In conversation with Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: A review

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Introduction

I remember having to decide between two university bachelor of arts programs at the start of my academic life. Having never been enrolled in university before, I had no frame of reference to assess my options. I cared about environmental issues affecting my reserve, but I also had an unarticulated suspicion that environmental racism in Canada is a symptom of colonialism. My choice became unequivocal very quickly when a friend said something simple but profound: while an environmental studies program would allow me to see environmental problems perspicaciously, an Indigenous studies program would help me see the gaps between Indigenous epistemologies and what I now know to be Eurocentric diffusion, thus bringing colonialism into view. This intervention allowed me to place the stories found in my family and community at the centre of what scholarship could be about; it enabled me to see my community as having the knowledge needed to articulate a new vision for our future. Subsequently, I have never looked back, and have made Indigenous Studies my academic home.

Centering Anishinaabeg Studies marks a similar critical intervention in the still emerging field of Indigenous/Native American/Native Studies. Edited by Anishinaabeg scholars Jill
Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, the volume validates personal and collective story-making as sound methodologies for rigorous scholarship. The book features 21 articles, not including a preface written by John Borrows and a beautiful introduction by the editors. There, Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark argue that “Anishinaabeg-centered scholarship emerging from an examination of Anishinaabeg stories represents some of the most innovative and exciting work being produced today,” and that what makes this so important is that such scholars “offer a different way of viewing the world that does not narrow intellectual approaches, but opens them up” (Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam & Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, 2013). The articles constituting the volume speak to these points, and are organized in seven layers: stories as roots, relationships, revelations, resiliency, resistance, reclamation, and as reflections. Each layer unfolds stories, both sacred and quotidian, in ways that engage past, present and future issues from positions based in Anishinaabeg intellectual sovereignty.

Here, I engage in what I am calling a conversation with Centering Anishinaabeg Studies. In what started as a traditional book review, in working with editors at Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society (DIES), I have expanded this piece into a larger review to explicate two contributions the volume makes to Indigenous Studies, namely, how it challenges Indigenous Studies to be less pan-Indigenous and how it reconfigures academic rigor along Anishinaabeg epistemological lines. The complexity I needed to engage to do so demanded that this piece be more of a conversation with the book than a brief, one-sided review; it demanded that I establish and write through my relationship with the ideas found within its pages. For sake of scope, I engage only a few articles. That said, I encourage you to read beyond the pieces I have referenced below, as Centering Anishinaabeg Studies is a watershed moment in taking Indigenous scholarship to the next level.

**Challenging Indigenous Studies**

What I love about the articles is that many directly or indirectly challenge Indigenous Studies to take its next step away from pan-Indigenous approaches to knowing. For practical reasons, such as securing funding and creating critical mass within the academy, the history of Indigenous Studies is one of starting with a pan-Indigenous approach while, in many cases, intending to move towards more nation-specific approaches to knowing and scholarship. However, after 30 years - or in some cases longer - of academic degree programming, first year Indigenous Studies course text books in Canada oftentimes still provide only a survey of the major Indigenous nations north of the US border instead of a nation-specific approach to knowing the world. Materials titled along the generic lines of “Aboriginal People in Canada” are often written from a position of distance from those nations, especially if we consider the more recent works written by allies. Pan-Indigenism is alive and well.

By contrast, Centering Anishinaabeg Studies brings into relief Anishinaabeg intellectual orders that can address issues that concern our communities in ways that respect Anishinaabeg values and ways of relating. This is an important contribution: knowledge production is not a
politically-neutral act as the Euroversity\(^1\) (Zavala, 2013) would have us believe. When “the truth” about Indigenous peoples - be they Native Hawaiian, Maori, Itelmen, Saami, Anishinaabeg, etc. - is being told and re-told by Eurocentric observers, centering Indigenous ways of knowing in scholarship becomes an act of resistance against distortion and cognitive imperialism. It resists cognitive hegemony by centering Indigenous peoples’ stories of survivance (Vizenor & Mackay, 2013, p. 139).\(^2\) As Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes foregrounded in the last issue of DIES, “stories are resurgent moments, which reclaim epistemic ground that was erased by colonialism” (2013, p. iii). They go on to say that our stories of “living out” decolonization root us to the “material realities of the people whose lives bear the scars of colonialism and the long histories of resistance and triumphs” (2013, p. vi). This “living out” produces stories that are told and retold, thereby adding to our identities as peoples who are still here. In the words of one of my favourite theorists, Manulani Meyer, “what one prioritizes with regard to … knowing [ourselves], ends up being the stuffing of identity, the truth that links us to our distinct cosmologies, and the essence of [Indigenous] people” (2001, p. 125). Or as White Earth Anishinaabe poet and scholar Kimberley Blaeser put it, we become the stories we tell (1999, p. 54).

