of due respect [but] it can inflict grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need” (Taylor 1994:26). Understanding this “vital human need” and attempting to get out of the cycle of poverty found in many Aboriginal communities, Poplar River is proactively fighting for recognition - the recognition that exists through Aboriginal self-government and ownership of traditional territories is what allows individuals to define their identity and control their future. A good relationship between Poplar River and the State and Province is needed to fulfill, but not to define, that identity nonetheless, we define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us (Taylor 1994:33).

Indeed, these identities shaped by narratives of memory and of “honouring of the ancestors” are located in particular places and spaces and times. With space and place comes relationship to the land –not in the romanticised “Aboriginal connection way”, but any human being’s individual notion of place and how that sense of place is formed, shaped, and influenced by various discourses. The spaces protected by *asatisiwipe anishnaabek* need neither to be assimilated nor essentialized, as they are already fluid and spatially migratory to the individuals who own them. Poplar River First Nations members define their relationship to their spaces through the community’s permanent protection plan that comes out of the *Asatisiwipe Aki Lands Management Plan* which is

an outcome of successive efforts by Poplar River First Nation to assert the desire for protection of Poplar River Anishnaabek traditional territory. It also recognizes the interrelationships with a wider territory of ancestral lands occupied by neighbouring First Nations and the desire to cooperate in the protection and management of these lands (Lands Management, 2007:1)

This plan is an outcome of several years’ efforts to “protect the entire 861 718 ha of ... Poplar River Anishnaabek Traditional Territory” (Lands 2007:2). The area encompassed by this plan is the landbase on which the Poplar River Anishnaabek traditionally hunted, fished and trapped and, is most identified through the waterways that run through it, notably the *Asatisiwipe* (Poplar River), *Opakwepananusiwipe* (North Poplar River), *Mukatewisipe* (Mukutawa River) and *Maominwisipe* (Nanowin River).

All forms of available knowledge in terms of forests, land, water, wildlife, plants and fish management has and will be applied to protect this Park Reserve which is a reason why the Lands Management Plan is based on traditional methods and knowledge, as well as on scientific methods and data collection. The plan is therefore intended to inform and guide different “audiences”: it can serve as a frame of reference for the future generations of community

members, for governments in respect to planning and management of natural resources, as well as for the general public as environmental education and visitor facilities are all available on-site.

This planning initiative is taking place before specific large scale development proposals, in effect, a ‘preemptive’ strike against the non renewable resource development sector. But people are intricately tied to place, through culture, work and play. Usually by creating a distance between place and identity, the momentum of environmental efforts runs directly into the walls of political economy and individual livelihoods. Hence, if there is to be a meaningful change in the ways in which “territory” or the “Earth” is managed and used, people need to be included *at a fundamental level* as part of the entire system. It is for this reason that I have chosen to examine the politics, the economic development, the practices and discourses of environmentalism and “development” as well as the exploration of people’s relationships with spaces: their landscapes. Here, the following three individuals discuss their relationship to the land; I have selected Noel Bruce, as he is middle aged, Freddie Bruce, who is the community’s Health Service Director and in his 30s, and Byron Mitchell, an aspiring twenty-something preacher, who served as the voice of the “young people” for the purpose of this thesis:

Noel Bruce: *My relationship to the land is to try to protect it the way it is, the way the Creator made it. We were told by our Elders that the land was important to our young generations...we were told why the land is important*

Freddie Bruce: *The land is beautiful; it is like paradise here [...] Maintaining it and cleaning it [...] Like, I live off the land too, like for fishing and hunting...I’ve been here all my life and whenever I leave here, I miss it. And when I come back, it is just nice to be in the wilderness when it’s nice and quiet. No stress; just a place where you can go relax and let everything go.*

Byron Mitchell: *A lot of people love to hunt, they really do. Every fall, they go up the river, up the lake, up the lake here, for moose, and... in the fall; there is ducks and geese here in the spring [...] Native people are so in touch with their land – it is because they talk about the Creator, that we are one with creation. God made all*

this, I believe it is our responsibility to keep it, to preserve it [...] The land...it's where we live. I don't know if it is right for somebody else to tell us how to live.

As illustrated with Noel's, Freddie's and Byron's eloquently expressed words cited above, the people and the environment are tightly connected, and it is my feeling that the former will not be able to effectively mobilize without understanding and accounting for the latter. After all, the environment is a "single causal system" and as a result, I have made a conscious effort in my interviews to include questions of placement of oneself in one's landscapes. People's relationships with – and attachments to places may be one of the most powerful tools available to the environmental movement; Aboriginal peoples' place and space narratives intersect with the discourses and practices of environmentalism and "development" at a variety of levels. Examining how "Aboriginal community development" is constructed and represented locally, nationally and, with the United Nations World Heritage Site nomination, internationally, provides a framework against which to explore how constructions are internalized and/or resisted through people's own personal space and place narratives and experiences in *asatisiwipe aki*. Looking at the ways that Poplar River economic, community and territorial development is constructed and represented through various discourses of politics and environmentalism illustrates how places, and those people living in them, can become marginalized by the very discourses claiming concern for their social and environmental health. Mapping the discourses serving to construct, frame, and represent community and environmental issues in an Aboriginal remote community in the twenty-first century as a political process of place / issue / risk-making and serve as means by which the topographies of power can be explored. In effect, the exploration of all these issues on *asatisiwipe aki* is the goal of this thesis.

1.2 A NARRATIVE OF JURISPRUDENCE: “PLAN B”

The struggle to access and control spaces has forced Aboriginal people into violent conflicts, at times, peaceful blockades and launching numerous claims of land-[re]claims, Aboriginal rights, treaty rights and title. Cases of Kanesatake Mohawks at Oka, Ipperwash, Grassy Narrows, the recent protest and eventual arrest of Shawn Brant are just few examples that show Canada’s Aboriginal people driven to extreme measures trying to protect their lands.

Many Aboriginal people view land as “sacred”, not necessarily in the spiritual sense but based on the understanding that it is the basis of their survival as a people in a [re]settler-state. All indigenous nations in this country must at one point or another face the Canadian legal system. This European-based legal system primarily references market values to decide the worth of land; the sacred value of land is invisible. The Canadian political and economic system uses the market exchange system to decide value; the obvious interconnection between law, politics and economics need not be explored, but it must be remembered that this Eurocentric concept of value underlies all land-conflicts, and hence, all settlements.

Yet, land disputes indicate that off-reserve land under the control of non-Aboriginal people needs protection before any non-renewable resource developmental sector asserts ownership of that land. Indeed, in the Canadian provinces, 99% of land is off-reserve and many Aboriginal sacred and/or cultural sites, trapline territories and hunting/fishing areas fall into this portion of land (Ross 2005:13). This form of dispossession, writes Kulchyski & Tester (1994:6), not only transforms space and time, but is the dominant form of marginalization and absorption to totalization. The significance of these spaces then, is revealed by a careful examination of the relationship between Aboriginal people and land, especially with reference to culturally-

significant, at times even metaphysically, sacred places. Aboriginal control and management of land is critical to cultural and traditional existence or identity, but gaining control through the Canadian courts has been largely unsuccessful. A Western relationship with land, largely defined by economics is legally entrenched, and with it the method of legal argument, as well as the process of decision-making. Arguments are built with a combination of evidence and legal authority. Economic value is tangible and quantitative; spiritual value is qualitative and difficult to physically prove – especially for Aboriginal claimants arguing in Eurocentric courtrooms. Decisions evaluate evidence with regard to authority or precedent, and the existing tests to determine Aboriginal rights, treaty rights, or title subject all Aboriginal claims against the *Sparrow* test for infringement (*R.v. Sparrow*, [1990] (S.C.C) in Kulchyski 1994:212; Isaac 1999:417) In brief, the test to determine whether Aboriginal rights can be justifiably infringed balances the Aboriginal claim against the greater public interest. Given the difficulties in presenting a convincing argument, claims for Aboriginal traditional territories rarely outweigh the public interest.

In the *Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingni Community v. Nicaragua* the Inter-American Court of Human Rights describes the deepness of an indigenous person's relationship to the land: "[t]he close ties of indigenous peoples with the land must be recognized and understood as the fundamental basis for cultures, their spiritual life, their integrity and their economic survival". (Inter-Am. Ct.H.R. 2001). The human-land relationship is thus primarily essential to a cultural and especially, economic, survival. When ties to land are ignored, so are "traditional" persons and values, however "modern" they seem to be. This definition also marks a crucial difference between an Indigenous relationship with land and the predominant Western view, highlighted by

the word “survival”. Survival is roughly synonymous with subsistence, that is to say, to have just enough to live; far from survival, the Western relationship is dominated by the word “profit”. Actually, the notion of subsistence or “moderate livelihood” is deliberated by the Supreme Court in *R v. Marshall* [1999] (S.C.C.), par. 59:

The concept of “necessaries” is today equivalent to the concept of what Lambert J.A., in *R. v. Van der Peet* (1993), 80 B.C.L.R. (2d) 75, at p. 126, described as a “moderate livelihood”. Bare subsistence has thankfully receded over the last couple of centuries as an appropriate standard of life for aboriginals and non-aboriginals alike. A moderate livelihood includes such basics as “food, clothing and housing, supplemented by a few amenities”, but not the accumulation of wealth (*Gladstone, supra*, at para. 165). It addresses day-to-day needs. This was the common intention in 1760. It is fair that it be given this interpretation today.

Furthermore, Michael Lee Ross (2005:2) observes that Indigenous people always appreciate land for more than its physical aspects, as land is “fundamentally and irreducibly spiritual.” Plainly phrased, all land is sacred, yet this simple statement can obscure complexities and suggest the land base is religiously homogenous. However, for each individual person, band or Nation, certain sites hold greater significance than others. If, as Ross asserts, some places are connecting points, anchors, or roots to the overarching spiritual relationship with all land, then in relation to the overarching relationship, particular sites are crucial in existence as Aboriginal (Ibid., 3). Aboriginal peoples must have access to certain places to live a cultural or traditional life.

Ernest C. Bruce: *We will pursue the Aboriginal claim title, and I assure them that it will take time but that [is] the only way that Poplar River will have full ownership. And we don't claim to be the owners but we seem to be giving the message that we are the stewards of the area and we have lived here for thousands of years like our ancestors... We have to prove to the government that we have always lived here and we have done that.*

This stewardship lies in community-based efforts of “we have taken care of them since time immemorial ...” Leroy Little Bear (1998:19) explains an Aboriginal relationship to land and resources free of “ownership”:

[I]and cannot be ‘owned’ [...] Our evidence of title is in our songs, in the same way that title in Canadian law is evidence of a right to use. Our stories arise out of the land [...] Our ways of mapping our territory is through our stories. There is a story about every place.

Again, stories are scattered through place; they are woven from experiences with natural landscapes blended without temporal and spatial boundaries – they are alive in any point in history:

Like Aboriginal rights, the stories are *sui generis*. Implicate in nature, they cannot be easily fragmented into discreet units of Eurocentric knowledge, without seriously impairing their meaning. The meaning of other stories, the old stories or family or life histories, is about the dynamic changes in worldview, history, law, and behaviour. Many of the stories reveal the conventional character of human consciousness (Youngblood Henderson 2006:158).

To assert an Aboriginal need for control over and access to sacred sites is difficult without discussing the meaning of “sacred”. Sacred can be contrasted with the profane or the secular. Sacredness depends on symbolism; an object or place becomes sacred when it represents something more than it is to a person. Ken Douglas shows how sacredness of spaces is evident in the way people use it, in this case, for healing:

AP: *So from your oral history, and from your experience, what is your relationship to the land? [...] Do you think of the land as sacred?*

Ken Douglas: *No, no...that, not like that ...just...[...] hunting and camping, summer camping, the youth, the healing camping, and family camping, the last one in September, three more trips there’s going to be.*

There are no outward requirements; sacredness needs nothing tangible, only belief to exist (Ross 2005:10-13). In attempting to define sacredness however, it is not my intention to limit or

confine but to set out minimal requirements. Recognizing sacredness as at least a representation, in my limited experience, I discovered these spaces are more than symbolic. The earth on which a traditional sweatlodge sits gains spiritual significance through physical use. Sweat, tears, emotion and illness from people in the lodge soaks that earth. Over many years, the earth, water and rocks could absorb and heal the spirit of many generations. This is just one example of physical use and religious use combining to contribute to the spiritual significance of the land. Therefore any place which holds spiritual significance for someone can be sacred. Place becomes space to which meaning has been ascribed, usually, in the form of naming. Sacred sites can serve a variety of functions where law, culture, history and relationships are all part of Aboriginal spirituality, and the use of a sacred site may extend to nearly all aspects of traditional life (Ross 2005:3). The translation of First Nations understanding of “sacred” generates as their concept of right. These *sui generis* rights – of its own kind or unique – is based on First Nations knowledge, heritage and a culturally transmitted relationship with others to their environment. Hence, *sui generis* ownership of land and the citizenship in a community since time immemorial, can be viewed as “sacred”. Finally, with the special status of sacred places and spaces comes vulnerability to desecration.

If sacredness is a personal concept based on belief, and is highly variable, it should be unsurprising that the first significant hurdle to taking forward a claim for an Aboriginal sacred space is meeting the evidentiary burden. My role as a researcher was to help Poplar River First Nation in their “Plan B” – the eventual claim for Aboriginal title to their ancestral trapline territory (which I will discuss below) on the basis that the land is sacred to the people, and that “the chief that signed the treaty, was not a recognized chief by the community” (Ernest C.

Bruce). Legally speaking, this problem asks the question of, firstly, what evidence is necessary to establish sacred or spiritual significance of a place and secondly, what evidence can a First Nation provide, with reference to their traditions and beliefs?

For example, in *Mount Currie Indian Band v. International Forest Products* [1991] (B.C.S.C.) the evidentiary requirements were discussed in the context of conflict between the Lil'Wat and a developer who was constructing a road. The Lil'Wat believed road construction would destroy or seriously damage burial grounds and other sites of heritage or historical importance. However, their argument failed before Justice Macdonnell as he decided that there was a lack of specific physical evidence:

Examination of the evidence before me leads me to the conclusion that there are no demonstrated burial grounds, pictographs or other matters of heritage of historical significance within the road allowance [...] The evidence before me is of a very general nature, lacking any specificity which would make it possible to determine affirmatively otherwise the existence of any area or site within the road allowance which should be protected (*Mount Currie* no 703 at 4).

Without a physical manifestation of the spiritual assertion, Justice Macdonnell thought he was unable to conclude this site was sacred. However, Justice Macdonnell confused finding this area to be sacred, with finding that it was sacred to the Lil'Wat. It is important to note however, that *Mount Currie* was decided before the *Delgamukw v. British Columbia* [1997] (S.C.C.) and it was likely that the case involved an undervaluing of oral histories.

Again, the “sacred” is a representation; places shift from the secular to the spiritual through simple belief. What the court in *Mount Currie* should have evaluated was evidence of belief, not of any demonstrated spirituality of the site marked by material objects and physical manifestations. And although Poplar River has evidence of a 6000 year old existence in *asatisiwipi aki*, their mostly Christianized community may not convincingly show physical

evidence for practicing the European understanding of “Aboriginal spirituality” that stereotypically shows a connection to land in some evident form. This fatalistic argument shows the poverty of the legal understanding of a historical situation where the *asatisiwiipe anishnaabek* are “supposed to” be conditioned by their past as *aboriginal* people to further support the integral-ness of their culture as outlined in *Van derPeet* [1996] (S.C.C.).

Even when there is physical proof of a spiritual place, an evidentiary problem remains in the need to define and confine this space within boundaries. Decision-making based on boundaries reflects ethnocentric expectations; an Aboriginal “sacred” site to non-Aboriginal peoples is merely a secondary element of a much larger sacred system that involves the whole land/territory. Herein lies the misunderstanding of the nature of space: evidenced by the attempt to place physical boundaries around an intangible concept, usually limits protection and Aboriginal claims to territories, claims later silenced by industrial development projects. Sacred ground is related to the food resources found: the fish found in the waters, the medicine that can be gathered along the shores, the gathering of the peoples themselves. Problems with evidence and legislative authority over off-reserve lands are evident when establishing a claim for traditional lands and hence, these sacred spaces. However, the successful assertion of treaty rights as the basis for a right to access sacred spaces was argued in *R v. Sioui* [1990] (S.C.C.) where the 1760 treaty document guaranteed the Hurons the right to free exercise of their religions, customs and trade (*R v. Sioui* [1990] (S.C.C.) in Kulchyski 1994:184). The claimants in this case were convicted of cutting down trees, camping and making a fire in Jacques Cartier Park, all in contravention of Parks Canada regulations. Making full admissions of their acts, they pointed to the treaty provision as a basis for their right to practice ancestral ceremonies in the

park. A large part of the Supreme Court justices discussed the necessary negotiations and the elements of a treaty; the court then framed the remaining discussion of promised treaty rights and the “liberal and generous attitude” that is essential in interpreting the territorial scope of the treaty. Acknowledging that this was not a claim to the territory itself, but to a right of access, the court chose to concentrate on the “substantive content of the right” (*Sioui* in Kulchyski 1994:206). Nowhere in this judgement was the land in question regarded as a sacred or spiritual land, instead Justice Lamer acknowledged that “a very special importance seems to attach to territories traditionally frequented by the Hurons so that their traditional religious rites and ancestral customs will have their full meaning” (*Sioui* in Kulchyski 1994:208). In essence, starting with the presumption that this land could not be substituted for another piece of land, the court was acknowledging a special quality in this land, and in what this particular area represented to the Huron people.

Since the initial success of *R v Sioui*, no other Canadian case involving the treaty right of access an off-reserve sacred site has been successful. Neither has there been a direct claim to access, use, protection or preservation of an off-reserve sacred site as an Aboriginal right. This difficulty in definition can be best outlined through *R v Vanderpeet* [1996] (S.C.C.) where the Supreme Court of Canada outlined the test to determine whether an Aboriginal right had been established. To qualify as an Aboriginal right protected by S. 35 of the Constitution Act, the right claimed, must pass the “integral to a distinctive culture” test (*Van der Peet* in Isaac 1999:448 at 80). However, before one can apply, the test is necessary to determine the parameters of the right in question. This is problematic because the courts will have to interpret the “integral-ness” and cultural significance of an Aboriginal claim from European terms – and in comparison to

European standards. Instead of assuming an impassable chasm between societies and cultures, this anthropological authority of determining “integral-ness”, the Courts’ examination of things “integral to Aboriginal culture”, projects ideas about the culture itself. Thus the method of analysis hinges on definition - a definition which is not made by Aboriginal persons, or their lawyers, but by judges. The potential for a right to be mischaracterized is high, and the damage to the claim can be devastating as rights can be defined too generally so as to be distinctive or too narrowly to be meaningful (*Van der Peet* at 191). Although this term is highly perplexing to the identifiable elements being integral to *which* culture, the phrase nevertheless does not mean having to provide direct evidence of pre-contact activity. Ultimately, once the integral to a distinctive hurdle is overcome, it can still fail on a number of grounds, and it is further limited by the infringement test in *Sparrow*, decided immediately after *R v. Sioui*.

What is the effect then of the seeming inability of the Canadian legal system to protect sacred spaces even through providing temporary relief? Thousands of Aboriginal sacred places and spaces have already been destroyed or damaged, while still more sites are threatened, and access to still others is hindered or denied. As mentioned above, the fight of a land re-claim has an extra dimension of significance for Aboriginal cultural and traditional survival; however it can be argued, the failure of these claims expose issues affecting those who do not share those traditions or cultures. Furthermore, with a neo-liberal economic system focused on the exploitation of natural resources as a means to create profit, all Canadian lands are threatened.*

Hence the value of economic activity easily outweighs the value of protecting our environment

* I do not wish to perpetuate the idea that sacred sites and environmental ethics are equitable interests. I simply wish to extend the discussion of how the Western relationship with the land tends towards destruction first and foremost of sacred spaces but also generally towards all nature, mainly driven by non-renewable resource exploitation (cf. Alberta tar sands, Asubpeeschoseewagong [Grassy Narrows]).

for its inherent worth, the question turns from whether Aboriginal cultures can survive without a land base to whether anyone can survive at all? Studying the treatment of sacred land claims in the Canadian courts and the underlying norms and assumptions, proves that land without economic value does not fit into the existing framework of the law, into Judeo-Christian understanding, or into the Canadian political or economic agenda.