This is an important assertion when one considers that the academy is still a hostile environment for Indigenous peoples’ ways of knowing. If how one knows is constantly defined or regulated by Eurocentric or pan-Indigenous approaches, specific nations’ epistemologies will continue to struggle against Eurocentric epistemological hegemony. Eurocentric scholars often dismiss storytelling methodology as subjective and shoddy. And while Indigenous Studies has provided a safer place for Indigenous individuals to address challenges and opportunities from their own epistemic ground, Indigenous Studies remains largely structured as a pan-Indigenous space. Centering Anishinaabe Studies imagines an academic space where the epistemic ground is overtly Anishinaabeg. The book is an intentional move towards creating such a space, with the hope that “Anishinaabeg Studies, Choctaw Studies, Navajo Studies, and so on, [can develop] in conversation with each other as well as with American Indian Studies and disciplines like history, English, and political science” (Doerfler quoted in Doerfler, Sinclair & Stark, 2013, p. xxvi).

Centering Anishinaabeg Studies posits uniquely Anishinaabeg scholarship rooted in Anishinaabeg intellectual sovereignties. The articles largely consider the ways in which scholarship can be used to promote mino-bimaadiziwin, or the good life, within our communities. Two types of stories figure prominently helping people live the good life. Aadizookaanag (sacred stories) are not only narratives, but are actually alive. “They are

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\(^1\) Miguel Zavala uses the term “Euroversity” to expose links between the academy, Western/Modern cognitive imperialism and the state’s interest in reproducing its institutions. The Euroversity, opposed to the more innocuous sounding “University,” is thus exposed as a site of “historical contradictions between the colonial-capitalist State

\(^2\) Gerald Vizenor defines survivance in Centering Anishinaabeg Studies, as “a sense of active presence over historical absence and victimry” (2013, p. 139).
manidoog (manitous), living beings who work with Anishinaabeg in the interests of demonstrating principles necessary for mino-bimaadiziwin” (2013, pp. xvii-xviii). In contrast to aadizookaanag, dibaaajimowinan generally refer to personal stories, histories and news, and are considered to be inanimate (2013, p. xviii). Stories are important to Anishinaabeg communities and Anishinaabeg scholarship because they can unify communities or divide and destroy them (2013, p. xix). Such weight given to the importance of stories within Anishinaabeg communities signals an intellectual sovereignty that continues to assert an Anishinaabeg way of life.

But how does the volume challenge Indigenous Studies to move towards more nation-specific “epistemic grounds”? A few examples are in order here. Articles throughout Centering Anishinaabeg Studies challenge Indigenous Studies to become more nation-specific, and in this case Anishinaabe-specific, in various ways. Brock Pitawanakwat argues in “Anishinaabeg Studies: Creative, Critical, Ethical, and Reflexive,” that Anishinaabeg Studies could and should be a space to help students learn and teach what it means to be Anishinaabe (2013, p. 372). Pitawanakwat argues such issues might best be explored within the academy by using a Peoplehood paradigm - a matrix based on holistic relationships to land, language, sacred history and spirituality that “legitimizes peoples and delegitimizes states as sovereign entities” (2013, p. 371). At epistemological, axiological and pedagogical levels, this assertion signals a move away from Eurocentric intellectual orders, towards Indigenous and, specifically, Anishinaabeg intellectual orders that assert knowledge should not be torn apart or distilled to its basic parts (McGregor, 2004). Westcott and Garrouste take up this point earlier in the volume under the caveat that “scholarly approaches that overanalyze and ‘tear apart’ stories, become preoccupied with hidden meanings, and exclude Native voices” (2013, p. 62). Indeed, colonialism has done enough “tearing apart” of our knowledges. Indigenous Studies is challenged here to ensure it produces scholars that do not fragment Indigenous knowledges further, but rather, use their scholarship as a means to re-strengthen Indigenous epistemologies vis-à-vis the on-going colonial order. Stories, when approached using a Peoplehood paradigm, allow us to re-imagine a world where it is safe to be Anishinaabe.

It is on this note that Westcott and Garrouste’s article challenges Indigenous Studies to deepen its focus on what stories do rather than simply understanding their component parts. They demonstrate that what matters in using stories as theory in scholarship are the assumptions upon which the teller and audience build their understanding, reflections and actions. They contrast dialogical narratology - a non-Indigenous approach to understanding stories - with oral history to demonstrate convincingly the importance/consequence of assumptions: assumptions are active by the fact that a person is already acting upon them, and they can be radically anti-colonial when they exist outside of monolithic cognitive imperialism and Western notions of modernity. Choosing to live one’s life on assumptions that are anti-colonial and based in Indigenous ontologies will affect what stories do to/for you when you hear them: a story’s ability to help you re-image what is possible is either hindered or supported by what you assume possible in the world. This may just be a matter of perception. But Westcott and Garrouste demonstrate the transformational potentiality of stories. They do this by contrasting how the
assumptions underpinning dialogical narratology result in possibilities that differ from those that arise when one perceives a narrative through the assumptions underpinning an oral history approach to listening.

A proper example will suffice here. I quote Westcott and Garroutte on this point at length, as they might best clarify the consequences of using Western approaches to understanding narrative (discussed as representational assumptions in the quote below) at the expense of Anishinaabeg storytelling approaches:

To the extent that it moves only within the confines of representational assumptions, the Anishinaabe myth loses the capacity to evoke a mythic reality. It loses the ability to testify to possibilities for being in the world as a relative within an infinitely extended web of human and other-than-human relationships. It does not lead its hearers to conclude that they can move beyond empathic awareness to become of one mind with other beings. It fails to teach an audience that they can be fully transformed by such relationships. It no longer bears witness to “original perceptions” or to the possibility of a world remade in story. In short, narrative grounded in representational assumptions rob [sacred stories] of powers for which [an Anishinaabe storytelling perspective] allows. In so doing, these conventional [approaches to] narratives for guiding scholarly engagement with stories disenable “possible lives.” (2013, pp. 75-76)

After all, it is the re-imagining of our world as a safe place - a safer “possible life” - for Anishinaabeg that makes scholarship useful for Anishinaabeg communities.

Pitawanakwat’s assertion that story can help Anishinaabeg Studies teach what it means to be Anishinaabe finds resonance in Heid E. Erdrich’s article. In “Name’: Literary Ancestry as Presence,” Erdrich argues that survivance and name’ (translated as “find/leave signs of somebody’s presence”) “suggest an ongoing presence of Anishinaabe making” (2013, p. 18). She challenges Indigenous Studies towards an explicit space for Anishinaabeg epistemic ground by arguing that it “give[s] us courage and comfort” along the path to knowledge. Namé and survivance “tell us of someone’s presence here, someone who has come before us, so even in writing, we know we are in Anishinaabe Aking [territory] and we are headed the right way” (2013, p. 18).

I take this as a challenge to make Indigenous Studies’ course offerings and overall philosophies more reflective of where their academic institutions are physically located. When located within Anishinaabeg territory, an Indigenous Studies department can provide courses tailored through Anishinaabeg epistemologies with the help of elders and knowledge holders. When located in territories shared with several nations, as is the case for many universities, the programming can reflect the epistemologies of the nations present. Such an idea is already animating some academic contexts, such as the Andaa Wiinjigewin/Indigenous Philosophy graduate degree program offered by the Seven Generations Institute near Fort Frances, Ontario. Reflecting the teachings of the territory, students there work with Elders and knowledge holders
“engage in the process of [restoring] the Anishinaabe way of learning, thinking, and self-exploration” (Seven Generations Education Institute, 2013). A similar program is located at Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario - a territory shared by Anishinaabeg and métis. Such spaces speak to what Métis artist and scholar David Garneau (2012) has called “Irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality,” or “site[s] of being where people simply are, where they express and celebrate their continuity and figure themselves to, for, and with each other in a complex exchange without the sense of feeling they are witnessed by people who are not equal performers” (p. 33). They are unique “epistemic grounds” where Anishinaabe theories and methodologies take the lead in shaping research projects and their goals. Centering Anishinaabeg Studies can only add to such innovative programs.