However, what Asatisiwipe First Nation is doing happens to perhaps be a precedent-setting achievement for Aboriginal peoples in the boreal forest: theirs is a pre-emptive motion to safeguard their trapline territory that they claim to be stewards of for the past 6000 years. Rather than relying on the courts (hence “plan B”), this community in northern Manitoba is relying on their rights derived from prior occupancy *qua* indigenous, as a practical possibility for future economic self-sufficiency and protection of their traditional sacred spaces and places. This legal recognition of Aboriginal rights as representing a right to a continued Aboriginal existence is understood by the leaders of this First Nation.

The case of *Delgamuukw v British Columbia* [1997] (S.C.C.) laid out the criteria for Aboriginal title as follows: (1) prior to sovereignty, the land must have been occupied by the ancestors of the Aboriginal group claiming title, (2) continuity between existing and pre-sovereignty occupation must be demonstrated when existing occupation of the lands in question is being offered as proof of pre-sovereignty occupation, and (3) at the time of sovereignty, the occupation by the Aboriginal group must have been exclusive (*Delgamuukw*, paras. 140-159 in Isaac 1999:11). Thus, occupation, continuity and exclusivity (which must take into account the context of the Aboriginal society at sovereignty) are enough to make an Aboriginal title claim. Poplar River First Nation’s “Plan B” is to assert Aboriginal title to land based on 6000-year old

occupancy. The community is a sovereign Aboriginal group that still continues to occupy the territory of which they are stewards of. By the principle of continuity alone, Aboriginal interest in land which has its roots in Indigenous law, continues to exist and cannot be nullified upon a simple assertion of “ownership”. Specifically, if there is no “clear and plain” voluntary abandonment, the principle of continuity ensures the preservation of certain collective rights of distinct groups: “Aboriginal title arises out of prior occupation of the land by Aboriginal peoples and out of the relationship between the common law and pre-existing systems of Aboriginal law” (*Delgamuukw* at 145 in Isaac 1999:438). Therefore the formulation of Aboriginal title gives force and legal recognition to the systems by which First Nations organize themselves; since Aboriginal political organization and occupation of land is dependent on the existence of an Indigenous group, these factors become a source of Aboriginal rights. Working in a circular motion therefore, if *sui generis* interest in land has its roots in Aboriginal legal and political organization, it means that these laws must, in turn, form a part of the contemporary meaning of Aboriginal rights (Borrows 2002:11). Therefore, the formulation of Aboriginal title gives force and legal recognition to the stewardship systems by which Poplar River is organized and the concept of a continuum of stewardship crystallizes the legitimacy of *asatisiwipe anishnaabek* sovereignty over their traditional trapline territories whose *sui generis* exclusive use and occupation as outlined in *Delgamuukw*, is protected by Treaty Five and was accorded constitutional status as an “existing” Aboriginal right.

Precisely, when referring once again to Canadian history, there are a few issues in Treaty Five and its adhesions that elaborate on this *sui generis* discussion in terms of an understanding of Aboriginal title to land. The basic text of the adhesions simply stated that:

[the Indians] transfer, surrender and relinquish to His Majesty the King, his heirs and successors, to and for the use of the Government of Canada, all our right [s], title and privileges whatsoever, which we have or enjoy in the territory described in the said Treaty, and every part thereof, to have and to hold to the use of His Majesty the King and his heirs and successors forever (Tough 2000:107).

Outlining the area surrendered, the benefits of Treaty Five included reserves of 160 acres per family of five, ammunition and twine and five dollars annuity payments (Tough 2000:319-320).

The southern boundary of the treaty consisted of the northern-most boundary of Treaty Two and Three, so, “unless the boundaries had been properly defined, in conformity with known geographical points”, writes the Lieutenant Governor at the time, Alexander Morris, then,

a portion of the country lying between the territories formerly ceded and those comprised in Treaty Number Five, would have been left with Indian title unextinguished (1991:151).

This allows many geographical points to be left excluded from the treaty boundaries as the map at the time of the signing was

prepared from actual observation, and locate[d] many places not indicated on any existing map, and covering as it does an area of over 100, 000 square miles, which, exclusive of the great waters, has been included in the treaty (Ibid 1991:151).

Hence, Treaty Five adhesion had a different intent than specifications; oral assurances and journal entries of Alexander Morris about the hunting and trapping rights cannot be easily reconciled with the literal written text of the treaty adhesion, which calls for the extinguishment of all rights, title, and privileges. The oral understanding of the treaty differs greatly from the written document; the “spirit” of the treaty and its negotiations tend to challenge the written promises which were never to be broken as long as grass grew and waters ran. As a consequence, it can be stated that Poplar River’s rights to hunt and trap in the Poplar/Nanowin rivers trapline territory, follows unextinguished continuity where the preservation of collective

rights of distinct national groups is ensured upon establishing no voluntary abandonment. Again, Ernest C. Bruce often mentions that, among others, their “Plan B” to go to court to claim Aboriginal title would be based on such historic-legal intricacies.

Management of ancestral lands is a specific form of exercising Aboriginal rights and although the United Nations cannot enforce this inherent heritage, the positions and acceptance of self-determinacy at the international level can be seen as a validation of Aboriginal self-government wherein the community is responsible for its politics, social issues and economic development. Thus, in a post-colonial, global context, Poplar River has a *sui generis* ownership and right to management of their trap-lines that could have neither been extinguished by a treaty adhesion nor by *Parks Canada* applications of international laws. Indeed, a First Nations community member and spokesperson for Pimachiowin Aki Corp. states,

Sophia Rabliauskas: *Creating a world Heritage Site in the area will not change the ownership of the land. Each jurisdiction will be responsible for planning and management in its area and all aboriginal and treaty rights will remain fully protected.*

It is essential to recognize that the individuals of this remote community around the historic HBC post, Negginan, continue to maintain their traditional traplines, from which they continue to hunt and trap for subsistence and a cultural continuance. The fifteen trapline territories are passed on from generation to generation to this day; the properties are still respected by the community and continue to be used even if the notion of “modern Indians” should state otherwise.

Ernest C. Bruce: *The trapline territories correspond to families based.*

Byron Mitchell: *People still go hunting; I don't but my family does.*

Therefore, the community, understanding its inherent rights, is taking charge of its future by creating its own plans to maintain an ecologically sustainable vision of community development

by designating their ancestral trap-line territory as a World Heritage Site, which offers protection, access to the World Heritage Fund as well as elaboration and implementation of measures and monitoring mechanisms needed to protect and recognize their territory in the archaic boreal forest as an example of cultural and natural wealth. This *sui generis* or inherent Aboriginal right is emphasized in a modern format through the *Asatisiwipe Aki Lands Management Plan*, which outlines the management of ancestral territory of *asatisiwipe aki* by means of jurisprudence based on knowledge and heritage that had been handed down through generations by cultural and oral transmission. This complete knowledge system with its own concepts of philosophy, epistemology, metaphysics intertwined with cultural practices, traditions and customs as well as scientific graphs, charts, maps and quantitative methodologies represent a modern – written - version of the totality of an Aboriginal society.

SUMMER :

The Rights-of-Way Conundrum



SUMMER

Poplar River stretches out east of Lake Winnipeg and down along the Poplar/Nanowin River. It declines south of the river dividing the community into a visible invisible of individuals. Beautiful, long beaches stretch out along the western shores of the community. The boreal forest - the beauty that, dense with life, home to hundreds of species and one of the most beautiful landscapes anyone will ever see - is also simultaneously of interest to the hungry for “wilderness conservation” and those starved for non-renewable resource exploitation. Presently, this natural ecosystem of the boreal forest, along with a permanent human settlement is a balanced relationship; the symbiosis is evident in the beauty of both parties of the affiliation. This archaic forest, although enchanting, should not be underestimated however; refreshingly beautiful yet ominous – like the complexities of the lives of the members of the community themselves.

The band office has an enterprise-like quality to it: jean clad backs, dozens of rubber boots placed at the entrance, faces covered with baseball caps make up the unending human procession of people piling in and out. The stream of people limps and staggers; in August it ceases to exist as everyone is gone to Weaver Lake or Winnipeg. The feeling when you are in the middle of the community band office or school activity is kind of like flying: if you’ve never been to a place like this – and where would you have living in a city? – your heart begins beating at a funny pace. It feels like dizziness and nausea tied with excitement; sometimes your legs buckle slightly because you have no business whatsoever being here, and people walk right past you...

But your invisibility is noticed here. Everyone knows who you are: all the kids yell your name from across the baseball field, the dogs follow you around, the adults trust you feeding their kids with peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches.

You are heading back to your accommodation now. Deep breaths; focus on the scenery. Dirt-road traffic; on the pocketed road you often find some lost or abandoned treasure. Now, walk. You're going to want to rush. It's your city-nature; get it over with, then slow down. Cars and trucks rush past you. Small, typical of the reserve, houses are seen in the distance along the road. Some windows are boarded up. Look up; eye contact is totally allowed here. Nod sincerely. Just don't gawk (gawking is rude). Unless you join a party where you owe money or become too infatuated with someone's partner, you're completely safe. By now you have realized exactly how exciting and secure you feel - how overstated the initial shock of it was - which is a slight consolation in the seemingly isolated, still unfamiliar environment in which you presently find yourself. Go to bed early; when you come back in the morning, you are going to see something entirely different.

2.1 BiPOLE III TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT

Long before the October 8, 2007 *Winnipeg Free Press* [WFP] article “Look at us, world” came out, there were efforts to protect the East Side region of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba. The seemingly unnoticed articles printed in Winnipeg’s largest newspaper like the March 24, 2007 “province gives \$2.5M for Aboriginal land-use planning” or the April 4, 2007 “First Nations sign accord” or even the June 18, 2007 articles about the importance of “East Side forests essential” to Lake Winnipeg never gained much attention. Even when the April 9, 2007 article regarding “East side road construction to start”, an important development project funded by the government, contradicting previous articles about the necessity of preserving the “pristine” East Side, has not made as big an issue as did the October-November articles about the UNESCO World Heritage Site possibly being designated in central Manitoba’s boreal forests. The reason is that the establishment of a World Heritage Site on the east side of Lake Winnipeg divided First Nations and other communities and the ensuing debate lead to political and environmental strife between Manitobans.

Not all individuals were in favour of the bestowment of this internationally recognized entitlement; the dissent had its source mainly in terms of value, monetary or not. Because the area is a resource rich place, some view it as a precious forest, a “wilderness park” devoid of any human/Aboriginal presence that needs to be conserved (Bordo 1992:98); others see economic potential and resource exploitation. These differentiating views were a hot topic in Manitoba in the last two years – since 2007, mainly due to the proposed development of Manitoba Hydro’s 500kv high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line that directly affected all of Manitoba and especially the eighteen communities located on the East Side.

The nomination for the first World Heritage Site in the province was first announced to the public in the October 8, 2007 *WFP* article mentioned above. The problem with the announcement was that Manitoba Hydro was already since 2002 planning to make use of the territory east of Lake Winnipeg for a transmission line project. Actually, in December of that year, Manitoba Hydro released a report, *Future Transmission Line Development on the East Side*, which summarizes perspectives identified by various community leaders on the East Side of Lake Winnipeg and Manitoba Hydro's intention to introduce the company's plans for future transmission line development, known as the BiPole III project. The meetings, held with the leadership of all First Nations of the 18 communities on the East side of the province* between Nelson River and the City of Winnipeg, were carried out from May to October 2002. The meetings, although requested by Manitoba Hydro, were to "begin the process of building relationships with communities in regards to such development" (Manitoba Hydro 2002). Bob Brennan, President and Chief Executive Officer of Manitoba Hydro, informed East Side communities about the Corporation's transmission development plans; this marked the beginning of an impassioned process involving the two sides in the planning and the environmental assessment of future transmission lines, beginning with BiPole III, a new HVDC line which would run approximately 800 km down from the Nelson River through the East Side of Lake Winnipeg to the outskirts of Winnipeg, where it would later extend to Northwestern Ontario and

* At the time when this document was produced, meetings had been held with the following eighteen First Nations: Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Sagkeeng First Nation, Hollow Water First Nation, Bloodvein First Nation, Berens River First Nation, Poplar River First Nation, Little Grand Rapids First Nation, Pauingassi First Nation, Norway House Cree Nation, Garden Hill First Nation, Wasagamack First Nation, St. Theresa Point First Nation, Red Sucker Lake First Nation, God's Lake First Nation, Manto Sipi Cree Nation, Bunibonibee Cree Nation, York Factory First Nation, Fox Lake Cree Nation.

the United States to serve the increasing need for energy (Manitoba Hydro 2002:3-4). A few of the protocols outlined in the presentation of the transmission line project were: no plans for damming of rivers or developing hydroelectric generating stations anywhere south of the Nelson River and; BiPole III, a new high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line would deliver power to the south from the Keeyask/Gull Generating Station on the Nelson River - if that project is built by 2017. Even without the Keeyask/Gull Generating Station, Manitoba Hydro needs BiPole III for system reliability purposes - to provide separation from and back-up to the existing HVDC lines, BiPoles I and II, which carry 70% of Manitoba's power on parallel HVDC lines from the Nelson River through the Interlake to the Dorsey converter station, Northwest of Winnipeg (Manitoba Hydro 2002:3-4; Manitoba Hydro 2008:2). The importance of the BiPole III is in the form of a "back-up" - a security line in case of an ice storm; by spreading the power currently flowing through the two existing DC lines out over three Hydro lines will significantly reduce line losses (i.e. loss of electricity that occurs when transmitting over long distances) and add more power, if necessary. Another possibility could be the Conawapa Generating Station, yet if both stations are built, an additional DC line, beyond BiPole III would be required – on the East Side, of course, yet this information is rarely discussed or even mentioned in any documents.

After many public debates, held a few months apart from each other at the University of Winnipeg, the University of Manitoba and the Winnipeg Public Library, the Gary Doer government decided to run the power line down the west side of Lake Winnipeg. Perhaps seeing how original, important and Manitoban-supported the UNESCO World Heritage Site was, the government made its final choice despite many condemnations. Many politicians were against

the move to the west side; some Winnipeggers disliked the idea of “such obvious” plans being changed for “some Indians”. Racism and blatant discrimination was often portrayed in the media, in the thoughts of the general public, and was made quite evident in the many articles printed in the *Winnipeg Free Press*; for example, mail-in comments about “Canadian aboriginals living on reserves demand[ing] special status” were made in regards to struggles for Aboriginal rights ensuing in the necessity to “facilitate the re-establishment of aboriginals into mainstream society” (*WFP* Oct 14, 2008:A12); treaty promises were referred as “contacts of the past belong[ing] to the people of the past” (*WFP* Oct 18, 2008:A12). Calling the project a “golden opportunity” for the East Side, Hugh McFadyen, the leader of the opposition, wrote angrily that the West Side NDP decision was made “before consulting with west side residents”, hence the “plan will leave a legacy of a half-billion-dollar debt and dirtier air to our children and grandchildren - all to protect at best, 14 square kilometres of boreal forest” (*WFP* Oct 2, 2007:A11).

Furthermore, *The Winnipeg Free Press* portrayed smug delight in the printed article “More chiefs opposed west-side decision”, written by Mary Agnes Welch on Wednesday October 17, 2007. The article describes how four more east-side chiefs were demanding that the Premier reconsider his decision to run the BiPole III down the West Side because this “misguided” decision “condemns their east side communities [of Wasagamack, Red Sucker Lake, Garden Hill and St. Theresa’s Point] to relentless poverty”:

The Island Lakes bands are among the poorest and most isolated in the province. Most homes there are dramatically overcrowded and don’t have running water or sewer service. Diabetic and other chronic illnesses are rampant and several reserves have serious gang problems. [Therefore, quoting the chiefs] “the project would have provided long-term meaningful employment and development. It would have alleviated poverty” (*WFP* Oct 17, 2007:B2).

Stating furthermore that, although Poplar River First Nation is “adamantly opposed to a transmission line going through its lands”, other First Nations like Pauingassi*, Bloodvein and Berens River would like to enter into an ownership or revenue-sharing deal to reap some financial benefits from this BiPole. However, full Aboriginal ownership is a “no-go” in Doer’s opinion and a laughable proposition to Manitoba Hydro as seen in the “East/West or the Route Less Taken Panel Discussion” on BiPole III held on April 22, 2008 at the University of Winnipeg where panellists such as The Honourable Eric Robinson, MLA, Don Sullivan of the Boreal Forest Network, Louis Young, the former chief of Bloodvein First Nation, James Blatz professor at the University of Manitoba in the engineering department and John Ryan, a self proclaimed “retired geographer” have presented their opinions on the BiPole III project. Eric Robinson, Don Sullivan and Luis Young were all against the East Side plan; James Blatz gave a PowerPoint presentation on the “objective science” of the project, yet seemingly sided with the original East Side initiative as he was also one of many engineering professors whose letter to Premier Gary Doer published in *The Winnipeg Free Press* argued that:

[w]e the undersigned, with the public interest as our highest consideration, request that the Provincial Government reconsider its decision to pursue development of the BiPole III HVDC line down the West side of the province (*WFP* Dec. 2, 2007:B4).

The retired University of Winnipeg professor John Ryan however, suggested a third possibility of placing the power line under water. Although the idea of extending transmission lines under Lake Winnipeg would resolve the East Side/West Side debate, this alternative would cost four to six times more, new converter stations would have to be built and the technology to install the

* This is wrong information of the part of the journalist as Pauingassi First Nation is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site planning initiative, thus cannot be against the transmission line re-route.

heavy 90 kilograms per metre cable would require special barges to get the line out into the middle of the lake. Basing its decision on cost and the feasibility of procuring the tools to carry out this alternative, Manitoba Hydro rejected this option - to the dissatisfaction of many.

Over the course of the few weeks, the *Winnipeg Free Press* emphasized such disagreements, especially the infighting of First Nations leaders. Indeed, the disagreements were serious; Berens River First Nation Chief George Kemp has threatened to take the UNESCO designation to court and Bloodvein leader-at-the-time threatened to take judicial action against Poplar River. Bloodvein leadership seemingly depends of the chiefs' views of the transmission line; former chief of Bloodvein First Nation Luis Young spoke against the east-side transmission line at the April 22, 2008 BiPole III panel –and the current chief of that same community showed up, and spoke angrily about the continued impoverishment of his community.

Yet, there are individuals who support hydro development in this region, most notably Elijah Harper, a former Manitoba NDP MLA who helped bring about the collapse of the Meech Lake constitutional package in 1990. Elijah Harper, who comes from Red Sucker Lake located on the East Side, claims that the government fears lobbying from environmentalist who want to keep the area “pristine” for their purposes yet, “the environmentalists don’t live here”. He continues on, “I know David Suzuki, I’ve met Robert Kennedy Jr. They enjoy the highest standards of living in the world while we live in the poorest conditions and they tell us we should continue to have those conditions. It really frustrates me” (*WFP* May 14, 2007:A11; *WFP* May 14, 2007:A2).

To preserve the integrity of the boreal forest, the UNESCO designation seems to preclude the construction of a Manitoba transmission line – and hence, some possible financial benefits.

Rerouting the transmission line might cost \$400 million to \$1 billion more in extra construction costs and lost power for export sales since the route is fifty per cent longer and may create vastly more environmental damage (*WFP* July 14, 2008:B4). But a reality check is needed because the notion of reaping financial benefits from the power line is dubious. This important message needs to be understood: there are absolutely *no* financial benefits for the East Side (or now the West Side) communities resulting *directly* from the transmission lines. Not only does Hydro maintain that the company is “not prepared to share in ownership of BiPole III because the line will be a key part of its integrated power system and must be managed and operated in conjunction with the system” but that same report further addresses the myth of significant employment and business opportunities for underemployed east side residents :

construction jobs and business opportunities associated with BiPole III will be modest and of short duration. Once the lines are built and in place, there are very few operating and maintenance job opportunities (Manitoba Hydro 2002).

Therefore, the argument that the power lines would provide long-term economic opportunities is misconstrued. Other than the jobs provided at the time of the power line construction - the corridor building, the alloy tower assembly and erection, the putting up of the lines and the maintenance of the corridor by pesticide spraying which would last about five years in total from the beginning of the project assembly - there are no “jobs” associated with the power line itself. Once the project is done, that is to say, once the line is up and running, there is nothing else left to do. Hence, if there is no option for a revenue-sharing deal that, as some may incorrectly believe could have pumped “millions of dollars” into each community every year; if there is no long-term economic opportunities associated with the line itself; if the only financial benefits were to be only the yet-undertermined initial payments for the already ceded Aboriginal lands; if

the communities cannot be shareholders for a multi-million project erected on their lands, then all these arguments only support the WHS initiative. Although the economic development potential of the UNESCO designation is often undervalued, there are strong, enthusiastic and satisfactory arguments that the east side's eco-tourism attractions (among many others according to Poplar River and which I will discuss later) could thrive with a UNESCO designation.

Another important issue must also be discussed here. Many east side communities are convinced of the positive (financial included) benefits of the BiPole III project. However, the project needs to be closely examined for the possible detrimental effects it may have that are not necessarily financial. The BiPole III project is a fairly new technology; only BiPole I and II exist in Manitoba and a similar HVDC power lines project exists in northern Quebec. The significant thing about the BiPoles is that they are high voltage *direct* current power lines – as opposed to alternating current power lines which are very different in terms of their technology. The Elsevier *Journal of Bioelectrochemistry and Bioenergetics* (1995:95) discusses the estimation of genetic effects of a static magnetic field by a somatic cell in a mutagen-sensitive *Drosophila melanogaster* (a common fruit fly) where the experimental results indicate that a static-magnetic field causes damage to the cellular DNA of the fly. Although far too few studies are conclusive concerning genotoxicity or carcinogenicity of static magnetic fields and hence possible adverse health effects, (after all, MRI scans are performed worldwide without any clear adverse effects being observed in this technology), yet nonetheless, physical rather than biological effects clearly exist where electrocardiogram (ECG) records obtained with surface electrodes show substantial augmentation in the T-wave in the presence of magnetic fields – and this phenomena is completely and immediately reversible upon termination of exposure (INCHEM 1987:22-24).

Presently, there are studies suggesting multiform effects of exposure to static magnetic fields such as cancer induction, a learned avoidance of fields by animals – sometimes even so strong that it that persists up to several days; nausea, vertigo, metallic taste in the mouth among the aluminum industry workers; lower productivity of bees under fields as well as disorientation in migratory birds when close to an energized source (INCHEM 1987:9&18; Leszczynski 2005:250-252; Manitoba Hydro 1995:33). How this magnetically-induced flow potential affects biological entities is yet to be determined; however, before promises of “permanent jobs” are made to northern Aboriginal transmission-construction workers, there is, I believe, an urgent need to perform new studies in order to fill the present gaps in knowledge and to provide assurance to communities (and the general public) that this technology will not cause unwanted and unexpected health side effects – to occupational workers, hunters, and the food supply upon which certain communities still depend on for subsistence.

Manitoba Hydro argues that the power lines will be built away from the communities and therefore, individuals will be rarely come into contact, if at all with the power lines. Yet, another confounding factor that is overlooked in the maintenance of the transmission line is the upkeep of the corridors. Corridors require the removal of trees and other bushes so as to keep them from knocking down the power lines. Widths of corridors range between 40m-80m, but that number is dependent on landscape, the size of the powers and the line voltage; the area is then clear cut and sprayed (Manitoba Hydro 1995:13). When pesticides are used, selective maintenance is dominant and long-term effects are visible. Manitoba Hydro has several specific methods for controlling vegetation on power line corridors. These range from mechanical removal, to hand cutting, to broadcast and selective handgun spraying with herbicides including stump treatments,

stem injections, bark sprays (Manitoba Hydro 2007:7-9); herbicides are indeed an effective tool over a long period of time, however nowhere are there indirect consequences nor any active ingredients stated in any of the corporate publications – none are made public either as confirmed by my telephone call to the Systems Planning and Environment Division. The concern is that animals will directly come into contact with the sprayed area, and there is a significant probability of the effects of pesticide spray drift from the corridors. Chemicals may have accumulated in the tissues of the exposed animal which may later be hunted or trapped and subsequently consumed by community members. Although there has not been any large scale northern transmission line herbicide use since 1990, herbicides are sprayed nonetheless, which means that the berries that the people may collect have been sprayed, the animals that the hunters have consumed may have once ingested sprayed vegetation; the active ingredients of the herbicide or fungicide may have drifted and/or seeped into the groundwater.

Manitoba Hydro is also researching biological control, which is perhaps a more threatening means of vegetation control as seen by many invasive species changing the ecologies and destroying habitat through rapid multiplication consuming native species where no natural predators exists - British Columbia can attest to the failure of this technique with the Mountain Pine Bark Beetle. Overall, there exist numerous methods for vegetation management on corridors, however, regardless of the method used, the ecological symbiosis of the archaic boreal forest may be endangered; any corporate technique will affect wildlife habitat by changing the largely undisturbed ecological community that is to sustain the next seven generations.

However, what are the very basic reasons that Poplar River is so adamant about rejecting the multi-million dollar project on their territory? Most people see it as an aesthetic conundrum:

will scarring the land with a transmission line really affect the beauty, the “archaic-ness” or “wilderness” of the boreal forest from the aerial view? Perhaps the answer lies in logic, that one power line might not seem like a big concern, yet it eventually becomes a magnet for all sorts of development and disturbances of many kinds. As David Schindler states:

[w]hat would happen on the eastern shores should be compared to another boreal area that was equally beautiful 40 years ago – the lower foothills and adjacent boreal plains of western Alberta. This area, too, was once considered wilderness in the 1960s, with abundant woodland caribou, boreal grizzlies and other large mammals. That changed rapidly with the discovery of oil and gas. Once a few seismic lines and roads were in place, other activities simply followed, including mineral exploration, agriculture and powered recreation (*WFP* Jan. 11, 2008:A11).

Introduction of one development has the tendency to create a ripple effect; it is never just one thing. In terms of the environment, once one resource-exploitative entity is introduced, others soon follow because the “pristine-ness”, the “wilderness”, the “untouched land” is no longer seen as such, thus creating an invitation to other components. This was very evident in the whole east side/west side debate: protect the still “relatively virgin land” of the east side from development, but not a lot of questions or environmental concerns were raised with the instalment of yet another transmission project on the west side – seeing that two BiPoles were already present, why even ask?

2.2 UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE NOMINATION

Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration. Places as unique and diverse as the wilds of East Africa's Serengeti, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and the Baroque cathedrals of Latin America make up our world's heritage.

What makes the concept of World Heritage exceptional is its universal application. World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 1972 (UNESCO World Heritage Mission statement 2007).

The UNESCO's World Heritage mission is a vast one. Among numerous others, some of the outlined goals are: to encourage countries to sign the World Heritage Convention and to ensure the protection of their natural and cultural heritage; to help State Parties safeguard World Heritage properties by providing technical assistance and professional training; to encourage international cooperation in the conservation of our world's cultural and natural heritage; and to provide emergency assistance for World Heritage Sites in immediate danger. However, because not all sites are accepted, nominated or ratified, what is the nomination process for a site to be recognized? How does nomination or ratification benefit the people directly concerned, like the four First Nations including Poplar River, on whose territory this title may be recognized?

The process for a site to be recognized or even nominated as a heritage site is a complex and somewhat a political process as "only countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention, pledging to protect their natural and cultural heritage, can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion in UNESCO's World

Heritage List” (UNESCO 2009). In Canada, the organization responsible for the protection, nomination and the ultimate decision of a site is *Parks Canada*. Thus, for each site that Canada would like to protect with the help of this international organization has to go through a “double process” application, one internal (or national) and one external (UNESCO, or international). This process is interesting especially since *Parks Canada* is state-controlled and has not always been historically friendly towards Aboriginal people. Therefore, at present, I would like to describe the UNESCO World Heritage Site process only; the internal or the *Parks Canada* application for and of a WHS and the eventual management of it, will be discussed afterwards.

Nomination Process

According to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the first step a country has to make is a “tentative list”, that is, it has to make an inventory of any important cultural and natural heritage sites located within its boundaries. The proponent of the property which is considered to be of outstanding universal value is encouraged to include the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders, including site managers, local and regional governments, local communities, NGOs and other interested parties and partners. Encouraged to be re-examined and re-evaluated at least every 10 years, this inventory list is essential for UNESCO World Heritage Site Committee because it “provides a forecast of the properties that a State Party may decide to submit for inscription in the next five to ten years” (UNESCO 2008). The list is submitted using the *Tentative List Submission Format* in English or French and ought to contain the name of the suitable properties, their geographical location, a brief description of the properties, and justification of their outstanding universal value. However, the important and somewhat troubling theme is that the World Heritage Committee cannot consider a nomination for

inscription of the WHS list unless the property has already been included on the State Party's Tentative List, which means that, in Canada, the potential territory needs to be considered "outstanding" in some way by Canadians and recognized as such by *Parks Canada*. Otherwise, without the recognition of the federal government, the nomination to the World Heritage List will not be considered.

The second step, after the tentative list and its selected sites is completed, the State Party then present a nomination file, which is exhaustive as all possible documentation, maps, graphs and any other "proof" necessary needs to be submitted; the World Heritage Centre actually offers advice and assistance in this step, recognizing the importance of all details in the application form. Once the WHC has ensured completion, the application is then independently evaluated by the appropriate Advisory Bodies. Serving as the third step, these Advisory Bodies include the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), which respectively provide the World Heritage Committee with evaluations of the cultural and natural sites nominated; the third Advisory Body is the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), an intergovernmental organization which provides the Committee with expert advice on conservation of cultural sites, as well as on training activities (UNESCO 2009).

Once a site has been nominated and assessed, it is up to the intergovernmental World Heritage Committee to make the final decision on its inscription. Once a year (in the case of Poplar River, the date of submission was October 1, 2004) the Committee meets to decide which sites will be inscribed on the World Heritage List. It can also defer its decision and request further information on sites from the State Parties. Moreover, to be included on the World Heritage List, sites "must be of outstanding universal value" and meet at least one out of ten

selection criteria; these criteria are explained in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* which, besides the text of the Convention, is the main working tool on World Heritage.

Indeed, the Criteria for selection is very quantitative and precise; to be included on the World Heritage List, sites must have unique universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria which are outlined in the *Operational Guidelines* and whose criteria are regularly revised by the Committee to “reflect the evolution of the World Heritage concept itself” (UNESCO 2009). The revised in 2005 *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, set the ten criteria:

	Cultural criteria	Natural criteria
Operational Guidelines 2002	(i) (ii) (iii) (iv) (v) (vi)	(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)
Operational Guidelines 2005	(i) (ii) (iii) (iv) (v) (vi)	(viii) (ix) (vii) (x)

Where, since 1992, significant interactions between people and the natural environment have been recognized as **cultural landscapes**. These selection criteria are defined as the following:

- i. to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- ii. to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- iii. to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
- iv. to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
- v. to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
- vi. to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);
- vii. to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- viii. to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

- ix. to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- x. to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

The protection, management, authenticity and integrity of properties are also important considerations, which is why the Poplar River initiative is so interesting and vital to the preservation of Indigenous heritage in Canada. In fact, the nomination of *asatisiwipe aki* as a World Heritage Site is an international effort, referring to the network of NGO groups throughout the world who have joined their support. At the same time, these efforts are localized as it is Manitobans, environmentalists, conservationists and principally First Nations people of *pimachiowin aki* working to “educate and inspire others”. The language used in the WHS nomination is “cultural catastrophe” – framing it both as an environmental issue, a human as well as an Aboriginal rights matter.

Pimachiowin Aki: The Land that Gives Life

On February 15, 2007, initiated by Poplar River, four First Nations, and the governments of Manitoba and Ontario, have established a non-profit corporation as part of their goal to achieve international recognition of a UNESCO World Heritage Site for lands east of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba and northwestern Ontario. The area covers about 42 000km² and includes the ancestral territories of Poplar River, Little Grand Rapids, Pauingassi and Pikangikum First Nations as well as the Atikaki Provincial Park in Manitoba and the Woodland Caribou Provincial Park in Ontario (see map below).

The Atikaki / Woodland Caribou / First Nations Accord that is now known as Pimachiowin Aki, has in 2004, submitted an application for a World Heritage Site, for the Europe and North America region.

***Russell Lambert:** It took Poplar River 8 years to put some concrete work into this project [...] The area would be protected as an Anishnaabe cultural landscape... to protect the heritage.*

Moreover, calling it a precedent-setting achievement, the Manitoba government is willing to provide CAN \$130 000 to support efforts to gain recognition for the Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Site. Recognizing the combined natural and cultural

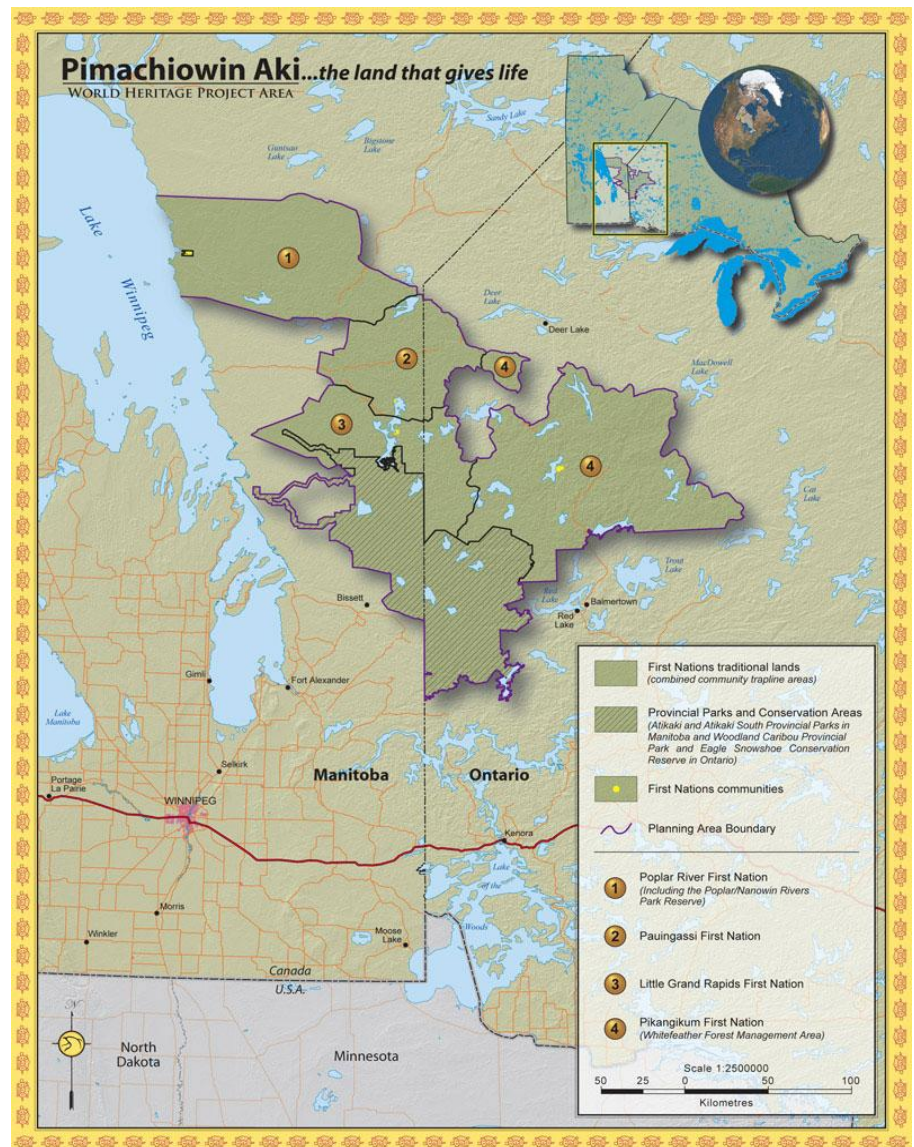


Fig 1: Pimachiowin Aki WHS Area (Source: pimachiowinaki.org)

features of the site, such as the 6000-years of habitation of First Nations people based on archaeological evidence, Pimachiowin Aki Corporation's nominated site would be placed alongside the Pyramids of Giza, the Canadian Rockies and the Taj Mahal as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The nomination process for Pimachiowin Aki was a long and arduous journey that started in 2002 with the *Protected Areas and First Nations Stewardship Accord* which recognized the collective agreement on sustainable economic opportunities for Pikangikum, Poplar River and Little Grand Rapids First Nations communities. Claiming that protection and management of these ancestral lands will be in accordance with *anishnaabek* values and management practices, the site was reviewed and accepted at the *Boreal Zone Workshop of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature* (IUCN) in Russia in 2003 where it is stated in the concluding report that:

This site is remarkable because of the existence of diverse and significant boreal forest values...It fills an important gap by representing the Canadian boreal shield ecozone. This site is also internationally significant because of the planned integration of traditional and western ecological knowledge for land management and protection. The agreement between the First Nations in whose traditional territory this site is located is precedent setting (Pimachiowin Aki, 2008).

It is only in 2004 that the four First Nations formed the Pimachiowin Aki partnership with the two provincial governments and because, as stated earlier, the WHS must be made by a UNESCO State Party, the Government of Canada chose Pimachiowin Aki on its tentative list of 10 sites out of 125 (Pimachiowin Aki, 2008). Becoming a non-profit organization in 2006, the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation hired the University of Manitoba, particularly Gord Jones and Iain Davidson-Hunt of the Natural Resources Institute to be their project manager; this university research however, is to be completed within one year.

The nomination process continues; extensive research, community consultation, mapping and community-based land-use planning needs to be done before a nomination document is completed in 2011. I have included the official summary of Pimachiowin Aki as taken from the UNESCO World Heritage Site website on January 12, 2009. Below is a detailed outline of the nominated site; as well, because I believe that the following description is a form of self-

reflection on the part of Pimachiowin Aki, (whether or not the summary is done by UNESCO is irrelevant) no changes have been made to the description part.

Pimachiowin Aki: Atikaki / Woodland Caribou / Accord First Nations Accord

Poplar River, via *Parks Canada*, submitted their nomination for a World Heritage Site on October 1, 2004 as a mixed category site, meaning, it is a cultural and natural heritage site, requiring protection and preservation of both of these features. The criteria for Pimachiowin Aki are as follows: (v) to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change; (vii) to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance; (ix) to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals; (x) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation. The region that the nomination site encompasses includes the Traditional Resource Areas of Poplar River First Nation, Pauingassi First Nation and Little Grand Rapids First Nation as well as the Atikaki Provincial Park, Woodland Caribou Provincial Park, and the Whitefeather Forest on the Pikangikum First Nation Traditional Resource Area.

Below is the unedited description of the area as summarized by UNESCO.