It is against this backdrop of creating nation/epistemic-specific spaces that Centering Anishinaabeg Studies offers another important challenge to Indigenous Studies. It was clear while reading the articles that the relationship between sacred and personal stories unfolds epistemological orders upon which we, as scholars, can reclaim rigour from Eurocentric hegemony.

### Reconfiguring rigour

One of the challenges Anishinaabeg scholarship faces within the academy is the accusation from “established” Eurocentric scholars that it lacks the proper grounds to foster methodological rigour. Among other critiques, Eurocentric scholars argue that stories and storytelling are not rigorous forms of scholarship because they are too subjective. Typical definitions state that for scholarship to be rigorous, it must be extremely thorough, exhaustive or accurate. We are told that the only way to achieve this is to maintain a distance between researcher and the researched: rigour in Eurocentric scholarship is defined by its degree of objectivity at the cost of relationality. Such objectivity is facilitated by either quantitative or qualitative research methods, thereby privileging positivist traditions of knowledge production (Fallman & Stolterman, 2010). As such, “rigour” is claimed in a hegemonic way that makes Eurocentric knowledge traditions the measure of “real” scholarship.

By contrast, Indigenous approaches to intellectual rigour are more collaborative than Eurocentric definitions. Collaborative rigour is based on doing work that intentionally seeks to establish and maintain good relationships with peoples and the ecology. Scholarship is rigorous when it facilitates the completion of our relationships (Deloria Jr., 1990; Colorado, 1988). For Wheeler, rigour is found in the balance of creating new methodologies, constructs and curricula without downgrading the teachings that promote Indigenous peoples’ identities and knowledges (Wheeler, 2001, 101-2). In other words, academic rigour is not rigorous if it comes at the

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3 Qualitative research is implicated as positivist here because, despite the acceptance that it produces information not generalizable to all peoples or settings, it nonetheless produces “theories or concepts that can be assessed using other research methods,” thereby necessitating validation through elite gate keepers. See Bryman, A., Teevan, J.J. & Bell, E., Social Research Methods, Second Canadian Edition (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 138.
expense of our relationships, including our relationships with the ecology and manidoog. Further, research is rigorous in Anishinaabeg scholarship when it has relevance to specific communities, not when it produces knowledge for knowledge’s sake. These differences between Eurocentric and Indigenous notions of rigour do not mean that the latter is lacking in thoroughness.¹ What this difference tells me is that the definition of rigour needs to be reclaimed from its Eurocentric measuring stick. And Centering Anishinaabeg Studies does this in innovative ways.

If stories have the power to unite or divide communities, we must approach stories in a rigorous way in order to show them respect. Manulani Meyer says that "the quality of how you listen, or even how you ask the question, is the most rigorous aspect of the depth and beauty of an Indigenous way of knowing" (Meyer, 2013). I would argue that what we are asking and listening for, ultimately, is truth. Rigour within Anishinaabeg intellectual orders is based on Anishinaabeg notions of truth. It is about being accurate. Basil Johnston is quoted on this point: “[t]ruth in a Western sense is absolute. Not so among the Anishinaubeg; its only the highest degree of accuracy, because you perceive certain things and what see is different from another person” (Johnston in Pitawanakwat, 2013, p. 365). And he develops his point further earlier in Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: “the more accurate your interpretation is, and the more fluent you are in language, the more accuracy you will convey”. The bar for Anishinaabeg centered scholarship has been set.