First Nations in Manitoba and Ontario with the support of both provincial governments have proposed creating an internationally recognized network of protected areas and managed landscapes on their ancestral lands and to seek UNESCO designation of the area as a World Heritage Site. Set in the Canadian Shield, the project is known as Pimachiowin Aki and the project area contains 40,147

km² of boreal forest that includes the First Nations' traditional lands and contiguous protected areas on both sides of the provincial border. The majority of the project area is comprised of the First Nations' Traditional Land Areas where ongoing land use planning will help to determine the boundary of a future World Heritage nomination. The parklands include Atikaki and South Atikaki Provincial Parks in Manitoba and Woodland Caribou Provincial Park, four proposed park additions and the Eagle – Snowshoe Conservation Reserve in Ontario. These parks and protected lands represent an area of natural and wilderness values covering over 8,500 km². The First Nations' traditional lands and provincially designated lands together form part of the continuous coniferous boreal forest that extends across northern Canada.

The forest is dominated by stands of black spruce and jack pine, with a shrub layer of ericaceous shrubs, mosses and lichens. Secondary tree species include aspen, white birch, white spruce and balsam fir, with some species from the prairies and the eastern deciduous regions. Four rivers carve through the area, with associated cliffs, waterfalls and rapids. One of these rivers, the Bloodvein, has been recognized and designated as a Canadian Heritage River. Also found are typical landforms of the shield region, including glacial striae, till deposits and evidence of glacial Lake Aggasiz. The area provides an essential habitat for a segment of the threatened woodland caribou, and also protects habitat for the chestnut lamprey, a species of special concern. Other wildlife representative of the region includes black bears, wolves, lynx and owls, as well as lake trout, pike and walleye. Numerous archeological sites exist, helping to demonstrate that the area has long been of special significance to First Nations.

The site was one of several protected areas in the circumpolar region recommended at the October 2003 Boreal forest workshop held in Russia for consideration as possible World Heritage nominations. This project area is considered part of the Midwestern Canadian Shield ecoregion, which is in turn part of the Canadian Taiga Biogeographical Province (Udvardy classification) (UNESCO 2009).

Therefore, *pimachiowin aki* has many sites of outstanding cultural and natural value - all in need of protection. However, I believe that, although the site is not in immediate danger, it is essential to mention that the territories of this site are vital to the existence of Indigenous nations who are relying on the land for a continued, distinct cultural survival. In order to expand this argument, I believe that Poplar River needs to emphasize the preposition that sacred places are irreplaceable and irreparable. Damages to these sites cannot be repaired or remedied; some may argue that there is even a chance that the spirits which make a place sacred will be disrespected. It is on the basis of a space and place premise that ensures the identity of a people in the neo-liberal, non-

renewable resource-dependent, [re]settler-state of Canada. This fragility of culture, language and a continued way of life must be re-examined in the intricacies of the WHS decision-making bodies for signs that it may be dismissive of indigeneity, of the cultural rights of [Ab]original people in a multicultural country. The negation of the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples by Canada is an apparent example of the endangerment of *pimachiowin aki* and its peoples through continued denial of the collective rights of indigenous peoples to keep and strengthen their own institutions, cultures, traditions and ownership of land by means of self-determination and self-government.

Benefits of Ratification

The process, although providing a great opportunity to see the value and importance of one's heritage, is rather exhaustive and lengthy. The benefits however, are far worth it, and include, foremost, the "[t]he overarching benefit of ratifying the World Heritage Convention of belonging to an international community of appreciation and concern for universally significant properties that embody a world of outstanding examples of cultural diversity and natural wealth" (UNESCO 2009) Due to the fact that the State Parties to the Convention unite to protect and cherish the world's natural and cultural heritage sites, and hence, have expressed a commitment to preserving their legacy for future generations, there is a "prestige" associated with having a site on a World Heritage List that "often serves as a catalyst to raising awareness for heritage preservation" and include access to the World Heritage Fund of about US \$4 million annually (UNESCO 2009). This monetary fund aids in the preservation, identification and promotion of such sites, yet the World Heritage Fund is aimed particularly for developing countries. Emergency assistance for urgent action to repair damage "caused by human-made or natural

disasters” is also available through the fund, and because the World Heritage concept is so well understood that sites on the List are a magnet for international cooperation and may thus receive financial assistance for heritage conservation projects from a variety of sources.

Furthermore, not only does the inscription of a site on the World Heritage List bring an increase in public awareness of the site and of its outstanding values, but it also ensures that

[s]ites inscribed on the World Heritage List also benefit from the elaboration and implementation of a comprehensive management plan that sets out adequate preservation measures and monitoring mechanisms. In support of these, experts offer technical training to the local site management team (Ibid 2009).

Finally, when the site is ratified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization World Heritage Committee, the final step for Canada is to ratify the recognition and all the stipulations therein contained by means of a signature of the head of state. Once this is achieved, Poplar River and the participating communities of *pimachiowin aki* can fulfill their aspirations for sustainable tourism on their traditional territories that will further bring important funds to the site and to the local economy.

AUTUMN :

Determining Indeterminacies



AUTUMN

Dawn. You are overlooking the beach. Likely it's grey, and the drizzle cold. At 6 am you have the community to yourself, and in the quiet, you begin to notice the fragile community of brick inside a reserve of glass.

Fall will be different than spring or summer for a different reason. Last time you did nothing but stand and gawk. Today we are participating. Which means that you the reader, and me, the writer/researcher have to do more than what reader and writers do at this moment in the story. I say this because I think that experience is the single trickiest moment to be Canadian in the 21st century (which is to obviously say nothing for living there). At the same time, Poplar River (or any Aboriginal community) at this time, is an essential trip for a tourist, a fellow Canadian, a policy-maker and so on, to take if they want to *know* Canada and *still* acknowledge it is the year 2009. As visitors, we need to go to these places, at least for two reasons: (1) it is so amazing and different that your sense of place and your history may be challenged, and (2) it is contemporary evidence of the way the country denies its heritage.

When I would mention these premises to individuals who had very limited affiliation with any Aboriginal [isolated] reserves, I would get a dubious scowl and a worried look. *Nobody* wants to go to a reserve; nobody wants to *be* there.

But nobody likes the biased media depiction of their neighbourhoods or communities either. Normally, when asked where to send individuals to discover Canada – where people send their friends – you get the typical tourist attractions of Niagara Falls, any major city or minor “pretty little towns”. “...B-b-but why there?” Like any other northern community or reserve, like any other place not on your common tourist guide, *this is modern Canada*.

“So you’re going to go to, like, an Indian reserve?”

“Well...why not,” I’d reply. “People there actually say hi to you. And they include you with your ‘outsider’ identity”.

When I’d say that, most Poplar River-ians would smile.

It is fall. Hunting season. So many people there still practice some form of hunting that there aren’t any canoes left for me to take along on the trip. This year. But I am promised a good catch and an adventure next year.

3.1 DISCURSIVE CROSSROADS

So here I was in Poplar River, at a discursive crossroad where the same landscapes of *asatisiwipe aki* were being constructed in such dichotomous ways: simultaneously dirty and pristine, at once a socially polluted victim of colonization and a wilderness monument of an absence of industrialization. Steeped in the forces of political economy, power relations, marginality and the notion of post-colonialism, central northern Manitoba is also constructed and perceived as a resource rich hinterland – the “northern” Canada.

Most individuals talk about “my” north or “the Canadian” north when they are away; it is the one that gives them the lifestyle of outdoor recreation. Some speak to me about remote Indian reserves as “an ugly reminder of the colonial legacy”, or the “scars in a lovely landscape laden with drunken Indians”. Hence, mediated through class, education, social standing and race, the “beauty” or the “ugliness” of a remote reserve like Poplar River is contingent on many factors. Tourists and environmentalists who talk about remote communities and the consequent protection of “pristine” forests with enthusiasm are almost entirely southern, non-native, educated professionals who make the choice of going up to Poplar River and other remote communities based on lifestyle, personal interests and environmental morals. And there are capital oriented individuals from cities who are much less enthusiastic about remote reserves, often finding them “ugly” and “dead-ended”. Of course factors such as age, class, gender and race come up as mediating forces in how such places are perceived, experienced and related to – in this case, very few First Nations members of the community of Poplar River spoke of the “nothing-ness” that ought to be found there:

Sophia Rabliauskas: *The land is where my ancestors are.*

Byron Mitchell: *The land is beautiful out here.*

Freddie Bruce: *There is so much to do here with the young people.*

Over the course of time, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with some of the ways the discourse of environmentalism serves to separate people from places. This project therefore is a conscious effort to replace “the environment” with “community development within the environment”, more specifically, sustainable development, as part of the theoretical discourse, which I will discuss in the last section of this dissertation. In so doing, however, a number of thematic currents emerge consistently both from the mainstream populations of the “Indian reserve”, and from the place of narratives of the many Anishnaabek, Cree, Oji-Cree, Saulteaux and non-native community members of Poplar River First Nation with whom I have spoken with in the summer of 2008. These interconnected narratives create a master trope within which constructions and experiences of *asatisiwipe aki* landscapes are ultimately mediated. However else it may be represented, whatever interests are expressed, ultimately, the east side of Lake Winnipeg is almost always represented and seen as a large, scarcely populated, open, free, wild, unused blank space that is beneficial for resource exploitation, industrial development or recreation. While mapping these notions and examining them with a larger discursive network, it becomes clear that this “free space” becomes discursively colonized. These discourses serve to create a frontier space out of the East Side, and in doing so, silence the experiences, histories and places and spaces of the Cree and Anishnaabek First Nations. This highlights the position of power relations in shaping and forming how places and spaces are made, experienced and politicized in central northern Manitoba.

Like Byron Mitchell, and many others with whom I spoke, their relationship with *asatisiwipe* landscapes is deeply rooted in a sense of place and belonging. But for those, like me, who come to Poplar River, with our dogs, and books and university degrees, and environmental

morals, this is a place where we can find balance between our professional and recreational selves. We are educated, and thus able to hold well paying, decision-making, socially powerful jobs. We are physically active, and thus love the range of activities provided by *asatisiwipe* landscapes as fitness and recreational spaces. And we are socially and environmentally conscious, so we can work towards ensuring that these leisure places and spaces remain intact for our pleasure. We are part of the professionally mobile class of Canada's powerful elite. This is precisely why Elijah Harper argues against certain environmental movements of those individuals who, while enjoying comforts of the cities, insist - oftentimes, at the expense of Aboriginal populations - on the preservation of the North "for its own sake" (see page 42).

What is however this strong need in protecting these "rare wonders" of the world, these lungs of North America, for its own sake? The strategy perhaps of the present neo-colonial government and the industries involved in mounting campaigns against the Pimach iowin Aki, is not to justify the park's position as a "wilderness", but rather, to demonstrate its "uselessness" to "civilization". To the four First Nations involved in this World Heritage Site designation, the site is more than a collection of natural and historical curiosities; in fact, it is a life-preserve. Because if the Anishnaabe culture and language disappears from Canada, it also disappears from the world.

Foucault suggests that any social construction of space is "nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred" (Foucault 1986:23). The notion of the sacred is clearly evident in the idea of the "wilderness" concept as it is presented in environmental literature and consciousness. "Wilderness" has a deceptive concreteness at first glance; it is a word that can be a noun yet still act like an adjective. The use of "-ness" designates a quality that "produces a certain mood or feeling in a given individual and, as a consequence, may be assigned by that person to a specific

place” (Nash 1971:1). The northern Manitoba trapper may consider going to Birds Hill Provincial Park, located approximately 15 km from Winnipeg, a visit to the “southern” way of life, while a vacationer from Winnipeg or Toronto would consider it a wilderness adventure indeed. Hence, because of this subjectivity, a universally acceptable definition of “wilderness” is elusive. Contemporary dictionaries define “wilderness” basically as a contrast to cultivated and developed land; images of a forest primeval dominate the mind. For the colonizing Christian however, wilderness has been “a potent symbol applied either to the moral chaos of the unregenerate or to the godly man’s conception of life on earth” (Nash 1971:1). Wilderness of course, also had significance in human terms.

Vast, largely unmodified regions would be very close to absolute wilderness: the North American continent prior to [re]settlement serves as an example [...] The New World was also wilderness at the time of discovery because Europeans considered it such. They recognized that the control and order their civilization imposed on the natural world was assent and that man was an alien presence (Nash 1971:7).

Although most definitions imply man’s hostility to the term, there do exist favourable connotations associated with the *notion* of “wilderness”. Nowadays, the notion conjures images of escaping from civilization, of “pristine” environments; forests yet untouched by development and forestry industries. The definitions of “wilderness” are complex and at times, even contradictory, therefore it is essential to have a clear understanding of some of the concepts included in the notion especially when it becomes necessary to apply the term for conservation, for a specific area, and the people living on, near or part of, it. To insist on absolute “purity” or “pristine-ness” could result in land where humankind has never set foot in; but does a human living in “wilderness” alter the state of wilderness and its characteristics? If man is not a destructive force, it comes down to degree: does the presence of an Aboriginal community disqualify the area? Does their land management “alter” the “naturalness” of the territory? Does

their management of resources through hunting affect the “wildness” of the area? Does their community and economic development and hence the use of resources and land create any significant ecological disturbance that would disentitle the boreal forest of *asatisiwipe aki* of that concept? Given these discrepancies and the tendency for wilderness to be a state of mind, it is tempting to allow the term to just define itself, that is to say, to accept as wilderness those places people call wilderness. However, the dilemma with this accommodation is not so much what wilderness is in itself, but what men *think* it is – and how they take care of it:

It is difficult for people from ‘advanced’ cultures to accept the idea that people from ‘primitive’ cultures might know something scientifically significant, or even know more about a subject within the fields of natural science [...] than do scientists (Lewis 1989 quoted in Berkes 2008:14).

The focus on the belief of this concept of “wilderness” is essential to the researcher, the policy analyst, and especially the community affected by the application of the term on their territory. The conception of a spectrum of conditions on the term makes definition an individual matter, and hence no definition at all; premium on variations of intensity is emphasized rather than absolutes.

Yet, ironically appreciation of wilderness begins in the cities. Almost all policy-makers, biologists and conservation activists live in the cities. They appreciate the nature of it for its own sake; they consider it best left-alone, preserved in its undisturbed state, for the sake of being - for its own being. This is why some environmentalist groups differ, and most often, disengage in the “maintaining of the land” with First Nations; oftentimes their beliefs do not coincide with the cultural, traditional and modern economic practices of Aboriginal peoples.

Ernest C. Bruce: We are also planning to start the fur industry, but the fur industry is not very promising too, because of the fur ban in Europe and south and also we are up against the fur farms that are being built in the U.S. so... - and the environmentalist people, which is good I guess but it really killed the fur industry.

There are still people that do live off the fur; they were trapping this spring; it's not a big income but it does provide some income...

The dilemma here is that the conservationist's notion of wilderness "protection" does not necessarily coincide with the Aboriginal understanding of the concept of conservation. Historically, the non-Aboriginal with a pro-conservation policy has its roots in the Romanticism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries where wild country lost much of its repulsiveness (Nash 1971:44). The change in attitude led to a certain form of Enlightenment where Euro-American people saw (and were perhaps very influenced by Native spirituality here) these marvellous creations as majestic – they must have had a divine source! Immanuel Kant pursued the ideas of the beauty of nature in his Critique of Judgement (1790) where he elaborated on the "aesthetically agreeable" features of the natural world. The malcontents of the modern man and "his works" directly attack the polluted cities, the smell of exhaust and the luxury of concrete in order to be left yearning for "pathless wilds", "soul food" and other testaments of characters that can only be found within pristine, untouched nature. This disenchantment with city life and the appealing novelty of wilderness that surrounds the intellectual framework of conservation advocates today can be traced back to the Don Juan-ian idea of finding joy in the wilderness where Lord Byron has one of his characters state that

There is pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore.
There is society where none intrudes
By the deep sea, and music in its roar:
I love not man less, but nature more (Byron 1817, reprinted in 1999)

The tradition of "loving nature more" is evident in the resource-management and hunting conflicts between Aboriginal people and environmentalists. As recently as December 2008, there was an issue in the *Winnipeg Free Press* where the Inuit of Iqaluit were condemned for their hunting practises of narwhals that were trapped in the ice where, taking advantage of the

situation, the Inuit hunted as much as 700 narwhals to which environmentalists like Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, responded angrily against “ruthless Inuit killers”. “I never let the ‘cultural use’ argument interrupt what I say for animals” continued Michael O’Sullivan of the Humane Society of Canada, “My job is to talk for animals because it looks like no one else will” (WFP 2008:A18).

Perhaps the preservation of wilderness and consequently its appreciation lay in the sad fact that forests and resources are disappearing at an alarming rate in the world. The sadness at the disappearance of bush-land and the regions of the [boreal] forests of Canada stem from personal tastes combined with a sense of a historical and an ecological process. However, oftentimes environmentalists are frustrated by the ways that some First Nations treat the landscapes that they call “our” Canada, our north. For example, logging to boost the economy, or to create space for tourist cottages along the Nanowin River, or even starting up the trapping industry is seen antagonistic to the environmental movement, hence conservationists often worry about long-term economic development that stands to shift their landscapes from leisure or “wilderness” places to industrial spaces – even if Native owned. All the while, the main thrust of environmental efforts for the protection of the East Side is the conservation of this “pristine” wilderness space maintaining that wilderness is central in the discourse of Manitoba’s integrity.

Precisely the notion of wilderness and the construction of Northern Manitoba landscapes as wilderness is heavily classed, deeply political, and steeped in the colonial legacy of Canada. William Jordon (III) writes:

The environmentalism of the past generation has placed a high priority on wilderness preservation, but has only limited success in actually achieving it on an adequate scale. Despite notable successes, it is probably fair to say (and I suspect that few environmentalists would argue the point) that environmentalism has generally failed to provide a plausible basis for the conservation of large natural areas in a crowded and increasingly democratic world. Traditionally,

preserves were hunting parks, the prerogatives of the wealthy and privileged, and something of this exclusivity survives today in our culture of nature. In the political and economic sphere, it survives in an environmentalism that idealizes the remote – and, for most, inaccessible – wilderness areas as the quintessence of nature. And at the personal level, it survives in a culture that provides only an extremely limited repertory of ways for conducting nature – ways, I mean, that engage only a limited range of human interests, talents, and abilities. The result – unintended of course – is a kind of psychological elitism that accommodates those inclined by nature to those experiences of observation and appreciation, but has less to offer the mechanics, nurturers, healers, hunters, gatherers, artists, craftsman, pilots, planners, leasers and ditch-diggers among us (Jordon III 2001:31).

Indeed, “the mechanics, nurturers, healers, hunters, gatherers, artists, craftsman, pilots, planners, leasers and ditch-diggers among us” in addition to First Nations people are often excluded from the environmental dialogue; in fact, the latter are mostly silenced by the monologue of conservation. Although the mainstream perception of environmentalism is oftentimes a monologue of conservation; Poplar River has been reshaping old dichotomies of: “the north must be kept safe and pristine” - like a museum versus its polar opposite, “let’s develop; let’s get in there and mine...” Rather, this community is changing these old notions of conservation by seeking to develop ways to benefit from the land yet also have a long and stable existence.

First Nations members of this community continue to assert their place by this lake by locating themselves in the landscape. Stuart Hall suggests that “marginality has become a powerful space. It is a space of weak power but it is a space of power nonetheless” (Hall 1991:34). Precisely, by placing themselves along the *ziibiwan* (rivers) First Nations members of the community are asserting and resisting totalizing power. As much as colonialism, the Government of Canada and Manitoba Hydro have tried to push them out, they remain firmly located in this place of significance.