Key to Anishinaabeg-based academic rigour is Johnston’s understanding about the importance of not interfering with another person’s truth. He writes that, “men and women must seek within themselves the talent or the potential, and afterward create their own world and their own spheres, and a purpose to give meaning to their lives” (Johnston, 2023, p. 8). Knowing and acting on our potential is refining the truth of our beingness. This “ethic of non-interference” is the underlying axiology that supports Anishinaabeg intellectual orders: it is the responsibility of each person to come to know themselves without being hindered by the people around them.² Non-interference has important implications within Anishinaabeg studies, as Doerfler, Sinclair and Stark note in the introduction: “it is often said that there are as many versions of the Creation Story as there are storytellers - all contribute to the understanding of who we are” (Doerfler, Sinclair & Stark, 2013, p. xviii). Anishinaabeg communities remain vibrant, flexible and adaptable because each person born into a new generation brings with her a set of skills and gifts; it is her responsibility to understand those skills in order to give back. It is our responsibility to know our truth, or come to know ourselves. Through these experiences of coming to know ourselves and others we generate new stories that we then share as dibaaajimowinan.

¹ Wheeler makes a great point that can be applied to Anishinaabeg scholarship here: “Our communities deserve the best we can give them - mediocre warriors do not win wars, average leaders do not create change.” (p. 102).
Another important way in which rigour is reconfigured in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies* is by making sure research is relevant to Anishinaabeg communities and families. Whereas academic rigour is debated within the non-Indigenous academic world as diametrically opposed to the *relevance* of curricular activities, Indigenist scholarship is most rigorous when it is relevant directly to the challenges and opportunities Indigenous nations face today (Deloria Jr., 1990, pp. 43-49). Dreaming and ceremony are two elements of Anishinaabeg scholarship that ensure our research is relevant to our communities. As Leanne Simpson and Edna Manitowabi write in “Theorizing Resurgence from within Nishnaabeg Thought,” dreaming and visioning are relevant to Anishinaabeg because they allow us to imagine decolonized realities (2013, p. 282). This is relevant to reconfiguring rigour because visioning charts a course from where we are now to where we want to be, often using Anishinaabeg values and assumptions found in aadizookaanag to interpret those visions into reality I take this up in more detail in the next section of this paper.

In a related piece elsewhere in the volume, Carry Miller, writes that, properly trained, individuals were “transported to the spirit realm to receive teachings and ceremonies that will improve the lives of the Anishinaabeg” (2013, p. 124). She notes that, “Anishinaabeg peoples valued social relationships established through gift exchange with human and *manidoog* that promised to aid them … to achieve the Ojibwe moral ideal, *mino-bimaadiziwin*” (2013, p. 120). While the academy is not the *Midewiwin* lodge, Miller’s article, as well as Simpson and Manitowabi’s, demonstrates that including spiritual elements into our work makes it more rigorous within Anishinaabeg intellectual orders, as it honours our relationality with the spirit (or process) of things, instead of only relying upon our observations of things at the surface level. This creates the possibility for knowledge seekers’ work to be useful in maintaining balance within our communities.

Combining Anishinaabeg notions of accuracy, non-interference and spirituality asserts an innovative approach to rigorous scholarship based Anishinaabeg intellectual sovereignty. Dibaajimowinan are the open-ended expression of theory and practice found within aadizookaanag. Aadizookaanag were never meant to be “the” truths about reality; instead of proving aadizookaanag as monolithic, dibaajimowinan evince fluidity and our ability to permutate myriad valid expressions of knowledge, much in the same way that non-interference allows for multiple expressions of what it means to Anishinaabe. Paradoxically, an aadizookaan is a truth with infinite manifestations expressed through stories, songs, dances, artwork, and language that echo the lived experiences of each individual Anishinaabeg as she comes to know her place in the world. There are thousands of ways to be Anishinaabe, one for each person who rightfully belongs with an Anishinaabeg nation; as such, there are thousands of dibaajimowinan

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that manifest aadizookaanag in unique yet “authentic” (or valid) ways. The result is not necessarily an emphasis on validating theories designed for the sake of knowledge, but rather that each unique dibaajimowinan makes the original stories more accurate over time, particularly when they serve the purposes within our communities.