3.2 A RECONFIGURATION OF TOTALIZING POWER

“Of a place” located in space, is a modality of incarnation; a condition of pleasure and happiness. Belonging to a space speaks of identification of self and of consciousness through community membership. Here, in Poplar River, “of a place” is to describe the images of a distinct culture within the global context. The attribution of a World Heritage Site nomination for a colonially-dominated anti-colonial Indigenous community is a modern strategy for a continual existence of this First Nation. Just like a painting or a poem, we find images in this international aspiration that are reproduced – with different means and tools, certain objects, desires and conceptions of self, of a place and a space - certain pre-existing realities that survive on traditional *asatisiwipe aki*.

We know that in the Freudian sense, the psyche functions by creation and by appropriation of images more than it does by the comprehension of concepts. Many community members of Poplar River have appropriated the beauty of the land as theirs, but still many have their own understanding of the political, legal, economical or environmental concepts associated with the places and spaces that they are stewards of (Ernest C. Bruce 2008). The notion of sovereignty that some individuals in the community have spoken of, has left me concerned about the possibilities of reconciliation of anti-colonial Aboriginal epistemologies and the dominant conservative policy makers who fail to understand the Indigenous discourse. This discourse can be found in the *depth* of the subject more so than at the *surface* of the text. The sense always looks for the origin; either in the metaphysical sense of the word, or in the metaphysics of the surface like an imminent form. In *asatisiwipe*, for some there is *sense*, for others, there is mere *structure*. The sense and depth of the discourse is found in oral [hi]stories of the people of this First Nation. Something lives only as long as the last person who remembers it. The storytellers,

the Elders of Aboriginal communities have come to trust memory over history; memory like fire, is radiant and immutable. While history serves only those who seek to control it, those who would douse the flame of memory in order to put out the dangerous fire of truth, oral [hi]stories have taught the people to beware such men, for they are dangerous and unwise - their false history of Canada's past is written in the blood of those who remember it and of those who seek the truth. Storytellers remember the past; it is their responsibility to the future, and it is captured in the nuances of Aboriginal languages. Because most decision-making individuals in Poplar River speak their native language as well as English, they remember the stories that made their ancestors the people they were. It was interesting for me to hear individuals speak their native language in their everyday functions; Emile Mason, who works at the band office, fluently transmitted an *anishnaabe* message over his walkie-talkie, as he drove me around the community on my first day there. Sadly, most kids under the age of twenty no longer speak their native language; a misfortune they consciously acknowledge because they cannot understand the stories. Through great [hi]stories, the bodies of the storytellers "become houses of ancient sound" (McLeod 2007:100). Great stories, writes McLeod,

challenge the status quo. They challenge the social space around us, and the way society structures the world. Great stories urge us to rethink that social space. Great storytellers are embodiments of the social climate around them. Through storytelling, they are able to question the world around us. They are able to question the injustices that are often inflicted upon them. Storytelling is a subversive act that causes people to question the society around them. Storytellers hold the core of a counter memory, and offer another political possibility (McLeod 2007:100).

Through stories, the sense is found in the depth of the subject; his or her great [hi]stories maintain the Indigenous discourse which challenges the surface of the dominant text. The [hi]story teller is the fire keeper of Indigenous epistemologies that enable an Indigenous understanding of the political, legal, economical or environmental concepts associated with the

places and spaces that they inhabit. This discourse re-positions the dominating structure of Canada and the application of the *Parks Canada* Act on Poplar River's traditional territory.

Although ratification of the World Heritage Site by UNESCO is a great achievement in itself, the application and implementation of the World Heritage Convention by Parks Canada in an Aboriginal community is a challenge on its own – especially in regards to First Nations self-determination over their ancestral territory. At present, the *Asatisiwipi Aki Lands Management Plan* is intended to be protected by UNESCO because the community believes that UN recognition not only protects their ancestral territories, but it also protects their culture (Noel Bruce 2008). This belief in foreign “protection” therefore, needs to be examined more in-depth as there are still numerous elements of UN World Heritage Site policy that are debatable.

To begin with, in order to be included in the World Heritage List, natural and cultural sites have to meet the requirements that they are of “outstanding universal value”, as stipulated in the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, Articles 1 and 2:

For the purpose of this Convention, the following shall be considered as “cultural heritage”:

monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; [...]

sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.

For the purpose of this Convention, the following shall be considered as “natural heritage”:

natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations which are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view;

geological and physiographical formations and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or

conservation

natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty (UNESCO WHC 1972:3).

The definitions of the two features are so specific that they lack any room for variety because, obviously taken from the Eurocentric perspective, the Convention separated the two, rather than seeing them as possibly one entity. The question is therefore, what is the place of culture in the environment, and what is the place of nature in the cultural scope? Seen through an Indigenous perspective, the answer perhaps lies in [hi]stories and creation stories. A scholar like Bordo however, writes that vague landscape space, articulating itself systematically in terms of the absence, is the modern Euro-Canadian wilderness which continues to shape both our imaginative and our most mundane attitudes about human dwelling and the environment (1992: 97). He continues, writing that

the denial to establish that absence as the site for the image, erased aboriginal presence as a matter of course without the slightest consideration that such an act implied, as it typically does, a denial of existence itself (Bordo 1992:106).

The separation of culture from the environment is Eurocentrically embedded in the fact that culture, in order to be considered as such, must use the environment to separate itself from the “wilderness”. The accomplishments of “civilizations” continue to lie in the belief that the virtue of development of natural resources persists. To be considered a cultural *and* a natural heritage site is demanding because the notion of human-nature symbiosis is hard to understand in the contemporary context. The expectation to separate people from nature persists; accomplishments of a culture are often diminished and the existence of humans presupposes the frailty of natural surroundings – especially since some practices of land management like fire, hunting or selective logging to enlarge favourable flora for example, threaten the “naturalness” of nature as seen in the Eurocentric perspective. Sophia Rabliauskas herself admitted that to meet

the two criteria is a really difficult task. Since Canada does not at the present have any mixed sites, if Poplar River achieves its goal, it will truly be a precedent-setting achievement in this country, placing this First Nations community alongside mixed World Heritage Sites like the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park in South Africa, the Tongariro National Park in New Zealand, and the Kakadu National Park in Australia whose “cave paintings, rock carvings and archaeological sites record the skills and way of life of the region’s inhabitants, from the hunter-gatherers of prehistoric times to the Aboriginal people still living there” (UNESCO 2009). It is interesting to note that most of the mixed sites are sites of natural heritage yet with the traces of a heritage of an extinct culture.

As well, is the notion of an “outstanding universal value” taken from the scientific point of view, the World Heritage Site Committee’s understanding or is it a name given by the people occupying that land? The “cultural heritage” description has only sites and monuments (and buildings which I omitted for the purpose of this paper); both of these are considered to be “works” of humans, thereby ignoring the inherent value of the land for Indigenous people’s cultural survival. In this case, it is the spaces as discussed in the previous chapter that add this extra dimension of significance for Aboriginal cultural and traditional survival; and the failure to understand this identifiable element into the existing framework of “heritage” by a Judeo-Christian based organization creates a chasm of mischaracterizations that can in effect, be *indigenously* culturally or spiritually dismissive. Poplar River does indeed have archeological sites dating back to 6000 years; but there are also many other sites that are spaces of culture like the Thunderbird Eggs located in the northern region of *asatisiwipe aki*. Physically, these appear to be big boulders to those who are visitors; to those who “know the land”, these “simple

boulders” represent an important aspect in the spiritual/creation history of the people who live there. Moreover, the *World Heritage Operational Guidelines* (1972) state that

it is not intended to provide for the protection of all properties of great interest, importance or value, but only for a select list of the most outstanding of these from an international viewpoint.

Seeing that the international viewpoint is looking to find something “most outstanding”, one can certainly question the mechanism for this merit recognition, especially since the WHS relies on a majority vote where 21 to 40 countries are presently included. Each country that submits an application for designation has something at stake as each State party finds value in their sites, and finding the “aesthetic” point of view mentioned in Articles 1 and 2, is exceedingly subjective. Outstanding ecological and cultural features are difficult to measure; are the “most outstanding” cultural characteristics derived from the notion of imposed integral-ness to a “distinctive culture” as found in *R v. VanderPeet* that identify cultural significances from Western/European terms (see Chapter 1)? And if these “traditionally Aboriginal” sites are to be protected, does that mean that they are to be unused for the sake of preservation and conservation?

Another limit that may impeach the desired self-determination victory of Poplar River is the Article 5 and 5(4) of the Operational Guidelines which state that:

[t]o ensure that effective and active measures are taken for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory, each State Party to this Convention shall endeavor, *in so far as possible, and as appropriate* for each country [...] to take the appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage (WHC Art. 5 & 5(4) emphasis added).

This predicament can be furthered by the fact that Canada has its own *Application of the World Heritage Convention* (2004) which states in Section 1(3) of the report that:

the Canadian system of federal, provincial or territorial, and municipal governments shapes the way that heritage is protected in Canada [...] The World Heritage Sites which are administered by Parks Canada are subject to legal requirements under the *Parks Canada Agency Act* for comprehensive management planning on a rolling five year cycle [...] The Canadian Wildlife Service...is responsible for protection and management of migratory birds and nationally important wildlife habitat, endangered species, research on nationally important wildlife issues, control of international trade in endangered species, and international treaties (Parks Canada 2004).

Consequently, in regards to “autonomy”, what does it really mean for the *Asatisiwipe Aki Lands Management Plan* if the stipulations in that plan can be over-ridden by *Parks Canada*? What autonomy will the community have in managing their resources if a site is administered and managed by the *Canadian Wildlife Service [CWS]*? In *Kiumajut (Talking Back)*, Kulchyski and Tester (2006) describe the historical “unfriendliness” of *CWS* in terms of Aboriginal people and the management of resources. The authors describe how flawed scientific practices led policymakers to develop laws intended to limit the activities of hunters in the Arctic and how, as a result, this type of resource management became a justification for the regulation of Inuit life. Hence, resource management practices by the *Canadian Wildlife Service*, can in effect, be an [in]direct regulation or limitation of Poplar River’s hunting and traditional practices, such as the burning of fires to produce blueberry fields, the hunting of “endangered species” that the community believes is not in danger at all, or collecting renewable resources like medicine plants for economic development or cultural use that are on the *CWS*’ flora protection list. The Application clearly states that the *CWS* is responsible for protection and management of resources, how then, will this First Nation reconcile their stewardship/management practices with the regulations outlined by this totalizing establishment?

It is also interesting to note that Article 11 could also be seen as a possible extension of colonialism in that it is an external body circumscribing the possibilities, the potential

developments and any potential resource exploitation of the Poplar River First Nation ancestral territory:

[t]he inclusion of a property in the World Heritage List requires the consent of the State concerned. The inclusion of a property situated in a territory, sovereignty or jurisdiction over which is claimed by more than one State shall in no way prejudice the rights of the parties to the dispute (WHC Art 11(3)).

As well as Article 13 where,

[t]he Committee shall decide on the action to be taken with regard to requests, determine where appropriate, the nature and extent of its assistance, and authorize the conclusion, on its behalf, of the necessary arrangements with the government concerned (WHC Art 13(3)).

Canada has refused to sign the UN Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples, hence one can question what could stop Canada from ratifying and respecting the World Heritage Site protocols, especially since it is safeguarded by WHC Articles 11(3) and 13(3)? And, for the United Nations the “necessary arrangements” with “the government concerned” denote the Government of Canada; yet to a self-governing Aboriginal nation like Poplar River, this could allude to this community’s nation-to-nation agreement with UNESCO. Here, again, I must voice my concerns over the understanding of this arrangement by the First Nation. Although this remote community’s self-determination aspirations are being met with the aid of this international organization, the self-government of this community – especially resource management, could be ignored. Some of the individuals with whom I spoke, did not know much about UNESCO nor the World Heritage Site’s potential limitations; however, in all instances, the interviewees viewed the Lands Management Plan as the protocol to be followed because it is designed *by* their community *for* their community.

For a comparative policy analysis and how Parks Canada could affect the sociopolitical independence and resource management of a First Nations territory, I looked into the *Tuktut*

Nogait National Park of Canada Management Plan and the *Ivvavik National Park of Canada Management Plan*; although these parks are not World Heritage Sites, they are both under the jurisdiction of Parks Canada and the Minister of the Environment, which also administers the UNESCO designated territories. Due to the fact that most of Canada's WHS are either cultural or natural heritage sites rather than mixed sites, I chose not to focus on them. I will later discuss some predicaments of collaborative resource management of the Kluane National Park and Reserve, which is a WHS managed in co-operation with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations.

In section 2.2 of the *Tuktut Nogait National Park of Canada Management Plan*, Inuvialuit Harvesting Rights are explained as follows:

[t]he exercise of Inuvialuit harvesting rights is subject to the Inuvialuit Final Agreement [IFA] and Section 11 of the *Tuktut Nogait Agreement* [where]

11.1 (A) the Inuvialuit have the right to allocate any of the harvest to non-Inuvialuit, the Inuvialuit agree not to do so for game inside the Park except to other Native people as part of any bilateral agreement pursuant to terms of the IFA or other comprehensive land claims;

11.1 (B) where the Inuvialuit have to right to sell edible parts from the game, the Inuvialuit agree not to do so for game harvested inside the Park except for purposes of trade among Inuvialuit and other native people as provided in the IFA or other comprehensive land claims; and

11.1 (C) when, pursuant to the due process contained in the IFA, a quota is required for management purposes, the ICG [Inuvialuit Game Council] and the PHTC [Paulatuk Hunters and Trappers Committee] agree to implement it effectively (Parks Canada 2007:3-4).

The above stipulations state that even though the Inuvialuit harvesting rights are subject to the IFA, the National Park Agreement limits certain rights of Aboriginal people by proscribing where they shall hunt and to whom the meat should go. In addition, when a quota is required for conservation or management purposes, the parties signatory to the *Tuktut Nogait Agreement* agree to stop their harvesting. Aside from the problematic of obtaining a "quota" which I will discuss in the second half of this chapter, exclusion from a park reserve - oftentimes based on a

seldom-understood agreement on the part of the Aboriginal population - represents more than just a threat to the community's political sovereignty and economic well-being, but it also undermines the social relations and practices that sustain the very identity and the indigenous way of being in the global context (Nadasdy 2003:59). Moreover, although "[t]his management plan affirms the right of Inuvialuit to exercise all other harvesting rights in Tuktut Nogait" (Tuktut Nogait Plan Sec. 2(2), 2007), Canada may nonetheless "pass legislation consistent with these undertakings and shall do so where necessary for the purposes of implementation and enforcement" (Parks Canada Art. 11(3)). There are many other limits in the harvesting rights of the Inuvialuit that show the regime of the State in this seemingly collaborative "agreement", my issue with any such Parks Reserve agreement is that, in the event of any inconsistency or conflict, which agreement provides paramountcy?

II.

Perhaps the story of Poplar River's self-determination under World Heritage Committee, a foreign Eurocentric power, is a form of reconfiguration of colonial power, that is to say, through its "redistribution and redeployment in relation to new targets, new forms of knowledge, and new technologies, and especially its production of new effects of order and subjectivity" (Scott 1999:23). Aside from the totalizing foundation of politics, Poplar River's traditional knowledge/western science collaboration aspirations pose yet another series of problems. Sophia Rabliauskas confirmed that: "we have to be really careful with this collaboration..." The contemporary form of self-determination that Asatisiwipe First Nation is aiming to achieve with a Parks Canada involvement in the management of an area, needs to be carried out carefully; in fact, a reformulation of the question of colonialism needs to be examined when the notion of

“protection” and “collaboration” over resource management is exercised in an Aboriginal community. In this section therefore, I would like to inquire into the Foucaultian notion of modernity, of what appears to be a problem in the discussion about protection in the post-colonial context – a problem which bureaucratizes Aboriginal political self-determination as a totalizing form of power on the one hand, (Kulchyski & Tester 2007; Nadasdy 2003), and on the other, those transformations effected by modern power where, as a consequence, “old, pre-modern possibilities are not only no longer conceptually approachable except in the languages of the modern, but are now no longer available as practical historical options” (Scott 1999:23).

In effect, western European knowledge and scientific mode of reasoning have been, and still maintain their position, at the center of our theoretical knowledges in the seemingly post-colonial world. These Eurocentric scientific knowledges, by mere existence, privilege the cultural values, and ways of knowing, with pervasive and totalizing presumptions that marginalize and reject the Other’s anti-colonial forms of resistance by postulating what Blaut (1993:8) calls Eurocentric diffusionism whose really crucial part

is not a matter of attitudes in the sense of values and prejudices, but rather a matter of science, and scholarship, and informed and expert opinion. To be precise, Eurocentrism includes a set of beliefs that are statements about empirical reality, statements educated and usually unprejudiced Europeans accept as true, as propositions supported by ‘the facts’.

For Blaut, science is a Eurocentric set of beliefs that is “supported by the facts” and thus, lack of physical, concrete evidence supporting a theory does not constitute science and is therefore considered falsifiable and untrustworthy. This issue is not merely a historical argument raised at a conceptual level to deal with a geographical space; science in the case of a traditionally-managed resource in an Aboriginal community serves as an apparatus of dominant power-effects in a post-colonial [re]settler-state environment. The tool of “protection” of Poplar River by a

European organization forces me to critique the unforeseen effects of European hegemony in the construction of knowledges about land-management as well as the tools and techniques used in the implementation of WHS preservation. I am not presupposing that Poplar River and the *Lands Management* Team should interrupt their conceptually traditional forms of territory management and reposition their Aboriginal epistemological formulations to the colonial habit of deploying science as the universal rhetoric of all knowledge extraction. I am however emphasizing that it is essential for the community to comprehend that the position of science exists as the dominant language of conservationists and serves as “proof” for management and “quota” attainment hence Poplar River may find it difficult and arduous to reconcile or work with both knowledges simultaneously.

In Hunters and Bureaucrats (2003:94-95) Nadasdy differentiates scientific knowledge from knowledge-as-experience where the subsequent conflicts between these two and, at times, very opposing views and data, create a break in the fundamental nature of the responsibilities and obligations surrounding resource and land management. Because “knowledge” itself is loaded with cultural baggage, it has the effect of imposing on First Nations a set of foreign assumptions about the nature of the world and how humans can relate to the world and *know* it, therefore these assumptions render some forms of knowledge relevant, others not. Biologists need to express their knowledge through quantitative formulations: geographical positioning, figures of mortality, populations, birth rates, and so on. Indeed, they “more often relate to animals in the abstract, as numbers to be manipulated, than as intelligent social beings” (Nadasdy 2003:109). Most conservationists insist on special attention paid to the creation of protected areas “for their own sake”, essentially separating humans from nature. However, scientists live outside of a remote reserve and if called in, they focus on the study of non-humans; hence Western

consciousness about biodiversity management does not necessarily coincide with “community conservation” (ie human [cultural] conservation) which, for all First Nations is of foremost importance.

One of the most essential dissimilarities of the work of resource-management biologists and Aboriginal traditional knowledge is the fact that First Nations people “often perceive scientific wildlife research to be an inappropriate way of seeking to know animals” (Nadasdy 2003:109). This ill-ease with scientific research is based on “disrespect” through imposed monitoring techniques of placing transmitting collars on animals, or ear tags that pierce the body as well as through the imposition of their own hectic schedules, technological approaches and research agendas upon the animals. Due to the fact that most First Nations find “some of the most basic assumptions underlying scientific wildlife research offensive” continues Nadasdy (111), consequently “these differences lead many [Aboriginal people] to view scientific wildlife not only as inappropriate but also as inaccurate”.

Wildlife biologists obtain their knowledge and experience from scientific documents and other secondary sources; some rarely, if at all, go out on to the land and relate with the animals through direct experience, and “one cannot really learn anything important from reading books or from flying over [animals] once in a year from a helicopter” (Ibid 111). Most scientists look for change which would have occasioned a transformation in populations, birth or death rates in the “wild”, which they regard as a state of permanence. They look for this state by virtue of the dynamic rule of succession where one thing can only come into existence by virtue of another thing, and so where the present is a function of the past. So looking out from their helicopter or computer screen or a printout of the bear’s temperature or habitat range in the last few days, they are able to discern what the origin of a change or abnormality might have been by means of a

scientific or “factual” perception of an objective happening. Rather than getting to the Schopenhauerian perception-reality philosophical argument of the eye being the first object of human experience, that is to say, what I have before me is what I am seeing; I find the Kantian argument of knowledge-perception is essential in differentiating scientific wildlife research to *anishnaabe* experimental knowledge and world views. This is important because once something for the rule of wildlife permanence is established from a scientific viewpoint, this permanence is “fact”, hence any supposed change in state, for example, the altered behaviour of a bear with a neck collar, is neglected or disregarded. Many examples of this “disrespectful” behaviour are cited in Hunters and Bureaucrats (2003: 109-112) such as injuries of mountain goats when running in fear from helicopters that scientists use to do their population counts; the catch-and-release fishing that hurts the “spirit” of the fish; the collection of feces that affects the mammals’ discernment of other species. Therefore, because the techniques of scientists used on wildlife not only appear, but indeed are, invasive, there is a conflict of data collection between the two interested parties.

On the other hand, Aboriginal people rely on a holistic “science of ecology”, known as traditional ecological knowledge (TEK or TK). Indeed, the Pimachiowin Aki has generated international interest because it proposes an innovative approach to land management that combines traditional *anishnaabe* and western scientific knowledge. The term traditional ecological knowledge refers to traditional cultural continuity that is transmitted in social attitudes, relationships to surrounding milieu and, from my understanding, is based on principles, beliefs and conventions that derive from historical experiences. Although the term came to widespread use only in the 1980s, the practice of traditional ecological knowledge however, is as

old as ancient hunter-gatherer cultures; in fact, Berkes (2008:7) defines traditional ecological knowledge as:

a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with the environment.

Native people know that the natural milieu is firmly rooted in the reality of an accumulation of concrete personal experiences as opposed to book-learning because although most Aboriginal people cannot claim to understand the process of eutrophication, of the dynamics of gradient distribution, of the carbon footprint, they can certainly observe the penetration of sunlight that increases soil decomposition, the fact that poplar trees are more tolerant of the sun and create environments for the pines that will grow in their shade; they can observe the relationship between the frequency, distribution, growth and decay, and the effects all these components have. "In addition to biological information on life cycles and distributions, scientists have also noted [...] ecological knowledge of predation, competition, and mutualistic interactions among [...] species" (Berkes 2008:38-39). Indeed, there is a continuum which starts with direct sensory observations and proceeds to enormously complex, direct methods of knowledge-as-experience. And to efficiently use and manage a resource is to know what recovery mechanisms exist to make it sustainable - and who can do it best than the people permanently living in that biosphere.

People who are dependent on local resources for their livelihoods are often able to assess the health of the environment and the integrity of the ecosystems better than any evaluator from the outside. The *anishnaabek* of *pimachiowin aki* maintain a record of what the land and resources have provided for generations; they are the first to see any changes. Knowledge of the local land and the processes that sustain a community life are things that can be learned from books and especially from life on the land. As a result, Aboriginal people's time tested, in-depth

local knowledge can be useful in monitoring local ecosystems, provide key information for monitoring environmental change and provide environmental assessments that impact proposed developments (Berkes, 2008:43). Knowing the physical land, any songs that go with the spaces, the names of places that make up the collective landscape - the “connection” with the land, is what establishes legitimacy of the claim that “we know the land”. Stories and legends are part of culture and Indigenous knowledge - intellectual traditions - because they signify meaning. Such meaning and values are rooted in the land and are closely related to the sense of place of which I spoke in the first chapter. Hence, ecological knowledge and cultural activities are symbolically embedded in the places and spaces of the *anishnaabek* landscape. The landscape, writes Brosius (2001) “is more than simply a reservoir of detailed ecological knowledge... it is also a repository for the memory of past events and thus a vast mnemonic representation of social relationship and of society” (Brosius 2001, quoted in Berkes 2008:6). Poplar River First Nations members live in a remote community, surrounded by an archaic boreal forest hence, their understanding of their space and place is evident by their presence there and the experience that comes with living. The existence of these peoples at that location has helped them create theories for the management of the land that surrounds them and the resources that come with it. These theories aim at an understanding of the phenomena of the natural world, that is, of the mechanisms behind the regularities (and the irregularities) of the microscopic properties to the macroscopic world. Although most Aboriginal people and scientists disagree on the “observable” where the former sees “red”, “hard” and “hot” – properties directly perceived by the senses, and the latter perceives these things with a quantitative magnitude that can be measured through procedures of a spectrometer, a sclerometer or and a thermometer, one can ascertain that these two observables are different; yet both are undeniably true.

Because in many traditional cultures nature is often imbued with sacredness, ecological knowledge can be seen as sacred ecology, although not necessarily in a religious sense, as discussed in my interview with Ken Douglas. Indeed, even for contemporary hunters in Poplar River, some long acculturated and converted to Christianity, hunting continues nevertheless to be a spiritual activity in which you have to have “respect” for the animal. Byron Mitchell, the young preacher for example, does not hunt at all “because he feels bad about killing animals”, but who nonetheless understands the concept of “respect” (Byron Mitchell interview, 2008). The practice of respect not only contradicts scientific methods, but is also an example of tradition that recognizes difference between Native and non-Native hunters, and which, indirectly, helps conserve biodiversity. As a people dependent on local provisions of resources, Natives have a direct stake in conserving it. The forest sustains their life and promises them food when resources, shipment availability and the economy are scarce. Hunting can be seen as a continuation of or a relying on cultural memory: at the time of treaty signing, poverty was rampant, resources were scarce; consequently, being a “burden” to the government nowadays is not an option – independence by means of a continuum of cultural practices to secure a livelihood is however.

***Ernest C. Bruce:** See in south, we have resources. We don't want to be a burden to the Government. We don't want to rely on the South. [...] We will no longer have to rely on the First Nation having to go to the government and ask for funding, we can and we will generate our own revenues based on the land [that] will be developed and established because no society can exist without a land base that's the bottom line: if you have no land base you would cease to exist as people. [...] If we can establish land base build off map then that's when things will start happening because we don't like relying on the federal government or the provincial government because Poplar River is too smart for the hand outs we can take care of ourselves.*

Because TK is woven around people and not the other way around; it sustains and enhances social and community development. TK applied in hunting and trapping also means that people

rely on different resources for different uses and do not necessarily concentrate on a few species; this multi-species, multi resource use found in many Aboriginal hunting and trapping practices is what sustains a healthy eco-system like *asatisiwipe aki*. The use of traditional ecological knowledge therefore, not only helps ecosystem biodiversity, but also supports multiple use of a resource in order to make a livelihood that sustains the distinctive cultural ideology of the group, as well as the very important social relationships within the group needed to maintain social identity and provides a source of values (Berkes 2008:31-32).

However, oftentimes tensions over land and resources parallel tensions over authority and the legitimacy of knowledge (Nadasdy 2003; Berkes 2008). Scientists tend to dismiss knowledges that do not fit their own understandings; likewise, Aboriginal people often have a hard time trusting anyone that does not “know the land”. The topic of the philosophy and the nature of science, theories and observation is really a constellation of intertwined political and administrative problems because the idea of knowledge-integration not only contains implicit assumptions about the nature of “knowledge”, but

it also takes for granted existing power relations between Aboriginal peoples and the state by assuming that traditional knowledge is simply a new form of data to be incorporated into existing management bureaucracies and acted upon by scientists and resource managers (Nadasdy 2003:25)

Although the feasibility of applying TEK to contemporary resource management problems was recognized by the World Commission on Environment and Development, where, in their report they state that: “tribal and indigenous peoples’... lifestyles can offer modern societies many lessons in the management of resources in complex forest, mountain and dryland ecosystems” (WCED 1987, quoted in Berkes 2008:3), nevertheless Indigenous knowledge is seen as a challenge to Western science and hence becomes a source of conflict – especially when two differentiating political agendas about the notion of conservation are no longer merely

philosophical. Much of the controversy regarding resource management capabilities of traditional peoples stems from the fact that these societies have been impacted by social and economic changes that have resulted in loss of knowledge and altered practices, which, despite detailed knowledge of plants and animals nevertheless contradict the conservation movement through resource-use impacts (Berkes 2008:39-40). And although the lawyers, biologists and policy-makers understand the fact that Aboriginal people, as community living in the area of research, have their own distinct understanding of the management of land and its resources, they can rarely ever come to a full understanding of those experiences. What's more, they can never, willingly or not, fully act upon those understandings. Julie Cruickshank (1998:50) elaborates, stating that "indigenous knowledge continues to be presented as an object for science rather than as a system of knowledge that could inform science".

Through the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation, Poplar River developed a collaborative system that would support rather than displace the local initiative of "protecting" the land. This approach of traditional /positivist-reductionist paradigm has also been attempted in the Kluane National Park and Reserve, which is a WHS managed in co-operation with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and classified under a natural criteria for its "vast, unbroken ecological unit that covers 97,000 km² and is untouched but for a historic Aboriginal presence" (Parks Canada 2005). In this case, conflict over [traditional] management practices did not influence policy to eliminate the totalizing power of the State over Aboriginal people. In fact, the Kluane people seldom received what they wanted or expected out of the agreement to manage the Park Reserve; rather, the government's wildlife management policy became a "series of sinister machinations by a monolithic state" (Nadasdy 2003:58). In Poplar River, local, national and international agents serve to inform and shape the formation of this conservation

environmentalism; this of course, is shaped by various political agendas. Taylor and Buttel (1992:406) write:

In science, certain courses of action are facilitated over others, not just in the use or misuse of science, but in its very formulation – the problems chosen, categories used, relationships investigated, and confirming evidence required. Politics – in the sense of social action pursued or promoted – are not merely stimulated by scientific findings; politics are woven into science at its “upstream” end.

The authors present an argument suggesting that science not only acts as the key informing agent in the construction of environmental problems but that by its very formulation, science also serves to facilitate certain types of concerns and subsequent actions. Indeed, as most First Nations communities can attest, never far from scientific formulation is political influence.

This is where the problems of conservation arise: if scientists would like to preserve a particular animal, would that preservation contradict with cultural or spiritual use of the Poplar River Anishnaabe? Or, if future generations of Poplar River decide to set up a small-scale lumber factory to enhance their economy, will the United Nations or Parks Canada have the authority to restrict their choice? I would like to discuss the notion of wilderness protection in the next chapter, however, only with time, it can be conclusively determined whether an international organization (applied by the colonial State of Canada) can, *de facto*, support Aboriginal self-determination once a World Heritage Site - and the protocols set up by the organization - is designated.

Other than differentiating agendas, the dark side of co-management is the potential for the co-optation of indigenous knowledge and coercing people to work within Western-style governance that is foreign to their thinking (Stevenson 2006 quoted in Berkes 2008:41; Nadasdy 2003). Oftentimes

[g]overnments often require their bureaucrats to include TEK in policy and legislation without proper consultation with Aboriginal peoples, in unrealistic

timeframes, and without appropriate financial support. Governments also require TEK to be written down or documented before it is considered useful. Documented TEK is then integrated into processes and frameworks that remain rooted in Western science, and much of the transformative potential of indigenous knowledge is assimilated in the process. (Simpson 2005, quoted in Berkes 2008:16).

As a result, even when accommodating Aboriginal knowledge into policy and resource-management, writes Nadasdy (2003:25),

Aboriginal peoples are forced to express themselves in ways that conform to the institutions and practices of state management rather than to their own beliefs, values, and practices. And since it is scientists and resource managers, rather than Aboriginal hunters and trappers, who are expected to use this new integrated knowledge, the project of knowledge-integration actually serves to concentrate power in administrative centers rather than in the hands of Aboriginal peoples.

With this supposition, it can further be argued that political rationalities of the modern colonial state in which the Aboriginal community finds itself in a bureaucratic condition produce the effects of rule. In effect, it is not an issue of less Europe that is conceived, but a differently reconfigured one. Hence, although Poplar River deploys mechanisms of implementation, elaboration and protection that are in a sense traditional, it is because these “progressive” modernities derived from Western scientific knowledge that offer the community an accountable standing in the eyes of the State. That is why Sophia Raubliaskas affirmed that to force the government to take them seriously, they had to come up with a coherent plan – their *Asatisiwipe Lands Management Plan*. Therefore,

[t]he targets of colonial power (the point or points of power’s application; the object or objects it aims at; and the means and instrumentalities it deploys in search of these targets, points and objects) and the field of its operation (the zone that it actively constructs for its functionality) [have changed] not only the rules of the political game but the political game itself– not only did the relation of forces between the colonizer and colonized change, but so did terrain of the political struggle itself (Scott 1999:25).

To conclude therefore, UNESCO protection of ancestral territories of the signatory First Nations appears like colonial emancipation from capricious tyrants of historical Canada.

However, certain aspects of the World Heritage Convention and the subsequent application of the convention by Canada renders me somewhat apprehensive of the points of operation. It appears that the first step by Parks Canada includes the fundamental ignorance of Aboriginal land-based knowledge and the consequent uprooting of the conditions and skills that were understood to produce these resource knowledges; secondly, the systemic and systematic replacement of this non-Western cognition of resource management by an induced adoption of new mechanisms based on “clear, rational, objective scholarship” called science. Blaut (1993:9) effectively argues that we can “banish all the value meanings of this word, all the prejudices, and we still have Eurocentrism as a set of empirical beliefs”.

Using the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for some in the community is regarded as the absence of power and fulfilment of freedom; the troubling ideals of this Eurocentric international organization emerge in the form of political rationality that combines simultaneously two Foucaultian contradictory modalities of power in governmentality: one, the totalizing and centralizing, the other individualizing and normalizing. While the former emphasizes on the Aboriginal-State relations as evident through colonial policies and especially the totalizing regimes of resource/game management of *Parks Canada*, the latter on the other hand, refers to the individualizing and normalizing of the Aboriginal neo-colonial bureaucracies evident in their resource stewardship practices. The totalizing aspect of governmentality functions to centralize or assimilate Aboriginal resource practices to the colonial European mechanisms of measuring all non-human life forms in a scientific manner. Protecting nature “for its own sake” is *a priori* to State wildlife administration. The normalization of Aboriginal practices refers to the abdication of neo-colonial political practices forced upon Canada’s First Nation by the Indian Act and other totalizing policies to consume these populations in the

dominant way of life. “Foreign” aid - whether *Parks Canada* or the World Heritage Site Applications - is not, and cannot be, divorced from “foreign” policies. An examination of the specificity of the terrain allows for the understanding of the specificity of the homologous apparatus of this European-based international power and the responses to which the Aboriginal community of Poplar River constructs its own subversive responses through the very same international power.

Nonetheless, the modern colonial state of Canada whose structures, projects, and desires of Euro-Canadians generated changing ways of impacting the non-Western world, changing ways of imposing and maintaining rule over the colonized, also led to a changing of the terrains within which to respond. The present structure of Native-Canadian relations positions the government on top; as a result, the community is using an international organization to assist them in re-positioning the powers of the Canadian State. The community is using the WHS as a vehicle to overpass the Canadian government; the collaboration of the four communities and the two provinces recognizes the sovereign right of Aboriginal peoples to create the conditions to protect their cultures by any available means of expression. Yet, although the United Nations does not have any authority to establish and enforce rules over Canada, the organization reaffirms the obligations that the country has towards Aboriginal peoples and represents a permanent and watchful eye of this country’s honour.

WINTER :

A Geography of Permanences



WINTER

Today snow is falling gently out of the sky again. Already most things are covered in a thick cold fluff of white.

One thing you will notice about winter season is that less people drive for a night out back and forth the community. Maybe it is because of the snow.

You are past the school now, and head in the direction of the Elder's lodge – today's finish line. Behind the band office, almost out of view, lays the Elder's lodge which is the kind of lodge you think it is. But also nothing like you think. You can come in, and have a seat; grab a cup of tea. No one will mind; and someone might sit with you to talk, to play a word game, chess; or to tease you with a riddle. Or you may just want to sit in silence and look out the common room view, past the large-screen television set, and over the Nanowin River at the eagles flying in the distant sky.

Arriving on the shore of the river moments later, I paused to look things over. The first impression is one of utmost peace and tranquility. Where I swam daily during the summer, is now frozen solid. The ice was inviting in appearance, the surface covered in snow, the sun-dappled snow covered forest surrounded its shores. Some distance beyond, the endless chain of pines and poplar trees climb into the winter sky; other than for the few fleecy little clouds floating just above the horizon over the lake, the sky was clear. Everything seemed to be in order, at peace, in this little corner of paradise on earth.

4.1 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Elders of Poplar River First Nation have stated that “the Creator has given us life, he has given us land to live from. Without that land our people will die” (Poplar River First Nation [PRFN] 2008). When Poplar River nominated the 861 718 ha of this natural beauty for protection in 1998, the protection of the land meant survival of the people living off of that land. *Pimachiowin aki* means “the land that gives life”, and that can be understood in many ways: the land that gives life to the community and the land that delivers benefits to the whole continent of North America. Over the course of the last few chapters, I have tried to portray how the land of *asatisiwipe aki* provides a foundation for narratives of spaces and places to the people who live in the boreal forest. The landscapes are essential to the survival of a people; but when estimating the worth in Euro-Canadian terms, the boreal forest on the east side of Lake Winnipeg is worth approximately CDN \$120-130 million a year (IISD 2008:2). The monetary value estimate was conducted by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and, although portraying the transformative process of indigenous epistemologies over land to a Western economic mode of thinking, the members of Pimachiowin Aki Corporation understood the importance of translating the value of the land as they see it, into a language understood by most Canadians in order to protect their territories and bolster the province’s pitch for the World Heritage Site.

The IISD performed an eco-system assessment by measuring benefits provided by natural landscapes, including an economic analysis of how much money the boreal forest pumps into Manitoba’s economy through fishing, camping, trapping and from the value of the rivers that power northern Hydro dams. The purpose of the study “was to provide an estimate of the

economic value of the services provided by Pimachiowin Aki's natural environments to people, for both residents and non-residents" (IISD 2008:2). The overall ecosystem's largest components come from fishing (\$35M/year), then water treatment (\$32M/year) and finally from water supply for hydro-power that came to be \$20M/year. However, in addition to the actual services used directly, the natural assets such as carbon sources from forest and peat lands have an estimated value of \$2.7-\$17.5 billion. This is not counting the forest-generated oxygen that deserves the name of "lungs of North America" and the methane sources that could propagate alternative energy sources. In terms of human expenditures, the ecosystem service benefits was estimated by IISD to be at least twenty-eight times greater than the estimated public expenditures like parks and forest fire management which was approximated to be \$4.48 million. The report numbers are conservative values but are certainly necessary to change the significance and integrity of the natural environments on the East Side to local, national and international stakeholders interested in the region.

After spending the summer in the community of Poplar River, seeing what people are doing and saying about their life, their future and the management of their land, I was able to determine that they seem fairly united in their resolve and enthusiasm for protecting the land, that is to say, maintain it and shield it from destructive, permanent development. A lot of individuals appreciated the beauty and health of the boreal forest that surrounds them, but many of them were also concerned about the social problems that derive from high unemployment, the drinking and the drugs; from the vandalism and from the lack of "something to do" that persists in Poplar River and any other place facing similar difficulties. Nonetheless, everyone whom I talked to would like to change the social aspect of the community without altering the surrounding bush by large-

scale developments. To quote Ronald Wright (2006:151), “[a] small village on a good land beside a river is a good idea; but when the village grows into a city and paves over the good land, it becomes a bad idea”. The community of Poplar River has read and learned the lessons of the past and of other Aboriginal communities that had developed their land for “steady income”. They have learned that the health of land and water – and of the forests that are the keepers of clean water – can be the only lasting basis for their, and any First Nations community’s, survival and success. When reflecting on the “developed” land, on the destruction of natural resources, and especially on the slow revival of fertility and its eventual promise, Poplar River knows that their land needs to be protected *because* it ensures their sustenance as humans and as Aboriginal people.