This understanding of scholarship flowed throughout Centering Anishinaabeg Studies, revealing the challenges and beauty of applying aadizookaanag and dibaajimowinan in perhaps the most rigorous exercise of all: real world situations. Nowhere might the rigour of dibaajimowinan be more clear than in Jill Doerfler’s article on the reform of the White Earth Nation’s constitution, which I now turn to in order to close this discussion.

Dibaajimowinan: Validating and Rigorous

In “A Philosophy for Living: Ignatia Broker and Constitutional Reform among the White Earth Anishinaabeg,” Doerfler shows how she has employed the values found in aadizookaanag, narrated through dibaajimowinan found in Ignatia Broker’s Flying Night Woman, to renew White Earth’s constitutional provisions regarding citizenship or belonging. Like most Anishinaabeg communities in North America, White Earth has been struggling for decades against the imposed notion that one’s blood quantum determines whether s/he belongs with their community.

A “pseudoscientific” colonial logic based on mathematics, blood quantum laws work to exclude individuals from their communities when they may otherwise still belong according to Anishinaabeg legal orders. In resistance to this “terminal creed,” Doerfler argues that Broker’s narratives of family-making, responsibilities and inclusion “defy the colonial impositions of blood and race as a marker of identity,” allowing Anishinaabeg to use values of inclusivity and familial relationality to discern who belongs with our communities (Doerfler, p. 177). Doerfler’s constitutional work makes clear that stories have concrete effects on the lives of Anishinaabeg of today and the future, demonstrating the rigour of Anishinaabeg intellectual and political orders when applying them to real-world work such as Anishinaabeg-centering constitutional reform.

Doerfler contrasts the history of blood quantum in White Earth with the dibaajimowinan as told by Broker. An Anishinaabeg from White Earth, Broker shared stories in Flying Night Woman about Anishinaabeg life in northern Minnesota it was experienced by her great-great-grandmother, Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe (Night Flying Woman), referred to as “Oona.” Doerfler picks up on several aspects of Broker’s work, but especially teachings around the inclusion of two women

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7 Like Doerfler, I find Eva Marie Garroutte’s discussion about blood quantum useful in defining it: “The original, stated intention of blood quantum distinctions was to determine the point at which the various responsibilities of the dominant society to Indian people ended. The ultimate and explicit federal intention was to use the blood quantum standard as a means to liquidate tribal lands and to eliminate government trust responsibility to tribes, along with entitlement programs, treaty rights, and reservations.” In Garroutte, E.M. (2003). Real Indians: Identity and Survival in Native America. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 42.
into the White Earth community whose belonging might otherwise be questionable under purely biological logics. The first is about Oona’s mother: Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe was completely accepted into her community after having been found as a child by a man who would become her grandfather. Oona was found with another child and woman who were dead. Demonstrating a need to be cared for, Oona’s grandfather and the community demonstrated how identity is fluid and not predetermined solely by biological ancestry. “Adoption” beyond such biological lines is a valid form of belonging across Anishinaabeg Aki (Auger, 2000). Oona’s mother was Anishinaabeg despite her biological background. No one questioned her about her past or her “real” family because she was cared for by, and took care of, White Earth Anishinaabeg.

The second woman in Broker’s book discussed by Doerfler is a woman named Mary. According to Broker, Mary had grey eyes, light skin and could speak English and French in addition to Anishinaabemowin, suggesting that she was not what some people would call a full-blood Indian. Never was Mary shunned or described as only “part” Anishinaabe, or for not having grown up in the old ways. Mary’s story demonstrates the value of fluidity around identity and belonging, but under circumstances slightly different than those surrounding Wa-wi-e-cu-mig-go-gwe’s belonging though no less important to reclaiming control over belonging today. Mary’s identity and belonging were based on her actions. “Mary contributes to the family and community by watching over younger children, helping to pick chips for the morning fire, and carrying water from the pump” (Doerfler, 2013, p. 83). She also supported Oona while going to the forest. As Doerfler concludes, “Mary serves as a model for the reader because she worked to make herself part of the community through her actions … through respectful and reciprocal behavior[s] and relationships” (2013, p. 183). Through Broker, Doerfler emphasizes that belonging within Anishinaabe political orders is more a function of the responsibilities one carries and fulfills for their community, and less about whether one carries government-issued identification certifying their degree of Indian pedigree in one way or another.