Consequently, the World Heritage Site nomination has a different meaning altogether for the Poplar River *anishnaabek*; the goal is to sustain the forest but to nonetheless develop a means of economic survival. First Nations development nowadays is synonymous with community economic development, however, a rudimentary understanding of the concept and its implementation needs to be analyzed further in order to be useful. As early as 1955, the United Nations publication defined community development as “a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest reliance upon the community’s initiative” (UN quoted in Ponting 1988:140). The community-initiative tradition continues in Poplar River through the established WHS Working Group which is composed of four neighbouring communities and includes youth, elders and outside professionals – all collaborating to better their communities with this form of “life project”.

In In the Way of Development (2004), Mario Blaser discusses the concept of “life projects” of Indigenous peoples. These life projects are not only initiatives taken against non-renewable resource exploitation, they are in a sense, projects of resource conservation as well as *community conservation* where protection of resources directly affects the preservation of a people. Life projects are often pursued as an uphill battle where the dominant values of development and evolutionary progress not only block their way but also continually subordinate them. The emphasis of these projects however, has led “development” to dramatically shift attention “from socio-economic deprivation to legal rights and governance claims, which had the effect of making indigenous issues into questions of national importance” (Blaser 2004:8). This re-shifting of governance has created political pluralities which have allowed Indigenous cultures to differently respond to, accommodate or resist specific agencies of colonial totality. Poplar River’s political goals are to create a self-governing political structure:

Ernest C. Bruce: *[For] the First Nation to be successful and reach an agreement for managing the land and the resources within our consulting party - which is basically Treaty One to Five but we will pursue the Aboriginal claim title, and I assure them that it will take time but that was the only way that Poplar River will have full ownership. [...] Once we can get us a land base really of how we will grow and develop, that’s what I have planned for the community. We’re also pursuing economic development in the area of investments. We are one-seventh owners of the South Beach Casino. [...] But if we are able to successfully pursue the Aboriginal claim and have more say in our land and resources – that’s if we evolve further in deep political structure of the First Nation. [...] We have developed the band custom election code that promotes the accountability and a more responsible and more self-governing body of [how] we select them, how long their terms are, if there is a problem tell us of how we can intervene; and if we have to remove and replace a leader then there is also a process for that. It makes it more accountable and it ensures that the people will be able to have a more accountable, responsible, more transparent leadership.*

Hence, in order to have more control over land and its resources – over its life projects, this community understands the necessity of an accountable and responsible leadership; changing the

neo-colonial form of governance will enable the breaking down of colonial economic domination. Thus, to strengthen their resistance against the development agendas promoted by State and markets, this First Nation incorporated the concept of “sustainable development” into their environmental concerns. The trope of “endangered earth, endangered people” reconfigured perceptions of development institutions through the understanding that “indigenous peoples are given central focus *because of* rather than *in spite of* their cultural differences” (Ellen & Harris 2000, quoted in Blaser 2004:10, emphasis in the original). The notion of life projects and the developmental plans of Indigenous people is stated in the United Nation’s *Agenda 21*, chapter 26:

In view of the interrelationship between the natural environment and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic, and physical well-being of indigenous people, national and international efforts to implement environmentally sound and sustainable development should recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of Indigenous people and their communities (UNCED 1992 quoted in Blaser 2004:10).

These life projects can be seen as projects used to preserve the life of the people, hence they encompass the notion of sustainable community economic development, which the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) describes as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (IISD 2009). In this understanding, the term encompasses two concepts: (1) the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and (2) the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs (Ibid., 2009). The institute sees sustainable economic development as a [w]holistic system that interconnects space and time as well as all entities across the globe. This understanding can be correlated with the Aboriginal belief of “the next Seven Generations”, where great-grandparents have the power to affect the

quality of the ecosystem of their offspring, who in turn, will affect the quality of life of their great- grandchildren. As a result, the decisions of today – whether economically, politically or sustainably driven, will endorse policies of future generations.

Poplar River First Nation is indeed pursuing the goal of sustainable development yet they are nonetheless endorsing economic development of their remote community. The World Heritage Site initiative is a first and foremost First Nation-driven life project. The effect of having adopted a community-based natural resource management initiative like *Asatisiwiipe Lands Management Plan* and the nomination of a World Heritage Site, is that of local people instigating and autonomously assessing their level of involvement as well as their attitude towards “development” in their community. Poplar River, allowing their traditional territories to be incorporated into an internationally recognized park, permits self-determination; management practices will cater to the interest of the local people. Although many governments and companies tend to claim consulting with Aboriginal peoples, the promotion of policies and programmes for Indigenous peoples is often accomplished within the framework of externally driven developmental projects and processes - this is no longer the case: Poplar River is a self-determining nation who decides the economic projects they will pursue:

Ernest C. Bruce: *Economically, I think that the First Nation has the potential to... No, any First Nation has the potential for economic development benefits. [...] We are located on the East Side, and the best business for us is tied now to our Lands Management plan - eco-tourism [...] because we want to preserve the land the way it is. We are also planning to start the fur industry [...] and we also promote fishing; commercial fishing. And for the future of Poplar River, my vision for the First Nation to benefit economically and politically; to obtain either half ownership or full ownership of its traditional territory which is about 800 000 ha and our long term plan is to secure the future for our children and their children - we are looking at the next seven generations.*

Community representation on World Heritage Site management advisory committees should be high so as to enable resource-control benefits over a protected area, thus any extraction of park resources, revenue sharing (such as tourist fees) can be determined by the community.

However, to counteract any negative consequences of tourism and of *Parks Canada* applications of the World Heritage Site protocols as mentioned in the previous chapter, a number of approaches must be formulated to eliminate any conflict of biological diversity and hence its protection, and traditional resource-use. For example, in the case of elk, the demand by hunters is greater than the available elk hunting opportunities, thus hunting licences are available only through a limited entry draw system to residents of Manitoba (Manitoba 2009). Moreover, a comprehensive management strategy for all provincial flora and fauna has been developed by *Manitoba Conservation*; how then, will conservation efforts of plants and animals in the province work with subsistence hunting and medicinal gathering of Manitoba's First Nations? Can First Nations continue to use some plants as medicines, even if the plant is part of biodiversity conservation or on the Species under protection list? The examination of these issues is not only practical, but an ethical necessity, and it is crucial for the community to recognize the possible consequences of these issues and how they might affect their Aboriginal or treaty rights. Here, I am merely pointing to threads of academic research that need to be pulled further.

Economic development in this First Nation community is composed of autonomous decision-making processes where the notion of "development" can be used to achieve a successful life project and can also be seen as an escape of colonial history and administration.

However, the phenomenon means different things to different people. In fact, of all the people I have spoken to in Poplar River, each of them had a very different perception of the meaning of

“development” and consequently, how it should be carried out. The people I have spoken with in a formal interview as well as during casual conversations at the band office, while waiting for a plane, or for the coffee to be brewed, had varying interpretations of the term. The answer to the question “what does development mean to you?”, provided me with, first of all, a deep thought, and then with the ironically, all too common answer: “I don’t know....that is a hard question”. This seemingly contradistinctive response only confirmed the fact that people are actually thinking of the meaning of the word in their own personal understanding, rather than blurting out responses that have been passed down to them from outside sources.

Kenneth Douglas, an Elder with whom I spoke to at the Elder’s Lodge, was one of the first individuals to provide me with this indeterminate-yet-determinate answer, followed by his own definition: “I don’t know [what development is]. I don’t know. ...it’s a way...to keep an eye on it, to protect it. So nobody could go there and spoil our land” (Ken Douglas interview, 2008). Others had a different interpretation of the term:

***Ernest C. Bruce:** Development [of the land] means...as we’ve said over the past ten years or so - gaining benefits economically without damaging the environment – which is our traditional territory. And we’ve been reminded by the elders too, they said, ‘pursue it that way, to protect it, but be careful not to paint yourselves into a corner and lock the future so that the next generations might not be able to gain from it’. ...So, we have to be careful not to paint ourselves into a corner so that we won’t jeopardize the future of next generations, otherwise they are going to look back and say, ‘how come you didn’t think about us?’ That is why we have to look at the next seven generations.*

***Chief Russell Lambert:** Development means various things to different people. Development for me means strengthening of what we have as an Aboriginal group. Development economically means, it could mean to have colleges, and I think that Poplar River teaming with the provincial government and we were to have, if we could have a park, we could come to some kind of agreement. We could have tourism, building cabins or cottages on our land but there would have to be some kind of ...we would have to be stringent on the type of agreement that would be in place.*

Hence, each person has a different interpretation of the term “development”, be it economic or political, yet in every case, the *significance* of development includes reinforcing and as much as possible, bettering the quality of life in the community. This significance comes from perhaps, the understanding that the cohesiveness of the community is solitarily responsible for its own heritage, its past, its present and future, its spaces and places; and the fact that only Poplar River can assume the duty of recipient/proprietor of its own heritage and landscapes in a dynamic manner.

Economic Development Possibilities For *asatisiwipe aki*

As stewards of the land, Poplar River First Nation is re-working ways to achieve economic development but maintain a sustainable environment nonetheless. The community is reconfiguring the notions of protection and “wilderness conservation” by utilizing two dichotomous notions: development and preservation. The most fundamental of Poplar River’s economic development is eco-tourism. Eco-tourism activities include building management capacities and providing alternative livelihoods to promote conservation; building strategic partnerships to support eco-tourism as a conservation tool at World Heritage Sites and; aiding UNESCO, state parties, and the local populations to develop or maintain sustainability. The World Heritage Centre actually works with the tourism industry to support these initiatives mainly through: (1) training local community members (2), aiding communities around the sites to market their products and use the WHS as a lever for local economic social and cultural development, and (3) using tourism generated funds to supplement site conservation and protection costs, among numerous others (UNESCO 2008). For the purpose of this dissertation, I

researched internet sites and spoke to travel agencies about the subject; and can conclude that there are numerous programs and companies that promote WHS tourism, apparently because people now more than ever, are as interested in natural sites as they are in cultural heritage sites, and they want to visit these areas through environmentally-friendly means. In fact, heritage tourism is apparently the most rapidly growing international sector as more people are exploring sustainable options than they are abiding by luxury five-star accommodations. Overall, the eco-tourism industry is seen to have many success stories; it acts to preserve sites for future generations and often contributes to sustainable development while also generating money into a community. Basically, the goal of eco-tourism is to benefit tourism's industry yet minimize its impacts.

The eco-tourism industry in Poplar River could therefore, be part of a global network of places trying to make tourism a viable tool for conservation, poverty alleviation, protection of culture and bio-diversity, sustainable development and educational, as well as enjoyable, travel. The idea of eco-tourism could represents a viable option for Poplar River as more and more people nowadays focus specifically on the environment and "adventure" services; tourism industries too, are capitalizing on the notion of small ecological footprints. Therefore, rather than industrial development, vision goals for Poplar River could include eco-resort development and eco-tourism industry expansion such as placing cottages and cabins along rivers as well as providing "adventure" activities like hunting and trapping.

Moreover, as part of the establishment, there could be a possibility of enhancing the restaurant business, featuring local food. The production of arts and crafts could be augmented to generate funds for individual artists and those wishing to express their artisanal skillfulness.

Stores carrying products related to hunting, fishing, lake sports and winter sports could be erected as part of local sustainable initiatives. These would provide a relaxing and unique environment coupled with an educational cultural exchange that would significantly differ in the global market. The social benefits to be derived from an “interpretative center” to the visiting public can be of considerable benefit in the maintenance of Pimachiowin Aki Corp. or the Asatishwipi/Nanowin Rivers Park Reserve. A large segment of the visiting public tends to feel little emotional relationship to the landscape; they tend to view the site as an unrelated collection of trees, rivers, swamps and animals. By introducing the “missing” variable - Aboriginal people- into the landscape, an individual has a focal point of immediate interest from which to interpret the spaces in the present environment. Crossing out the humanly voided space, would rearticulate the modern Euro-Canadian systematic conception of landscape space that still resonates through the modern attitudes about human dwelling and the wilderness (Bordo 1992:103). Consequently, these unidentified places will become identifiable spaces where the erasure of colonial nominalism and Canadian “wilderness” can create a symbolic space, a territory occupied and possessed by an uninterrupted Aboriginal presence.

Eco-tourism however, also has its negatives. With millions of tourists visiting the 851 World Heritage Sites each year, tourism has become an important cross cutting issue and management concern at most sites. Oftentimes lack of trained personnel and local communities as well as policy makers, renders this tourism ineffective and even destructive. The impacts caused unintentionally or intentionally, by visitors, when multiplied by [possibly] hundreds each year, present a serious threat to the integrity and sustainability of the landscape. Fragile vegetation can be trampled, soils eroded, water and air polluted, wildlife disturbed, waste accumulated, and

cultural sites/resources diminished. In the process, the numerous visitors seeking the “cabin lifestyle” with a beer or two in a dry community can lead to threat of exploitation of the local population – in other words, sex tourism. Therefore to be successful, the territory of Asatisiwipe First Nation has to be protected and conservatively used, and a framework must be designated by Poplar River to identify and protect what is most important about the community - its landscapes and the people - to avoid surpassing the cultural and natural carrying capacity of *asatisiwipe aki*.

Nonetheless, if brought to fruition, eco-tourism and other financial benefits from a park can aid in the sustainable economic development of the community. For example, the park can offer job opportunities to local people as tourist guides and cultural teachers/interpreters; a market for traditional crafts, artwork, and food can be instituted. All these can positively affect local household income; money generated from diversified employment opportunities will *stay* in the community and can contribute to income equality as well. As a result, income generation will enable household members to attend school or to pursue higher education, Western or non-Western. Furthermore, summer home development would contribute significantly to the local economy because the year-round residents will fill jobs created by this industry. In order to service local demand for employees, specific training could be offered through extended education at Winnipeg colleges, universities or similar institutions. Consequently, community development may improve the infrastructure of the community and facilities such as a medical clinic or a hospital to serve the region may be established. Perhaps, an interpretative centre could be created to celebrate the vibrant past and a bright, self-determining future of the Poplar River community members so that residents of the First Nation as well as visitors could profit from the

knowledge. All this may sound ideal however, as Sophia Rabliauskas pointed out, “you have to remain positive. You have to have hope”.

Expansion of the fishing and trapping industry is yet another method of developing the economy. The traditional industry of the Poplar River region has for a long time revolved around fishing and fish processing; it is, at present, the biggest economy. The fish industry and the trapping industry are initiatives that the community would like to see enhanced, but because Lake Winnipeg is ailing at an alarming rate, there are fears about the longevity of this practice. Trapping also has its setbacks, mainly because not many individuals in the South look favourably at furs, and I quote Ernest C. Bruce once again to emphasize the disagreements about the “ethics” of [Native] fur industries:

***Ernest C. Bruce:** We are [...] planning to start the fur industry, but the fur industry is not very promising too, because of the fur ban in Europe and South and also we are up against the fur farms that are being built in the U.S. - and the environmentalist people, which is good I guess but it really killed the fur industry; they are still people that do live off the fur; they were trapping this spring. It's not a big income but it does provide some income.*

Nonetheless, local economies could be supported once individuals are educated about their necessity and function in sustainable, local and Aboriginal industries.

Finally, another way of yielding revenue from local resources could be the harvesting of non-timber products from the boreal forest including wild rice harvesting. As part of their economic growth, these options are not at all cost-prohibitive and support the traditional, healthy lifestyle that has been altered by colonialism. Non-timber forest products include a wide variety of resources: maple sap, mushrooms, herbs, pine cones, honey, berries, and all other botanical products that exclude wood. All these renewable resources can be used as food, medicine, ornaments, health and personal care; basket weaving, canoes, spices and any decorative use of

these products can be commercially traded in Manitoba, Canada or even internationally. According to Natural Resources Canada, traditional non-timber forest products industries have the potential to contribute \$1 billion to the Canadian economy and, if exported, edible mushrooms alone could contribute as much as \$115 million to the Canadian economy (NRC, 2007).

Wild rice harvesting too, can be part of the developing economy. *Bagwaji-manoomin* or wild rice (*Zizania palustris* L.), is an annual aquatic grass that is widespread across southern Canada and northern United States and for centuries has represented an important staple food of Aboriginal peoples inhabiting the forested region between the west shores of Lake Superior and the Prairies (Lavergne 2006:59). Qualifying the product as a “natural food” due to lack of pesticide or agrochemical use, Poplar River could certainly exploit 100% organic wild rice as a means of economic development. A market niche for lake wild rice will quickly establish, mainly because of its popularity within the marketplace among health enthusiasts who appreciate its nutritive value in quality protein and fibre. The “aura” of northern Manitoba’s wilderness and the organic appeal of wild rice would also help promote eco-tourism through the ancestral connection between the staple food and the *anishnaabek*. Due to the distribution of wild rice in *asatisiwipi aki*, the harvesting niche for this form of resource development has the possibility to generate a large annual income along with an inclusion of locals into employment as seasonal help for harvesting, equipment and vehicles. In fact, wild rice production is “an industry ideal for the North. It suit[s] the lifestyles of northerners in the sense that anyone could become involved and post-secondary education [is] not a requisite” (Lavergne 2006: 62). Hence, what communities might need in order to have a successful and profitable wild rice industry, is an awareness building to strengthen their knowledge of the economic promise and the harvesting process of

wild rice production in the north. With the development of a local and “home-grown” food industry in Manitoba - as well as the world looking to eat healthier and more sustainably, there would be, I presume, a high demand for organic wild rice; a wild food that will offer a variety of health benefits as well as economic aggrandizement for an Aboriginal remote community could bring in financial success.

As a result, harvesting of natural and renewable products that originate from the boreal forest and the swampy regions of the East Side, could prove to be an advantageous additional source of income for not only Poplar River, but all the other First Nations involved in Pimachiowin Aki Corp because individuals could be “properly trained with the information and skills necessary to enter and maintain the non-timber forest product industry while living in their own communities” (Buck (2004) quoted in Lavergne 2006:67). The training and skills necessary for this economy could be taught by Elders; traditional knowledge could be used as a conceptual framework to guide the students and potential employees. By reconstructing for the student his/her cultural [traditions] and history and immemorial presence on the land, the learner can begin to view his or her distinct identity, recognizing the surrounding landscapes as a dynamic system in which generations have lived and died, the modern form of which is only the result of processes which began since time immemorial.

Although economic and financial success is certainly an important aspect of the community’s goal for development, the question now is, what does success mean to the members of this First Nation? Can success and happiness be measured only in economic terms? I recall one childhood story of a man who seeks help from a mentor. The mentor asks him what he wants more than anything else in the world, to which the man says, “well, I’d like to have a million

dollars”. Then the mentor asks, “what would you do tomorrow if you had a million dollars today?” After thinking for a few moments, the man then says, “I guess I would go fishing.” The mentor then responds, “You don’t need a million dollars to go fishing. Just go.” Fishing, hunting swimming, flower picking, spending time with close ones or taking a walk does not require much money. These are the pleasures of life that do not have a price.

Epicurus argues that in order to be successful in the pursuit of pleasure, one needs to have a thorough understanding of what true happiness means. In the case of Epicurus, happiness was simple and inexpensive as it was founded upon pleasures of all the senses: the taste of a good meal, the sight of aesthetic forms, laughter, a walk, and an exchange of friendly conversation. Simplicity as such, I believe, is found in time. Whereas money and financial success will give the means for satisfaction of desires, it will not provide desires. If financial worth is defined by our deeds; money is merely a vessel that can sometimes lead us to happiness, but it is not happiness itself. Are not poverty/success standards set by a group of people who think luxury is the only mode of happiness?