If the dibaaajimowinan about Oona and Mary demonstrate fluidity around belonging with Anishinaabeg, what aadizookaanag might they be “validating”? How do their stories make the work of reforming White Earth’s constitution rigorous? One answer might be found in linking Mary and Oona’s stories to aadizookaanag, or the stories that hold the basic “truths” or values that help us live as Anishinaabeg. Doerfler does not juxtapose Broker’s dibaaajimowinan with aadizookaanag, but doing so briefly here will allow me to demonstrate the point I am trying to make, namely that nesting our work in dibaaajimowinan and aadizookaanag allows for an open ended rigour to emerge in our real world work as Anishinaabeg studies scholars.

While there are probably many aadizookaanag that unfold values related to fluidity around belonging, a useful one is known as “The Woman who Married a Beaver.” As told in the early 1900s by a woman from my reserve, Mrs. Marie Syrette, this aadizookaan reveals that

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belonging is based on family-making and carrying responsibilities. Importantly, family-making is not restricted by phenotype: the woman in the story - a human - meets the spirit of a male beaver in human form. Once married, she finds out that she has transformed into a beaver. They have many children together, and she learns the ways of the beaver nation. She is never shunned or rejected by other beavers for not having a certificate of beaver status. She is fully accepted. The woman fully belongs, despite having a low to nil quantum of beaver blood in her veins. In the end, her husband leaves and tells her it is time for her to return to her own people. Years later, now in human form, she informs her people how to respect the beaver nation when hunting. It is her beaver children and their children that her human relatives are now hunting. Fluidity around belonging is demonstrated by moving back and forth between the human and beaver nations; her familial responsibilities secure her place within the communities, not blood quantum. Together, the values of inclusion, fluidity, caring for others and family-based connections set the bar for doing rigorous work in our communities around reclaiming control over citizenship/belonging.

Doerfler’s work on the White Earth constitution demonstrates such rigour because it is relevant to our communities while staying true to Anishinaabeg values found in aadizookaanag. She and others are working towards making citizenship/belonging at White Earth a matter of family connection instead of blood quantum (Doerfler, 2013, p. 175). Key to this is the future generations: like the children of the woman and the beaver, future Anishinaabeg communities will most likely continue to be constituted by people of “mixed” blood. In answering the question of belonging in relation to the quantum of a person’s Indian blood, Doerfler states that “Broker acknowledges the diverse ancestry of the children, but highlights their identity as Anishinaabe. These children are not less authentic, or ‘part Anishinaabe’; they are ‘true in the spirit of the Ojibway’” (Doerfler, 2013, p. 184). Together, the White Earth Constitution and Ignatia Broker’s dbaajimowinan ‘validate’ the ‘theories,’ values or, in Broker’s words, “philosophies for living” that animate aadizookaanag such as The Woman Who Married a Beaver. As such, Doerfler’s article is a valuable contribution to exploring what “rigour” means within the field of Anishinaabeg Studies, and should command attention when reading *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*. How will your next research project reflect the values of your nation’s epistemic and axiologic grounds?

Conclusion

The contributors in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies* chart the next steps in the progression of Indigenous Studies as a contrapuntal space of learning within the academy. The rigour involved in the relationship between personal and sacred stories unfolds ever-deepening levels of thought.

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and theory that can be applied to strengthening Anishinaabeg Studies as a stream of profoundly self-determining academic degree-making.

In addition to the contributors’ work referenced above, Anishinaabeg knowledge holders Gerald Vizenor and Basil Johnston figure prominently throughout Centering Anishinaabeg Studies, and are balanced with women knowledge holders, Edna Manitowabi and Leanne Simpson, among others. Centering Anishinaabeg Studies is a must read for students following the work of these leading thinkers. Further, for those interested in using Anishinaabemowin (the Anishinaabe language) as a scholarly theoretical lens, using our relationships with land, water, sky and other beings as methodologies, or re-thinking what a story can mean to Anishinaabeg or Indigenist scholarship, this volume will prove invaluable to your work; it comprehends a world based on Anishinaabeg intellectual sovereignty, and invites you do to the same.

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