I believe that the happiness or success of this community lies in the confidence and security that comes from, to paraphrase Brody (2006:213) “the belief that there is food, that there always has been food, and all things being equal, that there always will be food that people can get for themselves”. Brody continues:

No one should be surprised when the Indians of today insist that their ways of looking at the world and harvesting its resources will outlive any other. It is not nostalgia, or sentimentality, when the Indians affirm their own identity and special interests; they are not paying their respects to an idealized or fossilized past. They do not say that they have not changed, but – a little paradoxically – they insist, sometimes with remarkable conviction, that their way of changing is what will guarantee survival (Brody 2004, 86).

The security of food, shelter as well as the hard work and pleasures that come out of land-based opportunities which the community can define for itself, all constitute the idea of happiness. The notion of self-actualization as a community by means of autonomy and the ability to determine own choices pertaining to any possible developmental plans can be considered “a good life” - *pimatiziwin* - by the community. Being self-determining as a community would enable Poplar River to renew leadership, to re-formulate self-governance structures according to own values, and to reconceptualise possible economic opportunities. Community economic development would alleviate the social problems caused by unemployment, alcohol and drugs as well as violence. Essentially, this First Nation wants to take care of its own social and economic development, its land and its resources as well as its accountability towards own people. Self-determination over community economic development, whose spirit and understanding on the part of Poplar River, can be seen as an extended source of an inextinguishable right to a continuity of self-preservation.

Individuals are empowered to think and to come together to make decisions concerning them, and how they relate to the world; the freedom of self-determination cannot be confiscated by institutional structures. Maintaining control of resource management and any development within the community falls under the category of Aboriginal rights. Aboriginal people have never surrendered their right to self-government; extinguishment is not a plausible concept simply because it is an *inherent* right. The nomination of a UNESCO World Heritage Site therefore, is a sustainable community development effort of *asatisiwipe aki anishnaabe* as well as their process of de-colonization through a revival of sociopolitical independence and land stewardship as an Aboriginal *sui generis* right.

In order to maintain a healthy community, Poplar River understands that control over own future is perhaps the basic necessity for achieving *pimatiziwin*, the [w]holistic concept of health and balance which would restore certain aspects of wellbeing that have been lost through the persistence of this community's share of social problems. The concept of health held by the *anishnaabe* is referred to as *pimatiziwin*, which involves "understanding that health is viewed in a holistic way involving physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual interconnections, which some have portrayed as the four quadrants of a medicine wheel" (Kinev 2006:1). In other words, *pimatiziwin* refers to the symmetry of the medicine wheel, that to be healthy means to lead a good life, a life connected – in other words, a balanced life. Through *pimatiziwin*, Poplar River First Nation is acting on their inherent right of self-determination, the right to have a healthy, balanced life, including control of own destiny. Therefore, financial success derived from economic development in *asatisiwipe aki* will indeed provide means with which happiness from proper healthcare, employment opportunities and the pursuit of individual pleasures can be attained; however, I also believe that economic remuneration will not change the essential substantiality – the attempt at achieving *pimatiziwin* - of this First Nation.

4.2 RESISTANCE AND THE ASSERTION OF PLACE

*“For a colonized people the most essential value,
because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land:
the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity”
- Frantz Fanon (1963:44).*

In order to protect their sacred spaces and places, Aboriginal people refer to different means of resistance. The continued onslaught of Indigenous sacred spaces turns many communities desperate for action, oftentimes, that action being “illegal” protests, blockades, long and frustrating legal and administrative processes – all ways of reasserting their place in the Canadian landscape. Although Poplar River’s World Heritage Site initiative is a preventative strike against the non-renewable resource development sector, I also believe that rejecting the common notion of “development” as understood by many Canadians to be crucial to the politics of modernization, is a form of resistance to the totalizing machination of the State. Kulchyski & Tester (2007:11-12) elaborate on the State as a totalizing force, operating alongside the accumulation of capital and the expansion of the commodity form to establish a new social totality in an Aboriginal community. The attempts of the State to first of all, dispossess the Indigenous population of their lands, and secondly, to control and manage all [wild]life - hunters included - so as to place all “life” under the State’s totalizing power. Arising from the denial to recognize Native economic systems, limited access to resources, including game regulations on “Crown land” and nature preserves, ensued the effectuation of what Foucault calls, biopower, over Native populations. Because, for Foucault, death is power’s limit, it is necessary then, for the sovereign to ensure a continuum of power through biopolitics of the population, which permits the organization of power over life, known as biopower. This notion refers to “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the

control of populations” (Foucault 1990:140) and it is this form of biological discipline, existing through legislation, wildlife regulation and conservation management, that serves as a mechanism through which the Canadian State exerts power over Indigenous stewardship practices.

Although the State policies of wildlife management have historically functioned as biopower in the manner that the “ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life” (Foucault 1990:138). If modern power continues to be distinctive from its point of application, then the body of the sovereign subject and the conditions in which that body is to live and define its life, must have limited agency. Therefore, after many years of colonialism, authority over hunters, resource regulations, game laws and denial of Aboriginal title, the question is, does Poplar River have limited - or any - agency within this perpetual legacy of totalizing power exerted through the State?

To understand the convoluted forms of responses and reactions that the colonized have constructed in North America is a difficult task because it requires one to purge oneself of a majority of one’s acquired empirical knowledge as well as historical and culturally-based epistemologies so that Aboriginal epistemologies (found in language and traditions) can be interpreted sufficiently enough to the equivalent Euro-Canadian notion of “agency”. Embedded in this term is the idea that acts of autonomy amongst the intricacies of colonial practices can only become visible through Eurocentric languages and symbolisms. In this context therefore, indigineity or indigineism has been used to refer to the responses of Indigenous peoples to colonial policies and the dynamics of colonialism. Through dominant language, the concept of indigineity is used to assert [ab]original heritage and rights over lands in the Americas. Although this term is rather recent, the notion of Indigenous resistance is part of historical socio-political aspirations. For example, by identifying as “Indigenist”, Cherokee scholar Ward Churchill aims

to coordinate and unify the dispersed anti-colonial politics of Indigenous peoples. He argues in I am Indigenist (2003:275) that his political motivation and justification “draws upon the traditions - the bodies of knowledge and corresponding codes of value - evolved over many thousands of years by [N]ative peoples the world over”. Churchill sees similarly inspired Indigenous activists throughout history because they share this non-Eurocentrically defined “spirit of resistance”. The guiding premise here is that imperialism and colonialism are – and have been since the beginning, fundamentally at odds with the truest characteristics of Indigenous life. Poplar River First Nation is an Indigenous community which continues to rely on hunting and fishing for subsistence (there were no canoes left in the community for me to use in the fall as everyone went hunting). Thus by refusing to accept the progressive, industrial mode of existence, more specifically, the *Canadian identity*, the community is - by mere refusal - confirming their *anishnaabek indigeneity*. The perpetuation of this identity is in itself a laceration of the totality of this colonial State, hence this community is relegating the framework of decolonization; theirs is a preventative strike, against violence, against the continued abdication of their community and their indigeneity. It is the notion of *indigeneity* that, I believe, is the underlying form of Aboriginal peoples process of decolonization because to be inspired by Indigenous cultural traditions, is to resist deracinating and totalizing forces.

The concepts of agency and resistance therefore, must be reconceptualised in the context of *pimachiowin aki*. This First Nation’s resistance includes retention of traditions along with an adaptation of certain European methods of economic development. The people desired continuity with the past, which they combined with specific benefits from Euro-Canadian knowledge and technology. Any claims that Aboriginal people have lost their culture because their culture has *changed* is incorrect as they exclude not only the possibility of growth, but also,

since they manifest themselves through people, these claims perpetuate the denial that cultures are alive. Utilizing an international organization like the United Nations, Asatisiwipe First Nation is freeing itself from the totalizing forces of the Canadian State and colonial history; they are resisting and talking back. Although the international organization is funded largely by European States and exhibits Eurocentric regulations, the use of this non-Canadian organization is a form of challenge to the totalizing and hegemonic powers of the Canadian State over Aboriginal peoples. In fact, the community is using the UNESCO designation as a vehicle to limit Canada's powers over its future; Asatisiwipe First Nation is using globally oriented structures to support their local needs.

Recognizing the fact that the United Nations WHS is merely a tool of the community's local aspirations is to recognize the community's self-determination. That same tool, if not instigated by Aboriginal peoples, can be used against them. This is clearly evident in the case of the *Dänojà Zho* in Dawson City, Yukon where the territorial government attempted to designate a large portion of Dawson City and its outskirts as a World Heritage Site, but some of the land encompassed in this site, were those of the *Dänojà Zho*. Here, the government instigated protection from the international organization of the territory's natural and heritage sites, sites that would exclude the *Dänojà Zho* from resources and the city's Gold Rush heritage. This poignant moment of counter-discursive assertion of Gold Rush-inspired street and image scapes insists on a re-negotiation and a re-conceptualization of the notions of UNESCO's designation of World "Heritage" Sites and the place of First Nation peoples and voices. However, because the WHS on *asatisiwipe aki* and *pimachiowin aki* was instigated by Aboriginal peoples themselves, the community is subverting systemic powers to maintain their *Anishnaabek* heritage; the First Nation is illustrating that power does not necessarily lie in institutions. Through this mechanism,

their voices become heard; their history is acknowledged. As Amílcar Cabral said with deep irony, when colonies gain their independence, they re-enter history; by claiming a right to their traditional territory, by challenging the doctrine of discovery, the *asatisiwipe aki* community is re-entering its proper place in [Canadian] history.

Gramsci elaborates on the actuality of institutional powers as well as on the ways people make sense of their world; hegemony is both a political and cultural process. Part of the reason, he concluded, was a serious underestimation of culture and civil society (Gramsci 1971:229-239). His idea of “wars of position” as part of the revolutionary project was to create a counterhegemonic culture; if this culture was to have real power, it must come out of the experiences and consciousness of people. The World Heritage Site initiative comes from Aboriginal people themselves; it is out of their experiences and their epistemologies, that they can create this precedent-setting project. This community has reformulated the progressive potentialities of their traditions, turning to an international organization to fashion a culture of resistance. By redefining resistance, approaching it less as a stand against the State and more as means with which to actualize their own political structures, Poplar River is simultaneously opposing the colonial world, yet using colonial technologies to destroy that system. Within the social structures of the system of global capitalism there are resistant elements like social networking and systems of communication at a global scale, resulting in interdependence, public support and the formation of cooperative consciousness. As such, these experiences lived by Poplar River, are at the same time, a form of subversion of colonial tools *and* a resistance to totalization. Depending upon how they are understood and mobilized, these structures can be utilized to avoid Fanon’s vision of violence and can lead to the fundamental re-conceptualization of decolonization. In the context of *asatisiwipe aki*, ultimately, it is only the members of Poplar

River First Nation who can transcend the colonial social structures; they have used the global system of international support to ensure the survival of their people.

This process of decolonization will not be easy however. Despite everything that Poplar River will attempt to do, the State will nonetheless continue to impose a neo-colonial system through the existence of *Parks Canada*, wildlife management and the Indian Act so as to undermine any frameworks and any sustainable development of the Aboriginal community. The direct ways in which they will resist this colonial administration is yet to be seen.

Memmi has clearly shown how colonization is achieved by cancelling out of the colonized. The policy to “kill the Indian in the child” was used to liquidate Aboriginal cultures, territories and histories while simultaneously refusing to share with them any of the colonizer’s “development” benefits. Similarly, Sartre writes that:

Nothing demonstrates better the increasing rigour of the colonial system: you begin by occupying the country, then you take the land and exploit the owners at starvation rates. Then, with mechanization, this cheap labour is still too expensive; you finish up taking from the natives their very right to work. All this is left for the [people] to do, *in their own land*, at a time of great prosperity, is to die of starvation (Sartre 2006:46).

In a capitalist society, when you no longer own anything, you are nobody; this time, to quote Sartre, “it was capitalism itself that became colonialist” (2006:39). In effect, when one speaks of the totalizing “colonial system”, it is important to know what it encompasses. Sartre (2006:51) writes that the colonial system is not merely an abstract mechanism:

The system exists, it functions; the infernal cycle of colonialism is a reality. But this reality is embodied in a million of colonists, children and grandchildren of colonists, who have been shaped by colonialism and who think, speak and act according to the very principles of the colonial system.

The system by its very nature destroys all attempts at resistance and local development, as a result, in order to maintain itself, it becomes harder and more inhuman each day (Sartre 1956:49).

Clinging to his baseball cap, Ray Rabliauskas would often rub his forehead with a sigh and confirm that meetings with State administration and the *Lands Management* team are difficult, repetitive and arduous; the productivity of the process is evidently a demonstration of the colonial system.

But the spirit that drives the First Nation to survive as a distinct people continues to exist and manifest itself in resistance movements against the colonial system, whether small or large enough to gain notice. Decolonization, writes Fanon, “never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history’s floodlights upon them” (Fanon 1963:36). Poplar River, against the common motive of non-renewable resource profit, is designating their resource rich land as a permanent conservation area. Claiming a right to the territory on the basis of stewardship, Poplar River is questioning the authoritative notion of “ownership” and “private property”; by maintaining the land for the next seven generations, the community is challenging environmental despoilment concealed under notions of “progress” and “modernity”. Asserting a right to maintain the land and all the resources, this First Nation is objecting to the state’s objective reductionist view of all wildlife management. Maintaining the [ab]original names of places and spaces of *pimachiowin aki* and *asatisiwipi aki*, these *anishnaabek* are defying the totalizing notions of Eurocentric nominalism. The community’s contemporary claims of sovereignty are not simply a revival of ancient traditions or old attachments, as legitimate as they are; they are the only way for the people to put an end to their exploitation. In a sense, the World Heritage Site is more than just a form of resistance to resource exploitation; it is defiance to Canada’s colonial history.

CONCLUSION

The ongoing health and well-being of *asatisiwipe aki* as she moves through the changing circle of her seasons each year is of major importance to the *anishnaabek*. Traditional recognitions of the interconnectedness of all living things contribute to holistic resource management - specifically, stewardship. It is with thanks that life is taken so that the people may live; but it is also the well-being and preservation of all species and looking forward to the needs of the Seventh Generation that are also seriously considered. As those that walked before them provided for the well-being of today's generation, so must those who will walk this earth in the future be considered. In recognition of these concerns, Poplar River's goal is to: "protect the land from industrial developments, sustaining natural ecological processes for present and future generations" (Lands Management 2005:5). Protection of *asatisiwipe aki* from any unwanted industrial activity by Poplar River First Nation is of higher importance than mere industrial and commercial utility. For this community, the World Heritage Site initiative is a measure inspired by local pride and cultural preservation against colonial and corporate greed.

In the end, this project created more questions than answers and I have pointed out threads of scholarly research that need to be pulled further. I believe it is necessary to procure a larger critical examination of UNESCO's policies and the notion of heritage, ownership and control of a designated site, as well as a rigorous inquiry into the de-colonizing processes of the discourse about community economic development at Poplar River. First Nation members of the community need to be included and perhaps even directing the course of management, implementation and elaboration of methods to oversee the UNESCO nominated/designated boreal bush in which they live. A reason why I also believe that there needs to be more detailed exploration of contested landscapes of *pimachiowin aki*. In fact, place-making through placing

people in landscapes as a political tool is one that I would like to see the international environmental movements use more.

In this thesis, to the best of my abilities, I have discussed positive and negative aspects of the nomination of a World Heritage Site, and after working on this project for over two years, I can still say that, in spite of the negatives of Eurocentric planning/definitions, boundary construction, and *Parks Canada*/UNESCO interference, I believe that this is still the best solution for the community. This is an initiative that has been instigated by this First Nation for the purpose of protection of this particular First Nation. Regardless of whether or not Pimachiowin Aki Corporation will be accorded the title of a natural and cultural World Heritage Site - as that will be determined in 2011 when the community will submit their complete nomination package, this pre-emptive proposal is precedent setting for Aboriginal people of the boreal forest.

Writing and researching at a graduate level taught me numerous things, among many, that friendships outlast any research project, in spite of differences in age, belief or gender. I have also learned that just “being yourself” is the best methodology when doing research in a community: swimming in the river, playing baseball and volleyball, as well as doing all the other activities with the members of this First Nation was one of my most pleasant memories because it extended past the research field to become my life. However, although the research part was great, I was surprised how enjoyable the writing process of a thesis could be. The beginning stage was difficult but once I had an idea of what direction I was taking this dissertation, the creative aspect of producing an original thesis, in a personal way, was immensely exciting. Being forced to exclude each news story that was made public about this World Heritage Site during my final step of writing was however, a difficulty that inspired me to continue working on this project at a doctoral level. The knowledge I acquired from the members of Asatisiwipi First

Nation, from the professors who guided my research process, from friends and acquaintances who raised fascinating questions, from the experiences while completing this thesis, proved to me that perhaps a continued collaboration with this community could be beneficial to the decolonizing aspirations for many of those directly or indirectly implicated and interested in this project.

Within one cycle of the changing seasons, the lessons I learned in the spring, in the summer, in autumn and in winter have taught me that learning, acquired in steps and not by leaps, is a treasure that accompanies its owner everywhere.

Each fall brings anxious eyes to see the wild rice beds; waterfowl hunters set out to the marches for the off-reserve migratory bird season. As fall edges into winter, trappers set their traps. This is a time when pelts are thick and rich, but the snow is not too deep to traverse.

Water as it flows through the rivers, lakes and streams, seeps through underground passageways, or spurts out of the Earth's surface; the Earth's water system can be compared to the human circulatory system, hence, the well being of the water, which affects every other living part of the earth, is of vital importance to the *anishnaabek* and to all people. Water, known as *nibi* in *ojibwemowin* (*Anishnaabe* language), is the source of life therefore must be protected and kept pure. Poplar River First Nation is sustaining the land because it signifies livelihood.

The *asatisiwipe anishnaabek* have a story to tell, the story of Ojibway treaty rights, including the struggle to preserve those rights and the natural resources upon which they depend. It is the land of *astisiwipe aki* and *pimachiowin aki* that provides the people with food; that keeps them from starving on their own land. *Pimachiowin aki* is indeed, the land that gives life.

APPENDIX

List and brief biography of research participants whose voices were used for the purpose of this thesis.

1. ***Kenneth Douglas.*** Ken is an Elder. He resides at the Asatisiwipe First Nation Elder's Lodge.
2. ***Noel Bruce.*** Noel works for the Post-Secondary Education Service.
3. ***Freddie Bruce.*** Freddie is the community's Health Service Director.
4. ***Ernest C. Bruce.*** Ernest is a political advisor to the community and works at the Band Council. He has lived in Poplar River his whole life. He is university educated and plays in a band. He speaks Ojibway (anishinaabemowin) fluently.
5. ***Byron Mitchell.*** Byron is a young man who aspires to become a minister. He currently preaches at the Pentecostal Church and does a Christian show at the local radio station.
6. ***Walter E. Nanawin.*** Walter is an Elder, a writer, a poet, an inventor, fluent Cree speaker, a musician and a photographer.
7. ***Albert Bittern.*** Albert is an Elder. He has spent most of his life in Poplar River and was taught about the land from his grandfather.
8. ***Russell Lambert.*** Russell is the Chief of Poplar River First Nation for yet another term. He has been chief for about twelve to thirteen years in total.
9. ***Sophia Rabliauskas.*** Sophia is the spokesperson for Pimachiowin Aki Corporation. She is the 2007 North American winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize for her grassroots activism. She presented at the Department of Native Studies Colloquium in February 2009.

Thank you all for your participation in this project and to those whom I have not yet had the possibility of interviewing, I hope, in the future, to have an opportunity to deliver your voice.

AP.

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